

The Vulgate

How the Latin West Got Its Bible

A source-first historical account

Biblical Translation Histories, BT-02

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1 One Title, Several Objects

“Vulgate” means “the common one”—*editio vulgata*, the edition in everybody’s hands. The name suggests a single book with a single author: Jerome’s Latin Bible, commissioned by a pope, adopted by the Church, printed by Gutenberg, canonized at Trent. Nearly every element of that sentence needs correction. In Jerome’s own lifetime *editio vulgata* named not his work but its rival—the common Latin Old Testament translated from the Greek Septuagint; the title did not settle on Jerome’s Bible until more than a millennium after his death, and the earliest official act to use it that way appears to be the Council of Trent itself.¹ The book itself is composite: four Gospels revised by Jerome against the Greek; the rest of a New Testament revised by someone whose name no source preserves; an Old Testament newly translated by Jerome from the Hebrew over some fifteen years; two deuterocanonical books he rendered from Aramaic with conspicuous haste; and several books he refused to touch at all, which entered the collection in their old pre-Jerome form.

This account asks how that composite came to be, and what happened to it. Who made the Latin Bible’s parts, on whose authority, from what sources, and against what resistance? How did a contested novelty become the common Bible of the Latin West? And what exactly did the Church’s official acts—Trent’s “authentic” decree, the papal editions of 1590 and 1592, the *Nova Vulgata* of 1979—do and not do to the text?

Governing thesis

The Vulgate is not one act but a tradition. Its parts have different makers, dates, source languages, and methods: a documented papal prompting covers, at most, Jerome’s conservative Gospel revision of 382–384; the rest of the New Testament was revised by an unknown hand; the Old Testament is Jerome’s Hebrew-based project, begun and defended against serious contemporary opposition; the deuterocanonical books entered half-revised or untouched, against the drift of Jerome’s own canon prefaces. “The Vulgate” as a bounded, named, authoritative edition is a product of medieval use and early-modern authority—and each later edition, from the Clementine to the *Nova Vulgata*, answers its own question and must not be read back into Jerome’s study in Bethlehem.

The method is evidence-first. Jerome’s prefaces and letters are participant documents, read for what they claim and when; Augustine’s letters carry the contemporary opposition; Rufinus carries the polemic; manuscripts witness what was actually copied; official acts establish their own object and no more; and modern critical scholarship reconstructs what no ancient source states, with its attributions kept visible. Work-wide bounds, terminology, and the evidence classes used throughout are stated in the terminal appendix.

2 Before Jerome: The Old Latin Bible

Latin Christianity did not wait for Jerome. By the time he took up his pen, Latin Scripture was some two centuries old, and its state was the problem he was hired to solve.

The witnesses agree on the disorder. Augustine, writing his handbook of Christian learning around 396, says that while the translators of the Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek can be counted, “the Latin translators are out of all number,” for “in the early days of the faith every man who happened to get his hands upon a Greek manuscript, and who thought he had any knowledge, were it ever so little, of the two languages, ventured upon the work of translation.”² Jerome, in the preface that opens his own revision, is blunter: if the faith is to rest on the Latin version, let his critics answer which one—“for they are nearly as many as the books!”³

Two corrections keep this famous chaos in proportion. First, the disorder the Fathers describe is largely a disorder of copies and revisions, not necessarily of independent origins: the editors of the modern Beuron *Vetus Latina* edition have concluded, book by book, that a single Latin translation appears to underlie the surviving Old Latin evidence for each biblical book, subsequently revised, corrected toward Greek copies, and cross-contaminated almost without restraint.⁴ “Old Latin” or *Vetus Latina* is thus a modern collective label for everything earlier than or independent of the Vulgate revisions—a plurality of text forms, not one ancient edition. Second, the base text was Greek throughout: for the Old Testament the Septuagint, not the Hebrew. The Latin Bible before Jerome was a translation of a translation, and its Psalter, its Jonah, its Daniel were the Septuagint’s.

Augustine also supplies the most disputed sentence in this history. Among the translations themselves, he writes, “the Italian (*Itala*) is to be preferred to the others, for it keeps closer to the words without prejudice to clearness of expression.”⁵ What the *Itala* was has been argued for three centuries: an otherwise unattested Italian text-type; a

corruption in the manuscripts; or even, on one influential nineteenth-century theory (Burkitt's), Jerome's own Vulgate. Current scholarship mostly reads it as a geographical label for the Italian form of the Old Latin that Augustine had met in Milan—but the term never recurs, and this account uses it for Augustine's remark and nothing else.⁶

One term of art completes the setting. When fourth-century writers said *editio vulgata*, “the common edition,” they meant this Greek-based common text—Jerome himself uses “common edition” for the Septuagint's. The name that now means Jerome's Bible belonged, in his lifetime, to the Bible he was trying to replace.⁷

3 Damasus and the Gospels: A Documented Commission and Its Limits

Jerome—Eusebius Hieronymus of Stridon, a Latin monk-scholar trained in classical rhetoric and, unusually, in Greek and Hebrew—was in Rome from 382 in the service of Pope Damasus. From that service one documented commission survives, and it is narrower than the legend of “the pope's Bible.”

The document is Jerome's own dedicatory preface, *Novum opus*, addressed to Damasus at the head of the revised Gospels. “You urge me to make a new work from the old,” it begins: to sit as judge over “the versions of Scripture dispersed throughout the whole world” and decide which agree with the Greek. Jerome calls it “pious work, yet perilous presumption,” and predicts his reception with precision: every reader, finding his familiar text altered, “might not instantly raise his voice, calling me a forger, proclaiming me now to be a sacrilegious man, that I might dare to add, to change, or to correct anything in the old books?”⁸

The same preface fixes the scope and the method. Scope: “this present little preface promises only the four Gospels,” in the Greek order Matthew–Mark–Luke–John, “revised in comparison with only old Greek books.” Method: conservatism. “We have kept our pen in control”: only readings that seemed to change the sense were corrected, and “the rest remain as they have been.” Jerome also imported the Eusebian canon apparatus for finding parallel passages, which his preface explains at length.⁹

The work was done between 382 and 384, and the reaction Jerome predicted arrived on schedule. In a letter of 384 to Marcella he reports “certain contemptible creatures” assailing him with the charge that he had “endeavored to correct passages in the gospels, against the authority of the ancients and the opinion of the whole world,” and answers—calling his critics, in the same letter, “two-legged asses”—that he is not correcting the Lord's words but the faulty Latin copies, restoring them “to the form of the Greek original.”¹⁰

3.1 Who revised the rest of the New Testament? A negative result

Jerome later spoke as though he had done more: in his catalogue of his own writings (392/393) he claims, “I translated the New Testament from the Greek,” and he repeats the claim in letters.¹¹ The evidence is against the claim. Outside the Gospels Jerome never quotes the Vulgate's characteristic readings; commenting on Galatians he even attacks the very rendering the Vulgate text of the Epistles retains, which he could hardly have done to his own work. The revision of Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation—made on the same principle of correcting old Latin toward the Greek—is anonymous. Its one preface, *Primum quaeritur*, prefixed to the Pauline letters, defends Paul's authorship of Hebrews against Jerome's known view; internal evidence places the work at Rome roughly between 393 and 410, and candidates proposed by modern scholars (Pelagius; the shadowy “Rufinus the Syrian”) remain hypotheses. The safest statement is the negative one: the reviser is unknown.¹²

Witness: Jerome, preface *Novum opus* to Pope Damasus (382–384), transmitted with the Vulgate Gospels.

What it establishes: A papal prompting for a revision of existing Latin against Greek copies; a four-Gospel scope; a deliberately conservative method; the expectation of hostility.

Limit: A dedicatory preface, not a surviving commission instrument; it authorizes no claim that Damasus ordered a whole Bible, and the rest of the Vulgate New Testament is the work of an unidentified later reviser.

4 Three Psalters

No book shows the Vulgate's layered character like the Psalter, because Jerome worked on the Psalms three times, from two different source traditions, and the version the Latin Church actually sang was not his Hebrew one.

The Rome revision—and the Roman Psalter question. In the preface to his second Psalter revision Jerome recalls the first: “Not long ago while located in Rome, I emended the Psalter, and had corrected it, though cursorily, for the most part according to the Seventy interpreters”—a quick correction of the old Latin Psalms against the Greek, made during the Damasus years, which he says was soon “corrupted by the error of the scribes” back into the familiar text.¹³ Tradition long identified this lost Roman correction with the “Roman Psalter” (*Psalterium Romanum*), the Old Latin-type Psalter used in Rome’s liturgy for centuries and at St. Peter’s much longer. Twentieth-century scholarship, beginning with Donatien De Bruyne, doubted the identification: the Roman Psalter’s habits sit badly with Jerome’s known method, and many now treat it simply as a revised Old Latin Psalter that is not Jerome’s surviving work. The question remains open, and this account asserts only the disagreement.¹⁴

The Gallican Psalter. At Bethlehem, at the urging of Paula and Eustochium, Jerome corrected the Latin Psalter a second time—now against Origen’s Hexaplaric text of the Seventy, importing the critical signs: the obelus marking words of the Greek absent from the Hebrew, the asterisk marking supplements from the Hebrew “according to the edition of Theodotion.” He begs copyists to transmit the signs carefully.¹⁵ This Greek-based revision—not a translation from the Hebrew—is the Psalter that conquered the Latin liturgy and stands in printed Vulgates to this day: a fact worth pausing over, since it means the most-used book of “Jerome’s Hebrew Bible” is Septuagintal.

The Psalter from the Hebrew. Later Jerome translated the Psalms directly from the Hebrew for his friend Sophronius, who had been embarrassed in debate with a Jew by citations the Hebrew text does not contain. The preface is candid about the division of labor between apologetics and liturgy: “it is one thing to read the Psalms in the churches of those believing in Christ, another thing to answer the Jews who accuse every word.”¹⁶ The *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* circulated in study Bibles—often, in Spanish pandects, alongside the Gallican—but never displaced the sung Psalter. When the Church finally replaced the Gallican Psalter in its official Latin Bible, in the *Nova Vulgata* of 1979, it replaced it with a fresh revision, not with Jerome’s Hebrew version.¹⁷

5 Bethlehem and the Hebrew Verity

Settled at Bethlehem from 386, endowed with Paula’s patronage, a library, and access to Jewish teachers, Jerome worked through two Old Testament projects in sequence. First he revised books of the existing Latin against Origen’s Hexaplaric Septuagint—he later cites his signed, corrected Latin of the Seventy as a completed work—but most of these revisions are lost, and Jerome came to regard the whole approach as building on a translation of a translation.¹⁸ Then, from about 390 to about 405/6, he translated the Hebrew canon afresh—*iuxta Hebraicam veritatem*, “according to the Hebrew verity.” The dates are a scholarly reconstruction from the prefaces’ dedications and cross-references, which yield a sequence, not a year for every book; this account assigns none.¹⁹

5.1 The helmeted preface: a canon drawn at the Hebrew line

At the head of Samuel and Kings Jerome set what he called a “helmeted introduction” (*galeatum principium*) to the whole enterprise. It counts twenty-two books “by which letters and writings a just man is instructed,” matching the Hebrew alphabet, and names them in the Hebrew tripartite order—the earliest unambiguous description of that arrangement in any surviving author. Then the helmet comes down: “whatever is outside of these is set aside among the apocrypha. Therefore, Wisdom, which is commonly ascribed to Solomon, and the book of Jesus son of Sirach, and Judith and Tobias, and The Shepherd are not in the canon. I have found the First Book of the Maccabees (is) Hebrew, the Second is Greek.”²⁰

Yet the same Jerome, pressed by bishops, translated two of the books he had just fenced out, and his prefaces to them are small masterpieces of reluctant compliance. Tobit, he tells bishops Chromatius and Heliodorus, the Hebrews exclude from the canon; their demand makes him translate it anyway, “for it is better to be judging the opinion of the Pharisees to displease and to be subject to the commands of bishops.” His procedure: because the book was in “Chaldean” (Aramaic), which he did not command fluently, he had “a speaker very skilled in both languages” render it into Hebrew while he dictated Latin to a secretary—“I took to the work of one day.”²¹ Judith got “one short night’s work,” translated “more sense from sense than word from word,” with the striking justification that “this book is found by the Nicene Council to have been counted among the number of the Sacred Scriptures”—a report of something in no surviving Nicene act, and best read as Jerome’s gesture at church usage he felt bound to honor.²²

The rest of the deuterocanon he simply left alone. In the preface to the books of Solomon he names Sirach and Wisdom, notes the Church “also reads the books of Judith, Tobias, and the Maccabees, but does not receive them among the canonical Scriptures,” and concludes that these two likewise may be read “for the strengthening of the people, (but) not for confirming the authority of ecclesiastical dogmas.” He translated neither; nor Baruch, nor Maccabees. When those books appear in later Vulgate Bibles, their text is Old Latin, carried across intact from the Bible Jerome meant to supersede.²³

5.2 What “the Vulgate” therefore is

The received Latin Bible is thus an anthology of at least five distinct textual enterprises: Jerome’s Hebrew-based Old Testament; his lightly revised Gospels; the anonymous reviser’s remaining New Testament; his hasty Aramaic-based Tobit and Judith; and untouched Old Latin books (Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1–2 Maccabees), with the Greek-based Gallican Psalter standing in place of his Hebrew Psalter. Nothing about that assembly was decided by Jerome, who died at Bethlehem in 419/420 with his canon prefaces still attached to a collection that ignored their advice.²⁴

6 The Quarrel over Novelty

The Hebrew project was opposed in Jerome’s lifetime by serious people with serious arguments, and the opposition is documented on both sides of two famous correspondences.

Augustine’s case. Writing from Hippo in 403, Augustine thanked Jerome warmly for the Gospel revision—“in almost every passage we have found nothing to object to, when we compared it with the Greek Scriptures”—and in the same letter begged him not to put the Hebrew Bible into the churches. His grounds were pastoral and ecumenical: the Septuagint bound Greek and Latin Christendom together, and a Latin text answerable only to the Hebrew would make the Greek churches, and the Jews, the only referees. His exhibit was a riot. A brother bishop—“it was in the town of Oea,” modern Tripoli—had introduced Jerome’s version; when the reading reached Jonah’s plant—“a very different rendering from that which had been of old familiar to the senses and memory of all the worshippers”—the congregation erupted, “especially among the Greeks”; the local Jews, consulted, said (“whether from ignorance or from spite,” Augustine allows) that the Hebrew supported the old reading; and the bishop “was compelled to correct your version in that passage as if it had been falsely translated, as he desired not to be left without a congregation.”²⁵

Jerome’s defense. The reply (his Letter 112) concedes nothing. The old dispute, he says, is “about the gourd”: where the Hebrew has *ciceion* (the castor plant), the Seventy rendered “gourd” (*cucurbita*); Aquila and the others, “ivy” (*hedera*); transliterating would have meant nothing to Latin readers, gourd “is not found in the Hebrew,” so he wrote ivy “that I might not differ from all other translators.” On the larger charge he states his program in a sentence: “I have laboured not to supersede what has been long esteemed, but only to bring prominently forward those things which have been either omitted or tampered with by the Jews, in order that Latin readers might know what is found in the original Hebrew”—and if anyone dislikes it, “none compels him against his will” to read it.²⁶ The received Vulgate text of Jonah 4:6 duly reads *hederam*—the ivy the Oea congregation rioted over—and its standard printed editions carry it to this day.²⁷

The settlement. Augustine’s last long letter in the exchange (405) accepts the Hebrew translation’s usefulness for scholarship while restating the pastoral line: he asks for Jerome’s Septuagint-based revision precisely so that churches need not risk “bringing forward anything which was, as it were, new and opposed to the authority of the Septuagint version.” Fifteen years later, in the *City of God*, he found the durable formula: Jerome is “a man most learned, and skilled in all three languages, who translated these same Scriptures into the Latin speech, not from the Greek, but from the Hebrew”—a labor whose faithfulness, Augustine notes, even the Jews acknowledge—and yet the Church rightly holds to the Seventy, whose divergences the one Spirit may have intended. Both things, for Augustine, were true at once.²⁸

Rufinus’s attack. Where Augustine argued, Rufinus of Aquileia—Jerome’s estranged former friend—prosecuted. His *Apology* calls the Hebrew project “havoc” wrought on “the divine record handed down to the Churches by the Apostles”: Susanna “cut out, thrown aside and dismissed,” the Hymn of the Three Children “erased from the place where it stood”; the seventy translators in their cells wrote by the Holy Spirit, but this is “a translation made by a single man under the inspiration of Barabbas”—and did Peter, who governed the Roman church and delivered it its

Scriptures, deceive it for four hundred years? Now, he sneers, “let us change the inscriptions upon the tombs of the ancients, so that it may be known. . . that it was not a gourd but an ivy plant under whose shade Jonah rested.”²⁹

The pattern of the resistance deserves notice: nobody defended the Old Latin as a translation. The defenders of the old text defended the authority of the Septuagint, the unity of Greek and Latin Christendom, and the devotional memory of congregations—reception arguments, not philological ones. That is why the quarrel could end, over centuries, in a quiet reversal: the Church took Jerome’s Bible, and kept the Septuagint’s canon.³⁰

7 Becoming the Vulgate: A Slow Medieval Victory

No decree adopted Jerome’s Bible. Its victory took roughly four centuries, was never textually clean, and is documented chiefly by what scribes actually copied.

Mixed Bibles. For generations after Jerome’s death, Old Latin and Hieronymian texts circulated side by side and interbred: Old Latin manuscripts kept being copied, readers corrected each text by the other, and many surviving codices are mixtures. At Vivarium in the mid-sixth century Cassiodorus could still describe, among his monastery’s Bibles, volumes of different textual complexions—a nine-volume study Bible, the illustrated *codex grandior*, and a small one-volume pandect—with scholars still divided over which carried Jerome’s text and which the old version.³¹

Codex Amiatinus. The oldest surviving complete Vulgate Bible is an English product of Italian learning: the giant pandect made at Wearmouth–Jarrow before 716, one of three commissioned by Abbot Ceolfrith, who died en route to Rome carrying it as a gift for the pope. Bede tells the story; the manuscript, long taken for an Italian book, sits today in Florence. Its connection with Cassiodorus’s lost *grandior*—whose format and famous scribe-portrait it seems to echo—remains a subject of careful hedging, and Amiatinus is in any case a witness to what Northumbrian scholarship could assemble around 700, not a photograph of Jerome’s fifth-century text.³²

Carolingian corrections. Charlemagne’s court made good Bibles a matter of policy, and two distinct programs answered. Alcuin of York, abbot of Tours from 796, wrote of a royal charge “to emend the Old and New Testament”; his revision aimed at correct orthography and usable Latin rather than text-critical reconstruction, and the Tours scriptorium turned it into an export industry—dozens of surviving pandects. It was never designated an official imperial text; it prevailed by supply. Theodulf, bishop of Orléans, worked differently and better: his smaller Bibles carry variant readings in the margins with sigla distinguishing Alcuin’s text and Spanish witnesses—an editor’s apparatus, three centuries early, though copyists sometimes swept his margins back into the text.³³

Paris and the standardized book. The thirteenth-century university trade produced the “Paris Bible”: small, portable, one-volume, gothic-script Bibles with a standard order of books, standard prologues, and—from about 1230—the chapter divisions still in use, traditionally credited to Stephen Langton though the system slightly predates him. It was a commercial standard, not an official recension, and scholars promptly built tools against its text: the *correctoria*, systematic lists of variant readings gathered from Greek, Hebrew, and old Latin copies.³⁴

Print. The first substantial European printed book was this Bible: the 42-line *Biblia latina* of Johann Gutenberg and Johann Fust, produced at Mainz between 1454 and 1456—a Paris-type Vulgate text, mass-produced before anyone could ask which Vulgate ought to be printed. Print froze the medieval text in hundreds, then thousands, of copies, and made the question of an authoritative edition urgent in a way manuscript culture had never forced.³⁵

8 Trent: What “Authentic” Did and Did Not Assert

On 8 April 1546 the Council of Trent, answering the Reformation’s appeal to Scripture alone and to the Hebrew canon, passed two distinct decrees in its fourth session. Both must be quoted exactly, because both are routinely overstated.

The first decree defines the canon. It lists the books “of the Old and of the New Testament,” including Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and both books of Maccabees, and anathematizes anyone who does not receive “the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition.” Here the Vulgate serves as the canon’s yardstick—the concrete answer to “which books, and which parts of books”—settling, against Jerome’s own prefaces, the status of the deuterocanon and of the disputed additions.³⁶

The second decree (*Insuper*) confers a status. Considering “that no small utility may accrue to the Church of God, if it be made known which out of all the Latin editions, now in circulation, of the sacred books, is to be held as authentic,” the synod “ordains and declares, that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many years, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.” A third provision orders that “henceforth, the sacred Scripture, and especially the said old and vulgate edition, be printed in the most correct manner possible.”³⁷

Read closely, the act is bounded on every side. It compares the Vulgate with other *Latin* editions then circulating—not with the Hebrew or Greek originals, of which it says nothing. It attaches the status to specified public uses. It grounds the status in “lengthened usage,” not in a judgment of philological perfection—indeed, by ordering a corrected printing, the same session concedes the received text’s imperfection. And it neither names Jerome nor asserts single authorship. The Catholic Church’s own later, definitive gloss says exactly this: Pius XII’s *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) teaches that Trent’s authenticity “applies only to the Latin Church and to the public use of the same Scriptures,” that it does not “diminish the authority and value of the original texts,” and that it “is not specified primarily as critical, but rather as juridical”—the Vulgate is guaranteed “free from any error whatsoever in matters of faith and morals,” quotable safely in disputation and preaching, which is a different property from being the best recoverable text.³⁸

One consequence of Trent’s settlement was a whole literature in English: when Catholic exiles at Rheims (New Testament, 1582) and Douay (Old Testament, 1609–1610) translated the Bible for English readers, they translated it, as their title pages advertise, out of the “authentic Latin”—the Vulgate—rather than the Hebrew and Greek, producing the Douay–Rheims Bible whose Challoner revisions (1749–1752) served English-speaking Catholics into the twentieth century. The Latin Bible’s juridical authority had made it, for a season, the source of vernacular ones.³⁹

9 Sixtus and Clement: The Official Text, Twice

Trent had ordered a most-correct printing; producing one took the papacy almost half a century and ended in the most awkward episode in the Vulgate’s history. The secure facts are these. Commissions worked on the text under successive popes after 1546. Sixtus V, dissatisfied with the pace and confident of his own scholarship, took personal charge of the final revision, and an edition was printed at the Vatican Press in 1590 with a bull (*Aeternus ille*) prepared to impose it. Sixtus died on 27 August 1590. His edition was then withdrawn from circulation, and in 1592, under Clement VIII, a substantially different edition was published, which corrected the Sixtine’s misprints, undid its idiosyncratic verse numbering in favor of the 1551 Stephanus system, and altered its text in a great many readings. The 1592 edition—with minor corrections in the printings of 1593 and 1598—remained the Catholic Church’s standard Bible until 1979.⁴⁰

The awkwardness was managed with a legal and literary device. The 1592 title page named not Clement but Sixtus (*Biblia Sacra Vulgatæ Editionis Sixti Quinti Pont. Max. iussu recognita atque edita*); “Clementine” became attached to the edition only later, and early printings from 1604 onward carried both names. The preface to the reader—written by Robert Bellarmine—explained that Sixtus himself, seeing that errors “of the press or of others” (*aliqua vitia vel typographorum vel aliorum*) had crept in, had resolved on a new impression, a project his death interrupted.⁴¹

How honest was that explanation? Here the evidence ceilings must be stated plainly. That the Sixtine’s problems went beyond printing errors is not seriously disputed: the alterations Sixtus had introduced were textual, and the Clementine’s corrections of them are likewise textual, not merely typographical—published counts of the differences vary with counting method and none is asserted here. Whether *Aeternus ille* was ever canonically promulgated—and therefore whether the Sixtine ever became binding law—was disputed at the time and is disputed still; the recall operation itself (traditionally described as buying up and destroying copies) is attested in early accounts that are partly apologetic and partly polemic (the Protestant Thomas James built his *Bellum Papale*, 1600, on the two editions’ differences); and the exact mixture of motives—textual scruple, the dead pope’s unpopularity, curial and Jesuit politics, embarrassment management—cannot be recovered from the surviving record. What the documents establish is the sequence and the device: a papal edition failed, was replaced within two years, and the replacement was presented, under the first pope’s name, as his own wish.⁴²

For all that, the Clementine settled the text. For nearly four centuries “the Vulgate” meant, in practice, this edition: the Bible of Catholic seminaries and liturgy, the base of the Douay–Rheims and of Challoner, the text printed by Hetzenauer and Colunga–Turrado, and the standard against which the critical editions of the next section measured their distance.⁴³

10 The Critical Editions and the Official Text

The twentieth century split the Vulgate's two roles—historical document and church Bible—into separate enterprises, and it is essential to know which question each modern edition answers.

Recovering Jerome's text. The critical projects aim at the earliest attainable Hieronymian wording, not the medieval or Clementine text. The Oxford Vulgate—*Nouum Testamentum... Latine secundum editionem sancti Hieronymi*, begun by Bishop John Wordsworth and H. J. White—published the Gospels from 1889 and reached completion, under successor editors, only in 1954; Codex Amiatinus is its leading witness.⁴⁴ For the Old Testament, Pius X in 1907 entrusted the parallel labor to the Benedictines; the resulting Roman edition (*Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam Vulgatam versionem*) ran from Genesis (1926) to completion in 1995, carried from 1933 by the Abbey of St. Jerome in Rome, founded for the purpose.⁴⁵ The one-volume Stuttgart Vulgate (*Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Robert Weber, 1969; 5th edition by Roger Gryson, 2007) distills both: its Old Testament rests on the Roman edition, its New Testament on the Oxford edition, and it prints Jerome's prefaces—making it the standard scholarly text, deliberately distinct from the Clementine in thousands of small ways and in its very goal.⁴⁶

Revising the church's text. The official line ran differently. The Second Vatican Council's constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum* (1965), n. 22, honored "the Latin translation known as the vulgate" among the Church's ancient versions while directing that new vernacular translations be made "especially from the original texts of the sacred books"—Jerome's own principle, now applied past Jerome's own Bible.⁴⁷ Meanwhile Paul VI, executing the Council's order to finish the revision of the Psalter, established on 29 November 1965 a Pontifical Commission for the New Vulgate: a revision of the whole Latin Bible "word for word" where the Vulgate accurately renders the original texts "such as they are found in modern critical editions," and prudently corrected where it does not, in Christian biblical Latin. The Psalter appeared in 1969, the New Testament in 1970–1971, the Old Testament in 1976–1977; and on 25 April 1979 John Paul II, by the apostolic constitution *Scripturarum thesaurus*, declared the *Nova Vulgata* the "typical" edition and promulgated it for use "especially in the sacred Liturgy." A second typical edition with retouches followed in 1986.⁴⁸

The *Nova Vulgata* is thus a new thing under an old name: an official Latin version aligned with the modern critical Hebrew and Greek texts, replacing the Gallican Psalter, and serving as the Latin liturgy's reference text—a role the Congregation for Divine Worship's instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* (2001) made explicit by directing that liturgical translation follow the manuscript tradition the *Nova Vulgata* follows for the canonical text, and consult it "as an auxiliary tool" to maintain the Latin tradition of interpretation, while translating from the original languages.⁴⁹ Three "Vulgates" therefore now coexist, and none may be silently substituted for another: the Clementine (the historical church text, 1592–1979), the Stuttgart (the scholarly reconstruction of Jerome), and the *Nova Vulgata* (the current typical edition). Which one a claim concerns is the first question to ask of any modern sentence containing the word "Vulgate."⁵⁰

11 The Answer to the Question

What the sources allow is a history of parts, patrons, and receptions; what they refuse is a single founding act. A pope prompted a cautious revision of four Gospels, documented only by the reviser's own preface. An unnamed contemporary extended the method to the rest of the New Testament. Jerome, in Bethlehem, retranslated the Hebrew canon against loud and reasonable opposition, drew a canon line his own church declined to follow, and tossed Tobit and Judith across it in a day and a night of dictation. Copyists mixed old and new for centuries; Cassiodorus, Ceolfrith's Northumbrians, Alcuin, and Theodulf successively packaged and corrected the results; Paris standardized the book and its chapters; Gutenberg froze it in type. Trent, needing a stable public Scripture, declared the inherited edition "authentic" among Latin editions for public use—a juridical status, as the papacy itself later insisted, not a critical verdict—and the attempt to print a definitive text produced one suppressed papal edition, one durable one, and a preface whose tact still embarrasses. The scholars then took the tradition apart again: Oxford and Rome reconstructed Jerome; Stuttgart put him in one volume; Beuron edits what he replaced; and the Church, having blessed the return to the original languages, issued under the old name a new official Latin Bible aligned with them.

Two habits of mind are this history's yield. First, specificity: every serious statement about "the Vulgate" must name a book (whose translator and source language differ across the collection), a witness or edition (Amiatinus, Clementine, Stuttgart, Nova Vulgata answer different questions), and an act (commission, use, decree, promulgation are different kinds of authority). Second, patience with mixed outcomes: the Latin Church kept Jerome's translation

and rejected his canon; it canonized long usage at Trent and then spent a century of scholarship recovering the text that usage had buried; it retired the Clementine and kept the name. The common Bible of the West was never one thing—and it served as the common Bible precisely because each age could make it, without ever quite admitting it, partly new.

12 Notes

1. The fourth-century sense of *editio vulgata* and the observation that Jerome’s revised text “was not called the Vulgate until much later,” with Trent as the apparent first such use, are reported from H. A. G. Houghton, *The Latin New Testament* (Oxford, 2016), ch. 2 (with Sutcliffe 1948 and Bogaert 2012 cited there), read in the Library of Congress open-access PDF, 2026-07-24. All web loci cited in these notes were read on 2026-07-24, and the quoted witnesses were re-verified on 2026-07-25; full bibliographic detail is in the References.
2. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.11.16, in the J. F. Shaw translation (NPNF series 1, vol. 2), checked at New Advent. Modern scholarship cautions that the remark concerns the Old Testament in context and has “long been overapplied” (Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 1).
3. Jerome, preface to the Gospels (*Novum opus*), addressed to Damasus, in the public-domain translation of Kevin P. Edgecomb at tertullian.org (“If indeed faith is administered by the Latin version, they might respond by which, for they are nearly as many as the books!”). The Latin tag is *tot sunt paene quot codices*.
4. Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 1, reporting the consensus of the *Vetus Latina* editors (Fischer, Thiele, Burton, and others cited there) for the New Testament and, with Haelewyck, for the Old. The shared renderings of rare Greek words across all witnesses are among the arguments. The conclusion is a modern reconstruction (class K), book-specific, and does not exclude lost early parallel versions.
5. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.15.22 (Shaw, NPNF series 1, vol. 2), checked at New Advent.
6. The debate is summarized, with Burkitt 1896 and Quentin 1927 as the outlying positions and the geographical reading as the present preference, in Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 1 (class K). Older handbooks used “Italia” for the whole Old Latin tradition; the usage has been abandoned.
7. Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 2; Jerome’s usage appears, for example, in the preface to the books of Solomon (“called in the common edition Proverbs,” tr. Edgecomb). See the terminal appendix on terminology.
8. Jerome, preface to the Gospels, tr. Edgecomb (tertullian.org, public domain). The preface, transmitted at the head of Vulgate Gospel manuscripts, is the sole primary evidence for the Damascan commission; no papal instrument survives, and what exactly Damasus asked for beyond what the preface reports is unrecoverable.
9. Same preface. Modern collation confirms the description: the Vulgate Gospels are a light revision of an Italian-type Old Latin text, with Jerome’s interventions densest in Matthew and thinnest in John—he seems to have tired as he went (Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 2, class K).
10. Jerome, *Letter* 27 (to Marcella, Rome, 384), tr. Fremantle, Lewis, and Martley (NPNF series 2, vol. 6), checked at New Advent. Damasus died in December 384; Jerome left Rome in 385 under a cloud of ecclesiastical censure unrelated to the revision’s merits, and settled at Bethlehem in 386.
11. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 135 (tr. Richardson, NPNF series 2, vol. 3), checked at New Advent; similarly *Letter* 71.5 (to Lucinius, 398) and *Letter* 112.20. The claim is Jerome’s own and is contradicted by the evidence in the next note.
12. The case—Jerome’s non-Vulgate citations, the Galatians 5:9 lemma, the *Primum quaeritur* prologue and its dating bounds, De Bruyne’s Pelagius proposal and the Rufinus-the-Syrian hypothesis with its contested evidence—is set out in Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 2 (class K). The translator’s note to the Edgecomb rendering of *Primum quaeritur* (tertullian.org) independently records the stylistic case against Jerome’s authorship. The attribution question remains open; only the anonymity is secure.
13. Jerome, preface to the Psalter according to the Seventy (to Paula and Eustochium), tr. Edgecomb (tertullian.org, public domain).
14. The traditional identification and its modern rejection are reported at survey level (class K): De Bruyne, “Le problème du psautier romain” (1930), with recent statements in Goins (2014) and Norris (2017), as surveyed in the reference literature consulted 2026-07-24 (see the source audit). Jerome’s own notice of a Rome revision (previous note) is not in doubt; what is doubted is its identity with the extant Roman Psalter.
15. Same preface. The signs mostly perished in copying, exactly as Jerome feared. The name “Gallican” is later, from the version’s early popularity in Gaul; its Carolingian diffusion is taken up below.

16. Jerome, preface to the Psalter according to the Hebrew (to Sophronius), tr. Edgecomb (tertullian.org, public domain).
17. For the *Nova Vulgata* Psalter see the modern section below. The three-Psalter distinction—Roman (disputed), Gallican (Hexaplaric Greek), Hebrew—is essential equipment for reading any claim about “the Vulgate Psalms.”
18. Jerome, *Letter* 112.19–20 (to Augustine), tr. Cunningham (NPNF series 1, vol. 1), checked at New Advent, where he distinguishes his earlier “corrected Greek version” work from the Hebrew-based translation; the Gallican Psalter and the preface to the books of Solomon (“the edition of the Seventy interpreters... corrected by us,” tr. Edgecomb) are the surviving traces. The loss of most of the Hexaplaric revisions is a standard result (class K).
19. The overall range c. 390–405/6 and the impossibility of exact per-book dating are stated at survey level (class K). The prefaces attest the order of publication (Samuel–Kings early with the “helmeted” preface; the Pentateuch, Joshua–Judges–Ruth, and Esther late; Tobit and Judith at or after the end), not a completion day for a whole Bible—which Jerome never published as a single volume.
20. Jerome, preface to the book of Kings (*Prologus galeatus*), tr. Edgecomb (tertullian.org, public domain); the “earliest unambiguous description” judgment is the translator’s and the standard literature’s (class K). The preface also dares the reader: “read my Samuel and Kings; mine, I say, mine.”
21. Jerome, prologue to Tobit, tr. Edgecomb (tertullian.org, public domain). What Aramaic text lay before the interpreter, and how much is paraphrase, cannot be recovered; the Vulgate Tobit differs markedly from the surviving Greek forms.
22. Jerome, prologue to Judith, tr. Edgecomb (tertullian.org, public domain). No extant canon of Nicaea (325) lists the books of Scripture; what tradition or document Jerome meant is unknown (bounded negative result, class K/S).
23. Jerome, prologue to the books of Solomon, tr. Edgecomb (tertullian.org, public domain); the Old Latin character of the Vulgate’s Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and Maccabees is a standard result (class K). The additions to Daniel (Susanna, the Hymn of the Three, Bel) and to Esther Jerome kept but flagged: his Daniel preface explains that he marked them off with the obelus, and it records with a shrug that “the churches of the Lord Savior do not read the Prophet Daniel according to the Seventy interpreters, using (instead) the edition of Theodotion, and I don’t know why this happened”—so the Vulgate Daniel translates a Hebrew-Aramaic base plus Greek supplements from Theodotion’s line (prologue to Daniel, tr. Edgecomb).
24. Class S synthesis over the evidence of this and the preceding sections. The date of Jerome’s death (30 September 419 or 420) is conventional, from Prosper’s chronicle tradition. The prefaces traveled with the text throughout the Middle Ages: medieval readers of the fuller canon copied, at the head of its books, Jerome’s statements that they were not canonical—a standing tension resolved only at Trent.
25. Augustine, *Letter* 71.5–6 (A.D. 403), tr. Cunningham (NPNF series 1, vol. 1), checked at New Advent. The request for a Latin translation of the Septuagint instead is 71.6. The anecdote is Augustine’s report of a report; the offending word (gourd versus ivy, Jonah 4:6) is identified in Jerome’s reply.
26. Jerome, *Letter* 112.20–22 (= Augustine, *Letter* 75), tr. Cunningham (NPNF series 1, vol. 1), checked at New Advent. The “tampered with by the Jews” framing is Jerome’s polemic, not this account’s judgment; his own prefaces elsewhere ground differences in text and idiom rather than fraud.
27. Checked visually at Jonah 4:6 in the Hetzenauer 1914 printing of the Clementine Vulgate (“Et præparavit Dominus Deus hederam...”), page 875 of the SacredBible page-image edition; the 1914 editor’s marginal apparatus glosses the plant as *ricinus*, quietly agreeing with Jerome’s Hebrew botany while printing his ivy. See the source records bound to this publication.
28. Augustine, *Letter* 82.34–35, tr. Cunningham (NPNF series 1, vol. 1), checked at New Advent; *City of God* 18.43, Marcus Dods translation (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), quoted wording verified against the exact 1871 text registered in this repository’s source library, and present likewise in the NPNF series 1, vol. 2 reprint at CCEL. Augustine’s inspiration theology of the Seventy is his own argument, labeled as such.
29. Rufinus, *Apology against Jerome* 2.33–35, tr. Fremantle (NPNF series 2, vol. 3), checked at New Advent. The “Barabbas” gibe twists Jerome’s own report that he had a Jewish teacher, Baraninas (*Letter* 84.3). Rufinus writes as a party to a bitter feud over Origen; his testimony is polemic, and is used here as evidence of the opposition’s arguments, not of Jerome’s practice.
30. Class S synthesis over the letters cited in this section.
31. Cassiodorus’s three Bibles are described in his *Institutiones* (1.11–14) as reported, with the competing textual identifications (Fischer versus others), in Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 3 (class K). The general picture of mixture and coexistence is the uncontested framework of the modern literature.

32. Bede, *Lives of the Abbots* 15, as reported with the manuscript’s history and its misidentifications in Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 3 (class K over class D). The altered dedication page (“Peter of the Lombards” over Ceolfrith’s name) is part of the same account.
33. Alcuin’s letter of 796 (Epistula 165), the Tours production figures, the non-official status of his text, and Theodulf’s marginal apparatus are reported from Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 4 (class K). Neither program restored Jerome’s wording; both stabilized and propagated a good current text.
34. Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 5 (class K). Verse numbers came only with print, from Robert Estienne’s 1551 Geneva New Testament. Somewhere in these centuries the name settled too: medieval writers increasingly called the common text *vulgata*, but the first official use of “old and vulgate edition” for Jerome’s Bible appears at Trent (Houghton, ch. 2, citing Sutcliffe).
35. Gutenberg edition identity and dating as stated by the Harry Ransom Center’s Gutenberg Bible pages (University of Texas), checked 2026-07-24; the textual characterization of early printed Vulgates as carrying the late medieval common text is class K. The judgment about print’s effect is this account’s (class S).
36. Council of Trent, Session IV, Decree concerning the canonical Scriptures, in the English of J. Waterworth (1848), checked at papalencyclicals.net. “Parts” points at, among other things, the Daniel and Esther additions Jerome had obelized and the disputed Gospel passages.
37. Same session and source. The Latin term is *pro authentica habeatur*. The printing provision is the mandate behind the official editions of the next section.
38. Pius XII, encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (30 September 1943), n. 21, English text at vatican.va, checked 2026-07-24. The same paragraph notes that translations from the original languages were not forbidden by Trent. Both the decree and the encyclical are official acts (class M): each establishes its own object, and this account draws no further doctrinal conclusion from either.
39. The 1582 title-page wording (“translated faithfully into English, out of the authentical Latin, according to the best corrected copies”) is quoted from the transcription at bible-researcher.com, checked 2026-07-24. The remaining facts—the 1582 Rheims New Testament, the 1609–1610 Douay Old Testament, translation “not from the original Hebrew or Greek, but from the Latin Vulgate,” and Challoner’s revisions of 1749–1752, which per Newman “almost amounted to a new translation”—follow Bernard Ward, “Douay Bible,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 5 (1909), checked at New Advent: a dated survey (class K), used for bibliographic facts only.
40. The 1590/1592 sequence, the withdrawal, the verse-numbering reversal, and the Clementine’s standard-text status to 1979 are stated in Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 7 (class K), which also notes the suggestion “that political motives lay behind” the withdrawal (citing Metzger). The three Clementine printings are also the basis of Hetzenauer’s 1906 and 1914 editions, one of which is a bound source of this publication.
41. Title-page wording from Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 7; Bellarmine’s authorship of the preface, its quoted phrase, and his own account of proposing the Sixtus-name expedient are reported in Sydney Smith, “St. Robert Bellarmine,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 2 (1907), checked at New Advent—an avowedly sympathetic treatment (class K, dated), which also prints the parallel draft preface of Angelo Rocca, secretary of the revision commissions.
42. Class S synthesis, bounded as stated. The textual character of the changes and the existence of the promulgation dispute are reported across the modern and the dated literature (Houghton ch. 7; the *Catholic Encyclopedia* articles cited above, including the concession in “Pope Sixtus V,” vol. 14 (1912), that the edition was withdrawn “on account of its many errors”). Thomas James, *Bellum Papale sive Concordia discors* (London, 1600), tabulated the two editions’ differences for polemical use; later published counts of the differences run from about 2,000 (James) through about 3,000 (Vercellone) to nearly 5,000 (Metzger; Aland), as reported in the survey literature consulted 2026-07-24 (see the source audit)—the spread itself is the reason no figure is asserted in the text.
43. Class S synthesis; the named editions are documented in the References. On the Clementine’s relation to the medieval text, the modern judgment is double-edged: it is often a better guide to the *medieval* Vulgate than the critical editions, precisely because it never aimed at Jerome’s fifth-century wording (Houghton, ch. 7).
44. Edition identity, parts (1889–98; 1913–41; 1905–54), and witness structure from Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 7.
45. The 1907 commission is described first-hand by its chairman, Aidan Gasquet, “Revision of Vulgate,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 15 (1912), checked at New Advent (including the pope’s charge “to determine as accurately as possible the text of St. Jerome’s Latin translation”); the abbey’s foundation by Pius XI (apostolic constitution *Inter praecipuas*, 15 June 1933) is recited in *Scripturarum thesaurus* (next notes); the completion date 1995 is from Houghton, ch. 7. First-volume date 1926 as in the standard edition descriptions.

46. Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, ch. 7. Alongside the Vulgate editions stands the Beuron *Vetus Latina* project (institute founded 1945 by Bonifatius Fischer at the Archabbey of Beuron), editing the Old Latin evidence the Vulgate replaced—the indispensable control on every claim about what Jerome changed.
47. *Dei Verbum* 22, English text at vatican.va, checked 2026-07-24. The Catechism of the Catholic Church does not treat the Vulgate as such; its n. 131 quotes this very conciliar teaching that “access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful” (CCC 131, vatican.va English text, checked 2026-07-24; bounded to the Catechism’s article on Scripture, CCC 101–141).
48. *Scripturarum thesaurus* (25 April 1979), English text at vatican.va, checked 2026-07-24 (which also notes the revision was “quite demanding in certain books of the Old Testament which Saint Jerome did not touch”); the working norms, the commission history under Cardinal Bea and Bishop Schick, and the volume dates are from the *Praefatio ad Lectorem* of the *editio typica altera*, Latin text at vatican.va, checked 2026-07-24. The Nova Vulgata’s New Testament took the Stuttgart critical text as its base (Houghton, ch. 7).
49. *Liturgiam authenticam* (28 March 2001), nn. 24, 37, 41, and 43, English text at vatican.va, checked 2026-07-24. The instruction’s own footnotes cite *Scripturarum thesaurus* and the 1986 *editio typica altera*. Its directives are liturgical law of their date, cited here as an act of reception, not as a statement about textual history.
50. Class S synthesis. Even mechanical identification differs: at Genesis 3:20 the three print *Heva*, *Hava*, and *Eva* respectively (Houghton, ch. 7).

A Scope, Method, and Historical Coordinates

A.1 Identity and corpus boundary

Subject: the Latin biblical tradition conventionally called the Vulgate, treated as the layered object the body of this account distinguishes: the pre-Jerome Old Latin (*Vetus Latina*) background; Jerome’s Gospel revision (382–384); the anonymous revision of the remaining New Testament (Rome, c. 393–410); Jerome’s three Psalters and his Hebrew-based Old Testament (c. 390–405/6) with the Aramaic-based Tobit and Judith; the untouched Old Latin deuterocanonical books; the medieval transmission and its editions (Cassiodorus, Amiatinus, Alcuin, Theodulf, Paris Bibles, *correctoria*); the printed and official editions (Gutenberg; Sixtine 1590; Sixto-Clementine 1592); the modern critical editions (Oxford, Rome, Stuttgart); and the *Nova Vulgata* (1979; *editio typica altera* 1986). “Vulgate” is used of the received collection anachronistically but conventionally; where a specific edition matters, it is named. “Old Latin”/*Vetus Latina* is a modern collective label, not one ancient edition. *Editio vulgata* in fourth-century usage denoted the common Septuagint-based text. “Authentic” bears only the juridical sense defined at Trent as glossed by *Divino afflante Spiritu*. “Typical edition” is the normative edition for a defined ecclesial use, not a claim of antiquity. “Hebrew verity” (*Hebraica veritas*) names Jerome’s program and polemic, not a claim that his exemplars equal the medieval Masoretic Text.

A.2 Coverage and exclusions

Chronological center: the second through seventeenth centuries, with a bounded modern extension (critical editions, *Nova Vulgata*, liturgical instructions, Catechism) checked through 2026-07-24. Geographic center: Rome, Bethlehem, North Africa, and the Latin West. This account creates no translation of any ancient, biblical, or official text; quotations follow the identified public-domain English versions in the References, and copyrighted works (notably Houghton’s guide, cited CC BY-NC-ND) are paraphrased or cited, never reproduced at length. Excluded: verse-level textual commentary; any manuscript census or stemma; complete histories of Latin exegesis, vernacular Bibles, or liturgical translation; any adjudication of canon or inspiration (acts are reported, not judged); any election of one edition as “the real Vulgate”; and any claim that presently binding liturgical law is stated here beyond the cited instructions’ own dates.

A.3 Evidence classes

Class	Meaning
D	Documents and artifacts: manuscripts and printed artifacts cited at catalog level (Codex Amiatinus, Tours and Theodulf Bibles, the Gutenberg Bible, the Hetzenauer 1914 Clementine printing, page image inspected).
A	Contemporary participant documents read at their own date and purpose: Jerome’s prefaces and letters, Augustine’s letters, Rufinus’s apology, <i>Primum quaeritur</i> .
T	Later tradition and reception: Bede on Ceolfrith, Cassiodorus’s descriptions, Bellarmine’s preface as reported, the Douay–Rheims enterprise.
M	Official ecclesial acts, each limited to its object: Trent Session IV; <i>Divino afflante Spiritu</i> 21; <i>Dei Verbum</i> 22; <i>Scripturarum thesaurus</i> ; <i>Nova Vulgata</i> praefatio; <i>Liturgiam authenticam</i> ; CCC 131.
K	Named modern critical reconstruction and survey literature: Houghton 2016 above all; De Bruyne; the edition projects; dated Catholic Encyclopedia articles used as identified period witnesses.
S	Source-grounded project synthesis, never attributed to a witness.

A.4 Method, uncertainties, and negative results

Participant prefaces establish what their authors claimed, at their date, in their polemical situation; no preface is treated as a neutral administrative record. Official acts establish the status they confer and nothing about earlier history. Modern reconstructions are attributed by name. Material uncertainties preserved in place: the exact content of Damasus’s request; the identity of the rest-of-New-Testament reviser (Pelagius and “Rufinus the Syrian” remain hypotheses); the identity of the extant Roman Psalter with Jerome’s Rome revision (doubted since De Bruyne); the per-book dates of the Hebrew-based translations (only a sequence is recoverable); the sources and procedure behind Tobit and Judith; what Jerome meant by his Nicene-Council remark about Judith (no surviving Nicene canon lists Scripture); the textual identities of Cassiodorus’s three Bibles; the promulgation status of *Aeternus ille* and the full motives for the Sixtine withdrawal, where published difference-counts (c. 2,000–5,000) are reported as a spread, none endorsed. Bounded negative results: no commission instrument from Damasus survives; no ancient source names the reviser of Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation; the Catechism’s article on Scripture (CCC 101–141) was checked and does not treat the Vulgate by name. These are correctable search results, not proofs of absence. Mutable web sources were used as checked on 2026-07-24; the quoted witnesses were re-verified on 2026-07-25.

A.5 Rights and review state

Project prose is original and intended for CC BY 4.0; ancient and official texts quoted follow public-domain translations identified in the References (Edgecomb’s preface translations, released to the public domain; NPNF; Dods; Waterworth’s Trent); Vatican web texts are quoted within ordinary scholarly limits with citation; Houghton 2016 (CC BY-NC-ND) is summarized without adaptation. This publication has received internal editorial checking only. No independent patristic, Latin-biblical, medieval, early-modern, theological, canonical, or rights review is claimed, and no ecclesiastical review or approval is claimed or implied.

A.6 Orientation timeline

Dates before print are approximate unless a witness supplies them; “convention” marks customary datings this account does not assert as established.

Date	Event or act	Witness or edition	Status
2nd–3rd c.	Latin translations of Scripture from Greek in circulation	Quotations in African writers; later manuscript tradition (D/K)	Secure as fact; origins reconstructed
382–384	Jerome revises the four Gospels at Rome under Damasus	Preface <i>Novum opus</i> (A); <i>Letter</i> 27 (A)	Secure; commission’s exact terms lost

Date	Event or act	Witness or edition	Status
384	Damasus dies; Jerome leaves Rome 385, Bethlehem 386	Jerome's letters (A); chronology conventional	Secure in outline
c. 386–390	Hexaplaric revisions of Old Testament books; Gallican Psalter	Psalter preface (A); <i>Letter</i> 112 (A)	Secure; most revisions lost
c. 390–405/6	Old Testament translated from the Hebrew; Tobit and Judith from Aramaic	Prefaces (A); sequence only (K)	Secure as program; per-book dates open
c. 393–410	Anonymous revision of Acts, Epistles, Revelation at Rome	<i>Primum quaeritur</i> (A); dating bounds (K)	Secure; reviser unknown
403–405	Augustine–Jerome exchange; Oea incident; Rufinus's attack	<i>Letters</i> 71, 112, 82 (A); <i>Apology</i> 2 (A)	Secure witnesses
419/420	Jerome dies at Bethlehem	Chronicle tradition (T)	Year conventional
c. 540s–580s	Cassiodorus's Bibles at Vivarium	<i>Institutiones</i> as reported (T/K)	Secure; textual identities disputed
before 716	Codex Amiatinus written at Wearmouth–Jarrow	Bede (T); the manuscript (D)	Secure
796–800	Alcuin's revision at Tours; Theodulf's editions at Orléans	Alcuin's letters; surviving Bibles (D/K)	Secure; no official imperial text
c. 1230	Paris Bibles standardize order and modern chapters	Surviving Bibles (D/K)	Secure; Langton attribution qualified
1454–1456	Gutenberg's 42-line Bible printed at Mainz	Surviving copies; Ransom Center description (D)	Secure
1546	Trent: canon decree; "old and vulgate edition" authentic; corrected printing ordered	Session IV decrees (M)	Secure
1582/1609–10	Rheims New Testament; Douay Old Testament from the "authentic Latin"	Title pages; survey literature (T/K)	Secure
1590	Sistine Vulgate printed; withdrawn after Sixtus V's death	Editions; Bellarmine's account as reported (D/T)	Secure sequence; motives disputed
1592	Sixto-Clementine Vulgate; standard text to 1979	The edition (D); reception (K)	Secure
1889–1954	Oxford Vulgate New Testament (Wordsworth–White)	Edition record (K)	Secure
1907; 1926–1995	Benedictine commission; Roman Vulgate Old Testament	Gasquet 1912 (K); edition record (K)	Secure
1943	<i>Divino afflante Spiritu</i> glosses Trent's authenticity as juridical	Encyclical text (M)	Secure
1945	Vetus Latina Institute founded at Beuron	Project record (K)	Secure
1965	<i>Dei Verbum</i> 22; Nova Vulgata commission established	Conciliar text (M); <i>Praefatio</i> (M)	Secure
1969/2007	Stuttgart Vulgate; fifth edition (Weber–Gryson)	Edition record (K)	Secure
1979/1986	<i>Scripturarum thesaurus</i> promulgates the Nova Vulgata; second typical edition	Constitution and <i>Praefatio</i> (M)	Secure
2001	<i>Liturgiam authenticam</i> assigns the Nova Vulgata its reference role in liturgical translation	Instruction text (M)	Secure as act of its date

B References

All web sources were accessed and checked on 2026-07-24; the quoted witnesses were re-verified on 2026-07-25. Citations in the text use conventional English titles with the numbering of the translations listed here. Sources are grouped by function.

Jerome: prefaces, letters, and catalogue (participant documents)

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