

The Vulgate

*Jerome's Work and the Making
of the Latin Bible*

Old Latin plurality, several translation projects,
textual stewardship, authority, and reception

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1 The Object Is a History, Not a Single Translation

The name “Vulgate” does not describe one translation made at one moment by one man. It names a Latin biblical tradition whose principal ingredients include pre-Jerome Latin translations, Jerome’s conservative revision of the Gospels, several Greek- and Hebrew-based Old Testament projects, an anonymous revision of much of the remaining New Testament, and centuries of copying, correction, printing, and institutional reception. The historical task is therefore to identify which act, book, witness, or edition is meant each time the name is used.

The familiar compressed account—Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to translate the Bible, Jerome completed the Vulgate, and the Church thereafter used his text—contains real persons and events but joins them too tightly. Damasus is connected securely with Jerome’s revision of the four Gospels in Rome in 382–384. Jerome later undertook several Old Testament projects, first with Greek Hexaplaric materials and then, book by book, with Hebrew sources. Yet the later Latin Bible also retained books and readings that Jerome did not translate, while the reviser of Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation remains unnamed. No surviving manuscript is Jerome’s complete authorial copy. The text called Vulgate emerged as those different materials were transmitted together and gradually preferred in the Latin West (Jerome, *Praefatio in Evangelia*; Houghton 2016, 31–43).

The resulting history is less tidy than the conventional story, but more intelligible. It explains why a medieval Psalter can be genuinely Vulgate without being Jerome’s Hebrew Psalter, why a Clementine reading can differ from a modern critical Vulgate, and why the *Nova Vulgata* can bear the inherited name while deliberately correcting the inherited Latin from modern Hebrew and Greek editions.

2 Before Jerome: The Plural Old Latin World

Latin Christianity possessed Scripture before Jerome, but not as a single authorized Latin Bible. From at least the second century, biblical books circulated in Latin forms translated principally from Greek. Different translators, local revisions, oral and liturgical memory, and ordinary copying produced a field of related but non-identical texts. The modern label *Vetus Latina* gathers that evidence for study; it must not conceal its plurality (Vetus Latina Institute; Houghton 2016, 7–30).

2.1 Why translation began from Greek

The earliest Latin Christian communities received the New Testament in Greek and commonly encountered the Old Testament through Greek Jewish Scriptures. A Latin Old Testament reading could therefore stand at two removes from a Hebrew form: a Latin translator rendered a particular Greek reading, and that Greek reading had its own textual and translational history. This is not evidence of carelessness. Greek Scripture was the Bible read, preached, and argued from in many ancient churches. A later comparison with Hebrew cannot simply be retrojected as the original operating rule of Latin Christianity.

The surviving material is uneven. Whole early Latin Bibles are absent; some books survive in fragmentary manuscripts or palimpsests, while patristic citations and liturgical texts preserve forms otherwise lost. A Father’s wording may reflect memory, adaptation to an argument, or a manuscript no longer extant. It is still evidence, but evidence whose unit and use must be identified. The Beuron Vetus Latina project accordingly works book by book and witness by witness rather than printing a conjectural uniform “Old Latin Bible.”

Witness: The Vetus Latina Institute’s manuscript register and edition program.

What it establishes: Pre-Jerome and non-Vulgate Latin evidence is dispersed among manuscripts, fragments, patristic citations, and liturgy; only part of the Bible has been critically edited in the series.

Limit: The modern institutional category organizes surviving evidence. It does not prove that ancient readers recognized one edition bearing that name.

2.2 Variation as a late-antique problem

Jerome's Gospel preface and Letter 27 describe numerous divergent Latin copies and defend correction from Greek manuscripts. His complaint is partisan testimony from a reviser under criticism, but it confirms that textual plurality was visible in Rome. Augustine, writing from North Africa, likewise treats comparison among Latin translations as useful and insists that faulty Latin copies be corrected by Greek, with the Septuagint important for the Old Testament and Greek manuscripts for the New (*De doctrina christiana* 2.11–15).

Augustine's preference for the *Itala* has sometimes been made the title of one identifiable Old Latin recension. The passage cannot securely bear that weight. It establishes his favorable judgment about a Latin form or quality described by that word; the long history of overlapping Latin texts makes a single recoverable edition uncertain. "African," "European," and similar classifications can be useful descriptions of affinities, but they are not self-contained Bibles whose boundaries are known in advance (Houghton 2016, 7–30).

2.3 Books, not yet a stable pandect

Biblical books and groups of books commonly circulated separately. Gospel books, Pauline collections, Psalters, and lectionary excerpts could develop different textual histories before later being gathered into pandects. A copyist might correct an Old Latin book toward a Vulgate form; a Vulgate copy could acquire a familiar Old Latin reading from worship or commentary. The direction of influence must therefore be demonstrated for each witness.

This material setting matters for the later word "Vulgate." A reader who imagines one Old Latin Bible being replaced on a fixed date by one new Bible misses the mechanisms of change. Jerome could revise the Gospels without touching Acts. His Hebrew Psalter could circulate beside a Greek-based Psalter. A later complete Bible could combine parts of different origin. The codex eventually made such combinations visible as one physical book, but physical unity did not erase textual ancestry.

2.4 The earlier meaning of "vulgate"

In Jerome's own usage, a "common" or "vulgate" edition could mean the widespread Septuagintal text, including its Old Latin descendants. The label had not yet become a proper name for his collected work. The reversal is historically revealing: the text that later generations called Jerome's Vulgate first challenged forms that a fourth-century writer could call vulgate. Later success renamed the field.

Two consequences govern the chapters that follow. First, Old Latin evidence is not merely debris swept away by a superior edition; it preserves early Latin reception and, at times, Greek readings of independent text-critical interest. Second, Jerome began inside this world. His revisions reused its wording, responded to its disputes, and depended on readers who already knew Latin Scripture by hearing and memory. Even a move toward Greek or Hebrew sources had to negotiate the authority of familiarity.

3 Damasus, Rome, and the Four Gospels

The most securely bounded Damasian episode is Jerome's work on the Gospels in Rome between 382 and 384. The evidence is Jerome's preface beginning *Novum opus*, addressed to Pope Damasus, together with his near-contemporary correspondence and the textual comparison of the resulting Latin tradition. The episode is important precisely because its limits can be stated: four Gospels, revised from existing Latin against Greek manuscripts, rather than a commissioned translation of the entire Bible (Jerome, *Praefatio in Evangelia*; Letter 27; Houghton 2016, 31–39).

3.1 A risky correction of familiar words

Jerome represents Damasus as pressing him to adjudicate among differing Latin copies by recourse to Greek. He anticipates a predictable charge: readers who recognize a familiar Gospel but hear altered wording may call correction corruption. Letter 27 shows that this was not a merely imagined objection. Jerome's defense appeals to variant Latin manuscripts and to the Greek source.

The preface also states a restrained editorial policy. Jerome did not aim to replace every familiar Latin expression. He describes correction where a difference altered the sense while leaving much else in place. Modern comparison broadly supports an intervention that is more extensive in Matthew and decreases through Mark and Luke to John. The result is a revision whose continuity with Old Latin is as important as its correction from Greek (Houghton 2016, 31–39).

Witness: Jerome’s *Praefatio in Evangelia*, addressed to Damasus, and Letter 27 to Marcella.

What it establishes: Jerome defended a revision of the four Gospels against older Greek manuscripts in 382–384 and expected resistance from readers of familiar Latin forms.

Limit: The preface is a participant’s programmatic defense, not a neutral commission register. It expressly bounds the promised work to the Gospels and cannot establish a whole-Bible mandate.

3.2 Text, order, and apparatus

The revision was not only a sequence of altered words. Jerome placed the Gospels in the order Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and transmitted Eusebian cross-reference apparatus that helped readers locate parallel passages. Such paratext matters historically: an edition can change how a text is studied even when its wording is conservatively revised. Later manuscripts could preserve, modify, or omit these features independently of their verbal text.

The Greek base cannot be identified with one surviving manuscript. Jerome speaks generally of older Greek copies, and the Latin outcome reflects an editorial act rather than a mechanical transcription. Textual criticism can compare his Latin with Greek traditions and infer relationships, but it does not recover a signed exemplar placed beside his desk. The proper historical claim is therefore comparative: his revision moved selected Latin readings toward Greek evidence available to him.

3.3 What happened outside the Gospels

Jerome’s later Pauline commentaries sometimes criticize readings that became standard in the Vulgate Epistles and propose alternatives. This is difficult to reconcile with his authorship of their received revision. The Latin text of Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation also shows a technique and Greek basis distinct from the Gospels. Current reconstruction commonly places much of this work in a related late-fourth- or early-fifth-century revision, perhaps in Roman circles, but the reviser is unknown and more specific social attribution remains hypothetical (Houghton 2016, 40–43; Houghton 2023, introduction).

This negative result is substantive. An anonymous reviser is not a gap to be filled with Jerome because his name is available. It is evidence that the later Vulgate New Testament was already composite at its formation.

Claim check: “Damasus ordered the Vulgate Bible”

The secure statement is narrower: Damasus sponsored or urged Jerome’s revision of the four Gospels. Jerome’s own preface names only those books. His later Old Testament translations arose in different circumstances, and the remaining New Testament cannot securely be assigned to him.

3.4 Early reception

The revised Gospels gained users without immediately eliminating other texts. Augustine valued Jerome’s work from Greek and used the revised Gospels in *De consensu evangelistarum*. At the same time, the continued survival and correction of Old Latin Gospel books shows coexistence rather than instantaneous replacement. Liturgical hearing, private copying, commentary, and regional book production all had their own tempos.

The Damasian project nevertheless set a durable pattern. It joined respect for received Latin with appeal to source-language manuscripts, and it made textual correction an ecclesial as well as philological problem. Those same tensions intensified when Jerome moved from revising Latin by Greek to translating Old Testament books from Hebrew.

4 Jerome’s Several Old Testament Projects

Jerome did not move in one step from the Gospels to a completed Hebrew Old Testament. His Old Testament activity passed through distinguishable Greek-based revisions, sustained study of Hebrew, and a sequence of new translations whose dates and source mixtures differ by book. The common date range about 390–405 describes the main Hebrew-based undertaking; it should not be treated as a single production schedule known in all particulars (Kamesar 1993; Houghton 2023, introduction).

4.1 Hexaplaric correction before the Hebrew translations

Jerome had access to the scholarly legacy of Origen’s Hexapla: aligned forms of the Hebrew text, Greek transliterations, the Septuagint, and later Jewish Greek versions associated with Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. Letter 32 describes collation work involving Greek and Hebrew materials and revisions of several scriptural books. Its date and vocabulary place it with Greek-based corrective activity, not with a completed translation directly from Hebrew.

Much of Jerome’s Hexaplaric revision outside the Psalter did not survive as an independently transmitted whole. That loss prevents a neat reconstruction of every transition. It also warns against reading every later Latin agreement with Greek as an accidental survival: some may descend from deliberate scholarly revision, others from Old Latin ancestry or later correction.

4.2 Three Psalters, three historical questions

The Psalms make the layered process unusually visible because Latin worship preserved more than one form.

Psalter	Source relation	Historical role	Qualification
Roman	A light Old Latin revision traditionally connected with Jerome	Continued in some liturgical settings, especially at Rome	Jerome’s authorship is disputed; “Roman” does not prove direct papal production.
Gallican	Old Latin revised toward Origen’s Hexaplaric Greek text	Became the dominant medieval Vulgate and liturgical Psalter	It is associated with Jerome but is not his direct Hebrew Psalter; early critical signs were not uniformly preserved.
<i>Iuxta Hebraeos</i>	A new Latin translation based principally on Hebrew, with Greek scholarly aids	Preserved for study and comparison	It did not generally displace the Gallican Psalter in worship.
Medieval mixtures	Copying and correction among received forms	Reflect local use and scholarship	A reading requires manuscript-specific analysis; a label alone does not guarantee purity.

Jerome’s Letter 106, written much later in response to questions about Psalter readings, reveals comparison among Greek and Latin copies, attention to Hebrew, and the afterlife of Hexaplaric critical signs. It is direct evidence of his philological reasoning at that later date and retrospective evidence about the revision’s purpose. Michael Graves’s edition and commentary and Oliver Norris’s survey provide the modern framework for distinguishing the Psalters.

4.3 The turn *iuxta Hebraeos*

Around 390 Jerome began translating Old Testament books with Hebrew as the governing source. The undertaking occupied more than a decade. Prefaces, correspondence, and internal comparison permit approximate sequences, but not every traditional book date is equally firm. The Hebrew Psalter belongs early in the movement; Daniel and other books followed in stages; the Pentateuch and some later projects belong toward the end. “Completed in 405” is therefore only a convenient boundary for Jerome’s principal work, not the date of a single finished Vulgate Bible.

Jerome's Hebrew source was a late-antique consonantal tradition broadly ancestral to the medieval Masoretic Text. It was not identical with the vocalized, accented, and critically edited Hebrew Bibles used today. He also consulted Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Septuagintal and Old Latin forms, exegetical traditions, and Jewish teachers. Adam Kamesar emphasizes the continuing place of Greek scholarship in the Hebrew project. Paul Rodrigue's full case studies of Genesis 37–50, Daniel, and Esther show that Greek Jewish versions, the Septuagint, Old Latin, and Jerome's own interpretation could affect even Hebrew-based translation. Those books establish a mixed source ecology, not one dependency rate for the whole Old Testament. This does not negate Jerome's turn to Hebrew. It specifies what an ancient learned translation from Hebrew entailed.

4.4 Prefaces as historical instruments

Jerome's biblical prefaces explain patrons, source choices, book order, textual marks, and objections. They are indispensable, but they are advocacy. A preface may magnify speed, difficulty, novelty, or opposition; a polemical contrast between "Hebrew truth" and corrupt "streams" advances a case. Modern comparison must test those claims against the translated texts and other witnesses.

The prefaces also traveled with medieval Bibles and taught later readers how to classify books. Their reception could outlast the exact editorial setting that produced them. A statement first written to defend one translation thus became paratext for a composite Bible whose contents and ecclesial canon were not reducible to Jerome's personal judgments.

Claim check: "Jerome translated from the Hebrew rather than the Septuagint"

For much of the Old Testament, Hebrew became his governing source. Yet he had first made Greek-based revisions, continued to consult Greek versions and Latin predecessors, produced more than one Psalter, and did not translate every book in the later Vulgate. The contrast is real but not exhaustive.

5 "Hebrew Truth": Philology, Polemic, and Reception

Jerome's phrase *hebraica veritas* names a methodological and theological claim: for many Old Testament questions, the Hebrew text should govern correction and translation. The phrase marked a consequential reorientation in the Latin West. It did not mean that Jerome possessed an unmediated original, that his every rendering followed Hebrew alone, or that the Septuagint ceased to have ecclesial authority.

5.1 Fountains, streams, and actual practice

Jerome often pictures source languages as fountains and translations as streams. The image supports recourse to Hebrew and Greek when Latin witnesses disagree. It is rhetorically powerful but historically incomplete. A translator reads through learned habits, lexica embodied in earlier versions, teachers, parallel passages, and inherited exegesis. Jerome's practice confirms this complexity. Greek Jewish versions could clarify a Hebrew word; the Septuagint could preserve an interpretive tradition; a familiar Latin expression could survive when it conveyed the sense adequately (Kamesar 1993; Rodrigue 2025, especially 309–313). Rodrigue's conclusion is deliberately book-bounded: its direct case studies do not authorize the same mixture or motive in every translated book.

Letter 57's defense of rendering sense for sense, except where even biblical word order may be significant, is similarly contextual. It arose in a dispute about translation and cannot serve as a single algorithm for all his biblical books. Some passages are close and formal; others explain, harmonize, transliterate, or choose among ancient interpretations. Translation technique must be tested book by book.

Jerome's references to Jewish teachers and his use of Jewish Greek translators document real intellectual exchange. His polemical statements about Jews or alleged textual corruption belong to late-antique Christian controversy and cannot be repeated as neutral descriptions of Jewish transmission. The evidence supports contact, borrowing, argument, and asymmetry; it does not disclose every teacher's identity or reconstruct each lesson.

5.2 Augustine's pastoral and textual objection

The exchange between Augustine and Jerome gives the dispute a concrete setting. Augustine praised Jerome's ability to revise the Gospels from Greek. He was much more cautious about replacing the Church's Septuagintal Old Testament with a Hebrew-based Latin text. In Letter 71, written in 403, he worried that a novel reading proclaimed in church could disturb congregations and create a gulf between Greek- and Latin-speaking Christians.

The controversy over Jonah's plant made the concern vivid. Augustine's Letter 71 reports that a congregation accustomed to one Latin rendering reacted sharply to Jerome's alternative. Jerome answered in his Letter 112, also transmitted in the Augustinian correspondence as Letter 75, defending his source work and lexical choice. Augustine's Letter 82 then responded to Jerome and restated the pastoral and ecclesial concern while affirming his respect for Jerome's learning. The sequence establishes neither that every congregation reacted in this way nor that one party simply rejected scholarship. It shows two goods in tension: correction from sources and continuity in a worshipping community (Augustine, Letters 71 and 82; Jerome, Letter 112).

Augustine's *City of God* later speaks appreciatively of Jerome as learned in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin while continuing to defend the Septuagint's providential and ecclesial importance. This combination prevents a false binary. One could esteem Jerome's Hebrew translation without making it the sole measure of the Old Testament's Christian reception.

Witness: Augustine's Letter 71; Jerome's reply, Letter 112 (Augustine, Letter 75); Augustine's further reply, Letter 82; and *City of God* 18.43.

What it establishes: A prominent contemporary welcomed Jerome's Greek Gospel work but disputed the pastoral and ecclesial consequences of a Hebrew-based Old Testament; the disagreement persisted alongside respect for Jerome's learning.

Limit: The letters must be read in sequence. They report elite correspondence and a narrated congregational incident; they do not quantify Latin Christian opinion or decide the textual question by themselves.

5.3 Canon and source are different questions

Jerome's preference for a Hebrew enumeration of Old Testament books shaped several prefaces, especially the helmeted prologue to Kings. But source-language preference, personal canonical classification, ecclesial reading, and later conciliar reception are distinct historical questions. Augustine's list in *De doctrina christiana* includes books that Jerome treated differently. The later Vulgate transmitted deuterocanonical books, some in Old Latin forms, and Trent received entire books and all their parts as found in the old Latin Vulgate.

It is therefore misleading either to make Jerome the author of the later Catholic canon or to say simply that he "removed" its deuterocanonical books. His judgments are primary evidence for one learned late-antique position; the physical and institutional history of the Vulgate records a broader reception.

5.4 Why the Hebrew project prevailed gradually

The Hebrew-based books offered learned readers an answer to discrepancies among Latin and Greek copies and increasingly traveled under Jerome's authority. Yet adoption depended on copying networks, schools, monasteries, commentary, and liturgy. The Gallican Psalter's success over the Hebrew Psalter is a particularly strong counterexample to any claim that source priority alone determined reception. A text might be philologically prized, pastorally resisted, liturgically familiar, or materially available in different degrees.

The long-term result was not victory by erasure. It was a Latin Bible in which Hebrew-based translations, Greek-based revisions, and Old Latin inheritances stood side by side. The next chapter makes that composition explicit.

6 The Composite Bible That Bore Jerome's Name

By the early Middle Ages, "Jerome's Bible" could function as a useful attribution of authority, but it was never an exact table of authorship. The received Vulgate joined work securely by Jerome, work associated with him but

disputed, anonymous revision, and inherited Old Latin material. Composition also varied among manuscripts. The table below gives historical source relations, not a judgment about inspiration or canon.

Corpus	Principal Latin history	Attribution	Material qualification
Four Gospels	Conservative Old Latin revision against Greek, 382–384	Securely Jerome	Individual readings continued to interact with Old Latin forms.
Acts, Pauline and Catholic Epistles, Revelation	Revision of earlier Latin against Greek	Reviser unknown	A related late-fourth- or early-fifth-century origin is reconstructed; Jerome’s authorship is not supported.
Most Hebrew-canon Old Testament books	New translations with Hebrew governing, aided by Greek and Latin sources	Jerome, in stages about 390–405	Book dates, technique, and degree of dependence vary.
Psalms	Roman, Gallican, Hebrew, and mixed forms	Gallican and Hebrew forms associated with Jerome; Roman attribution disputed	The Greek-based Gallican, not the Hebrew Psalter, became the dominant medieval Vulgate form.
Tobit	Rapid translation from “Chaldean” involving a bilingual interpreter and Jerome’s Latin dictation, according to the preface	Jerome, under unusual conditions	The intermediary text and each participant’s contribution cannot be reconstructed fully.
Judith	Rapid sense-for-sense rendering from “Chaldean,” according to the preface	Jerome, under unusual conditions	The preface names no interpreter; the precise source and process remain uncertain.
Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and 1–2 Maccabees	Substantially Old Latin inheritances in the received Vulgate	Not Jerome’s Hebrew translations	Jerome neither translated nor revised Maccabees; textual histories remain book-specific.
Esther and Daniel additions	Hebrew-based core and separately handled Greek material	Mixed Jerome-related and inherited history	Marks, placement, and wording changed in transmission; blanket “from Hebrew” language fails.
Additional appendix works	3–4 Esdras and Prayer of Manasseh in later printed appendices	Various Old Latin histories	Clementine printing placed them outside the canonical sequence; their presence does not equal Tridentine canonical status.

The Clementine preface itself recognizes the basic fact: the books of the Vulgate derive partly from Jerome’s translation or correction and partly from an older Latin edition. The official *Nova Vulgata Praenotanda* is even more explicit book by book. It notes Jerome’s lack of involvement with Maccabees and treats the authorship of the non-Gospel New Testament revisions cautiously. These late witnesses do not prove the original history on their own, but they show that official Roman editorial memory did not require the fiction of sole authorship.

6.1 Tobit and Judith as limiting cases

Jerome’s prefaces describe Tobit and Judith as undertaken at others’ request and with striking speed. The Tobit preface names the bishops Chromatius and Heliodorus; the extant Judith preface addresses unnamed plural requesters. For Tobit Jerome reports working through a bilingual intermediary from a language he calls Chaldean into Hebrew speech and then Latin dictation. For Judith he reports a rapid sense-for-sense rendering from Chaldean but does not mention an interpreter. Modern study uses these notices—and their difference—to explain why the books should not be grouped casually with the long Hebrew translation program (Gallagher 2015).

The accounts are unusually valuable evidence of process, yet they remain authorial prefaces that compress events and use ancient language labels. The precise intermediary text, the interpreter’s contribution, and the relation of Jerome’s output to surviving Greek and Latin forms cannot be recovered merely by repeating his timetable. The *Nova Vulgata* commission later judged the Old Latin tradition text-critically important for these books.

6.2 A physical codex can conceal textual seams

Once books of different origin were copied between the same covers, readers encountered one Bible. Prologues attributed the collection, book order suggested coherence, and recurring Latin vocabulary gave a degree of linguistic unity. Those are real features of reception. They do not erase the seams discoverable through prefaces, manuscripts, and comparative philology.

The tendency to reason from physical unity to single authorship becomes especially misleading with pandects copied centuries after Jerome. A manuscript could select the Gallican Psalter, an anonymous Pauline revision, Jerome's Hebrew Genesis, and Old Latin Wisdom, then undergo local corrections. Calling the result a Vulgate Bible correctly identifies a received family but does not answer each book's genealogy.

6.3 Canon, contents, and order

Three questions must remain separate:

- Which books a particular writer considered canonical;
- which books a particular manuscript copied, and in what order;
- which books an ecclesiastical act later received or placed in an appendix.

Jerome's prologues, Augustine's canon list, medieval pandects, Trent's decree, and the Clementine appendix answer those questions at different dates. None should silently substitute for another. The received Vulgate's broad contents were produced by ecclesial and material reception extending far beyond Jerome's desk.

Claim check: "Jerome translated the Vulgate"

Jerome supplied its most consequential named components: the revised Gospels and most of its Hebrew-based Old Testament. The later Bible nevertheless included anonymous New Testament revision, Greek-based Psalters, Old Latin deuterocanonical books, and readings altered in transmission. "Principally associated with Jerome" is accurate; "entirely translated by Jerome" is not.

7 From Late Antiquity to the Medieval Bible

Jerome's books did not replace the older Latin Scriptures by decree or in a single generation. They entered a manuscript culture in which books were copied separately, familiar readings could be restored from memory, and a new exemplar might itself combine several textual ancestries. By the sixth and seventh centuries Jerome's translations and the related New Testament revision had gained broad prestige, but Old Latin forms remained in circulation and continued to enter Vulgate copies. The medieval Vulgate was therefore both a successful received text and a history of continuing local correction (Houghton 2016, 55–68).

7.1 Pandects and the evidence of Codex Amiatinus

The single-volume Bible, or pandect, made the collection appear materially unified. Cassiodorus described biblical pandects at Vivarium in the sixth century, but no complete copy from his library survives. Around 700 the community of Wearmouth–Jarrow in Northumbria produced three giant Bibles. The survivor, Codex Amiatinus, is the earliest extant complete Vulgate Bible. Abbot Ceolfrid intended it as a gift for Rome and set out with it in 716; the codex eventually reached Italy and is now Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Amiatino 1 (Houghton 2016, 69–72; Library of Congress, Codex Amiatinus record).

Amiatinus is exceptionally important without being an autograph or a transparent copy of Jerome's lost Bible. Its books were assembled by Northumbrian scholars from more than one source. Its Gospel text reflects an Italian tradition, while other parts have distinct histories. The codex establishes what one learned community could gather about three centuries after Jerome. It cannot by itself establish every form that Jerome or the anonymous New Testament reviser wrote.

Witness: Codex Amiatinus, made at Wearmouth–Jarrow around 700 and preserved as Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Amiatino 1.

What it establishes: The earliest surviving complete Vulgate Bible already presents the diverse component books as one monumental pandect and supplies an early, unusually valuable textual witness.

Limit: It postdates Jerome by roughly three centuries, is not copied from one surviving authorial exemplar, and should not be made the sole norm for every book.

The codex also exposes a useful distinction. A Bible may be “complete” as an artifact while its individual books remain textually composite. Contents, order, prologues, layout, and verbal readings can each have a separate history. Physical wholeness is evidence about reception, not proof of single authorship.

7.2 Carolingian correction was plural

The Carolingian reforms increased both the demand for correct service books and the capacity to produce them. Charlemagne’s *Admonitio generalis* of 789 called for experienced scribes to copy Gospel books, Psalters, and missals carefully. The best-known biblical programs associated with Alcuin of York and Theodulf of Orléans answered that need differently.

Alcuin reported a royal command to emend the Old and New Testaments and completed a pandect around 800. His chief aims included grammar, punctuation, readability, and consistent presentation. The great productivity of the Tours scriptorium, rather than a surviving empire-wide act making one text compulsory, gave the Alcuinian form its reach. Even Tours Bibles were not identical: teams could work from several exemplars, and later books added or altered contents and prologues. The attribution of many prefatory texts to Jerome helped make the whole collection appear to be his work (Houghton 2016, 81–85; British Library, Add MS 10546).

Theodulf compared a wider set of Latin witnesses, including Spanish and Alcuinian forms, and marked selected variants in margins. His approach was closer to an annotated comparison than to Alcuin’s regularized school and liturgical book. Marginal alternatives could later be copied into the text they were meant to document. Only a small number of Theodulfian Bibles survive; British Library Add MS 24142 is one of the principal witnesses. Neither program created a single Carolingian “official Vulgate,” and their different purposes resist being collapsed into one revision (Houghton 2016, 85–86; British Library, Add MS 24142).

Program	Primary concern	Mechanism of influence	Historical limit
Alcuin and Tours	Correct Latin, punctuation, presentation, and complete pandects	High-volume, carefully organized production at Tours	Not one invariant text and not demonstrably imposed as the sole imperial edition.
Theodulf and Orléans/Fleury	Comparison of differing Latin witnesses and preservation of selected variants	A small, learned family of three-column Bibles with marginal signs	Variants could migrate into the text; relatively few copies survive.
Local monastic and cathedral copying	Worship, reading, teaching, and available exemplars	Repeated reproduction, correction, and mixture	“Local” does not mean careless, and a geographical label does not define every reading.
Later medieval book trade	Portable whole Bibles and shared study tools	Professional workshops, common order, divisions, and paratext	Standard format did not create a single critically controlled verbal text.

7.3 Glossed Bibles, Paris Bibles, and reference systems

From the twelfth century, the biblical text increasingly traveled with structured exposition. Glossed books surrounded Scripture with patristic and medieval commentary; masters and students needed stable ways to locate and compare passages. The so-called Paris Bible, widespread from the thirteenth century, answered this material and educational setting with a relatively compact pandect, a common order of books, a recurring set of prologues, running titles, and chapter divisions close to those still used. The type spread because Paris was a center of schools and commercial book production, not because one act promulgated its text (Houghton 2016, 101–106; Light 2012).

This standardization was powerful but selective. A shared chapter number allowed a lecturer, concordance, or cross-reference to point reliably to a place even when two copies differed in wording. The reference architecture could therefore become more uniform while the text remained variable. Modern verse numbers belong to the age of print and should not be projected into Jerome’s codices or the earliest Paris Bibles.

The thirteenth-century *correctoria* make the continuing problem visible. Dominican and Franciscan scholars compiled variant readings from Latin manuscripts, Greek and Hebrew evidence, and patristic citations. Some alternatives stood in a Bible’s margin; others circulated in separate reference works. Competing correctoria reveal both serious source criticism and disagreement about how much a received Latin text should be altered. Roger Bacon’s criticism of particular Dominican corrections is evidence of the debate, not proof that one medieval school possessed Jerome’s pristine text (Houghton 2016, 106–109).

7.4 What “the medieval Vulgate” can mean

The phrase may name at least three different objects: the Latin Bible as the West’s common scriptural medium; a regional or institutional family of manuscripts; or the exact text of a particular codex. These levels overlap but are not interchangeable. The Vulgate could be the normal language of theology, liturgy, preaching, and schooling while individual copies still differed, retained Old Latin readings, or followed distinct Psalters.

That combination explains both the tradition’s stability and its variation. Stability arose from worship, commentary, recognizable wording, and increasingly common book design. Variation arose from the ordinary mechanisms of manuscript transmission and from deliberate correction toward different authorities. Printing would greatly narrow the range that an ordinary reader encountered, but it would first reproduce one late-medieval Vulgate rather than recover the fourth-century text automatically.

8 Print, Trent, and the Roman Editions

Movable-type printing changed the scale and economics of biblical reproduction. It did not make the first printed exemplar critically ancient. The Gutenberg Bible, completed probably late in 1455 at Mainz, printed a Latin Vulgate in the textual world of late-medieval manuscripts. Its achievement was technological and material: many substantially identical copies could now descend from one typeset text, while rubrication and decoration might still be completed by hand (Library of Congress, “The Gutenberg Bible”).

8.1 Print fixes a copy and multiplies its choices

Early printers selected from available manuscripts and earlier printings. Once typeset, a reading that had been local could be multiplied widely; compositor errors could be multiplied with it. Corrected reprints, humanist comparison with Greek and Hebrew, and new Latin translations consequently proliferated together. Erasmus’s work on the Greek New Testament and his revised Latin, the Complutensian Polyglot, and other sixteenth-century editions made discrepancies among source languages and Latin forms newly visible (Houghton 2016, 108–110).

The age of print therefore sharpened two different questions. Scholars asked which readings had the best historical support. Churches and schools also needed a stable Latin text for public use. A single edition might serve both needs imperfectly, but the needs are not identical.

8.2 What Trent declared in 1546

On 8 April 1546 the Council of Trent’s fourth session issued a decree on the edition and use of the sacred books. Among the Latin editions then circulating, it declared the old and Vulgate edition—approved by long ecclesial use—to be held as authentic in public readings, disputations, preaching, and exposition. The decree also required Scripture, especially the old Vulgate, to be printed as accurately as possible (Council of Trent, *Decretum de editione et usu sacrorum librorum*).

The syntax and setting matter. The comparison is among Latin editions; the uses are named; and the demand for a more accurate printing acknowledges that no single flawless printed text had simply been identified. The decree did not declare every transmitted Vulgate reading inspired, make Latin superior to the Hebrew and Greek sources, or identify the Clementine edition decades before it existed. In 1943 Pius XII expressly explained the Vulgate's Tridentine authenticity as juridical rather than primarily critical and affirmed recourse to the original-language texts (*Divino afflante Spiritu*, 20–22).

Witness: Council of Trent, session IV, *Decretum de editione et usu sacrorum librorum*, 8 April 1546.

What it establishes: The old Vulgate was to be held authentic among circulating Latin editions for specified public ecclesial uses, and Scripture was to be printed as accurately as possible.

Limit: The decree does not select a fourth-century manuscript, name the later Clementine text, abolish Hebrew and Greek, or make a claim about every philological detail.

The decree on the scriptural canon, issued in the same session, is a separate act. It identifies books and parts received by the Catholic Church; the edition-and-use decree governs the status of a Latin edition. Canonical reception and textual reconstruction must not be made synonyms.

8.3 From commission work to the Sixtine edition

Roman work on a corrected Vulgate continued under several popes and drew on manuscripts, printed editions, source-language texts, and patristic evidence. Pope Sixtus V issued the first papally promulgated printed Vulgate in 1590. It is known as the Sixtine or Sistine edition. Sixtus died that year, and his edition did not become the durable settlement.

The later Clementine preface narrates the transition diplomatically. It says Sixtus had judged that printing faults required renewed work, which death prevented him from completing; work continued through the short pontificates of Gregory XIV and Innocent IX and was completed under Clement VIII. Modern histories also note the recall of the 1590 printing and debate the mix of textual, political, and reputational motives. The secure publication sequence is more important here than a single motive: Sixtine 1590, then a materially different Roman edition under Clement VIII in 1592 (Clementine preface; Houghton 2016, 132–133).

8.4 The Clementine settlement

The 1592 edition, followed by corrected Roman printings in 1593 and 1598, is called Clementine or Sixto-Clementine because its title continued to honor Sixtus's command. Its anonymous preface describes the received Bible candidly as partly Jerome's translation or correction and partly retained from an older Latin edition. It also says the work was corrected with as much diligence as possible. These statements undercut two later myths at once: sole Hieronymian authorship and a claim that editorial perfection was easy to guarantee.

The Clementine text gave Catholic public use a stable printed norm for centuries. Stability did not make it a diplomatic transcript of any medieval codex or a critical reconstruction of Jerome's earliest attainable text. Its readings arose from an early-modern editorial settlement, and its book order, chapter and verse system, punctuation, orthography, prologues, and appendix belong to that edition's own history. The Prayer of Manasseh and the books called 3 and 4 Esdras were printed in an appendix after the New Testament so that they would not disappear entirely; that placement did not add them to Trent's canonical list.

Claim check: “Trent declared the Clementine Vulgate perfect”

Trent acted in 1546, forty-six years before the Clementine edition. It conferred juridical authenticity on the old Vulgate among Latin editions in specified public uses and called for accurate printing. The Clementine text was a later Roman editorial answer, not a text named or declared verbally perfect by the council.

The Clementine's long use makes it a major historical object in its own right. It is often closer than an earliest-text critical edition to the wording encountered by early-modern and later Catholic writers. A historian quoting a seventeenth-century theologian may therefore need the Clementine; an editor reconstructing a fifth-century Vulgate book needs a different instrument. Calling both tasks “using the Vulgate” without naming an edition obscures the evidence.

9 The Modern Critical Vulgate

Modern Vulgate editions ask a question that no late-antique manuscript can answer alone: what earliest attainable form best explains the surviving witnesses for each book? The answer is an editorial reconstruction supported by an apparatus, not a newly discovered “original Vulgate.” Because the corpus is composite, a Gospel editor seeks Jerome’s revision while an editor of an Epistle may seek an anonymous early-fifth-century revision and an editor of Wisdom an Old Latin form.

9.1 The Oxford New Testament

John Wordsworth and Henry Julian White initiated the *Nouum Testamentum Domini nostri Iesu Christi latine secundum editionem sancti Hieronymi*, ordinarily called the Oxford Vulgate. Issued in fascicles from 1889 to 1954 and completed by additional editors, it supplies an extensive apparatus from more than fifty Vulgate manuscripts, Old Latin witnesses, Christian authors, early editions, and Greek evidence. Codex Amiatinus is a principal witness, but the edition compares families rather than reproducing that manuscript (Wordsworth, White, and successors 1889–1954; Houghton 2016, 129–131).

Its title retains the older convention of assigning the New Testament to Jerome. The edition’s own evidence and later work require greater precision outside the Gospels. Some provisional editorial decisions and older manuscript transcriptions have been superseded, yet the apparatus remains richer than a hand edition and preserves evidence not readily available elsewhere.

9.2 The Roman Benedictine Old Testament

Pius X entrusted Benedictine scholars with a critical Vulgate project in 1907; the Abbey of St Jerome in Rome became its institutional center. The resulting *Biblia Sacra iuxta latinam vulgatam versionem ad codicum fidem*, often called the Roman or Benedictine Vulgate, appeared in eighteen volumes from 1926 to 1995. Its primary historical aim was to establish the earliest attainable Vulgate Old Testament from manuscript evidence, not to modernize the Latin or reprint the Clementine text (Benedict XV, *Cum Biblia Sacra*; Roman Vulgate 1926–1995).

The project’s methods and witness selection developed over its long life. Henri Quentin’s genealogical work influenced the early volumes; later editors refined the treatment. The resulting text is an indispensable scholarly achievement, but its reconstructed readings and apparatus must still be read book by book. It does not convert the Vulgate’s diverse origins into a single authorial edition.

9.3 The Stuttgart hand edition

Robert Weber and collaborators produced *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* for the German Bible Society in 1969. Later editions were revised under Roger Gryson; the fifth revised edition appeared in 2007. For much of the Old Testament it draws on the Roman edition and for the New Testament on the Oxford project, while independently selecting and reporting witnesses in a compact apparatus. It is the principal scholarly hand edition for the historical Vulgate (Weber and Gryson 2007; Houghton 2016, 127–129).

Compactness is a limitation as well as a virtue. The Stuttgart apparatus cannot reproduce the full evidence of the Oxford, Roman, or Vetus Latina editions. Its main text reconstructs an early attainable Vulgate, not the Clementine Bible, the text of an average medieval copy, or the *Nova Vulgata*. A digital transcription labeled merely “Latin Vulgate” is therefore unusable for exact work until its edition and normalization are identified.

Edition	Publication	Principal object	Not equivalent to
Oxford Vulgate New Testament	Oxford, 1889–1954	Earliest attainable Vulgate New Testament with a large manuscript and versional apparatus	A single Jerome autograph or a current official Latin edition.

Edition	Publication	Principal object	Not equivalent to
Roman Vulgate	Rome, 1926–1995	Earliest attainable Vulgate Old Testament and associated received books, book by book	The Clementine text or a simple new translation from modern Hebrew.
Stuttgart Weber–Gryson	Stuttgart, 1969; fifth edition 2007	Compact critical hand edition of the historical Vulgate	A representative medieval manuscript or the <i>Nova Vulgata</i> .
Vetus Latina editions	Beuron project, in progress by biblical book	Pre-Vulgate and non-Vulgate Latin evidence from manuscripts and citations	One ancient “Itala Bible” or an edition already complete for every book.

9.4 An edition answers its stated question

The Clementine, Stuttgart, and *Nova Vulgata* may print different readings without one being a defective copy of another. The Clementine fixes an early-modern ecclesial text; Stuttgart reconstructs an ancient textual tradition; the *Nova Vulgata* revises Latin for contemporary official use in light of modern source-text criticism. Likewise a diplomatic edition of a manuscript answers what that codex reads, while an eclectic critical edition proposes a text behind several witnesses.

Responsible citation consequently names the edition and, where material, the apparatus or manuscript. “The Vulgate says” is sufficient only when the wording does not differ across the relevant forms. Historical arguments about Jerome, medieval exegesis, Trent, and modern liturgy require different Latin base texts.

10 The *Nova Vulgata*: A New Kind of Latin Edition

The *Nova Vulgata* belongs to the Vulgate’s reception but has a purpose different from the Oxford, Roman, and Stuttgart critical editions. It is a modern Latin revision for the Church’s public use, especially the Latin liturgy. Its editors retained historic Vulgate wording where that wording adequately represented the source text and revised it where modern critical Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek editions called for change. It is therefore neither a reconstruction of Jerome’s lost text nor a lightly corrected Clementine printing.

10.1 From a new Psalter to a whole Bible

Pius XII permitted a newly translated Latin Psalter in 1945, prepared from Hebrew by professors of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. That “Pian Psalter” did not become the *Nova Vulgata* Psalter, but it made the pastoral and philological issue explicit: the received Gallican text was deeply embedded in Christian tradition while containing obscurities and source-text problems that modern scholarship could now address.

The Second Vatican Council directed that the work of revising the Psalter be completed promptly, with attention to Christian Latin, liturgical use including singing, and the Latin Church’s entire tradition (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 91). Paul VI extended the work. On 29 November 1965 he established a Pontifical Commission for the *Nova Vulgata*, initially chaired by Cardinal Augustin Bea, to revise all the biblical books (*Nova Vulgata, Praefatio ad lectorem*).

The Psalter appeared in 1969. The New Testament followed in three volumes in 1970–1971, and the Old Testament in four volumes in 1976–1977. These separate publications were working stages rather than a text frozen in advance. Comments from scholars, including non-Catholic readers, informed further changes before the one-volume typical edition (*Nova Vulgata, Praefatio ad lectorem*).

10.2 The editorial rule

Paul VI’s stated program held two commitments together. Existing Vulgate wording should be preserved where it accurately rendered the source text as established in modern critical editions. Where it departed or interpreted

inadequately, it should be prudently amended in Christian biblical Latin. The goal was neither Ciceronian classicizing nor a word-for-word Latin crib of one modern edition (*Scripturarum thesaurus*; *Nova Vulgata*, *Praenotanda*).

The *Praenotanda* show this method at book level. For the Pentateuch, the Masoretic Text as represented in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* was the normal base, while the Septuagint and other ancient versions informed difficult places. In the Psalter the Gallican inheritance was preserved where it adequately represented the Hebrew; readings were revised when the Masoretic evidence, textual difficulty, or ancient versions required it. Latin choices were drawn where possible from the inherited Christian biblical register.

Books that Jerome did not translate required more extensive work. The commission could not simply “restore Jerome” in Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, or Maccabees, because no Hieronymian translation existed to restore. The same governing rule thus produced different degrees of continuity by book.

Witness: The official *Praefatio ad lectorem*, *Praenotanda*, and John Paul II’s *Scripturarum thesaurus*.

What it establishes: The commission deliberately preserved usable Vulgate Latin while correcting it from modern critical source texts, published components between 1969 and 1977, and produced a typical edition in 1979.

Limit: These official sources establish the edition’s mandate, method, and status. They do not make each editorial decision a reconstruction of Jerome or erase ordinary text-critical debate about the sources.

10.3 Promulgation and second typical edition

On 25 April 1979 John Paul II promulgated the one-volume *Nova Vulgata* and declared it typical, especially for use in the sacred liturgy. The apostolic constitution *Scripturarum thesaurus* explicitly described it as a revision responsive to advances in biblical studies and as a possible reference for vernacular liturgical and pastoral translations. A second typical edition followed in 1986, incorporating revisions for clarity and consistency; the official preface distinguishes it from both the preliminary volumes and the first typical edition.

“Typical” is a juridical and liturgical status, not the name of a text-critical method. The *Nova Vulgata* may be the normative Latin reference for a present ecclesial purpose while the Stuttgart edition remains the appropriate starting point for studying an early Vulgate reading. Conversely, the historical age of a Stuttgart reading does not confer current liturgical status.

Claim check: “The *Nova Vulgata* is Jerome’s Vulgate restored”

It preserves much historic Vulgate language, especially where that language adequately renders the source, but it deliberately corrects from modern critical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts and newly handles books Jerome did not translate. It is a modern official revision in Vulgate Latin, not a critical reconstruction of a fourth- or fifth-century edition.

This distinction protects both kinds of work. Historical criticism can ask what Jerome or another ancient reviser most likely wrote. Ecclesiastical history can ask why and how a modern typical edition was made. Neither question is answered by assigning the other’s purpose to its text.

11 A Latin Scripture and Its Cultural Worlds

The Vulgate’s importance cannot be measured only by places where its wording differs from Hebrew or Greek. For much of western Europe it supplied a common scriptural language across regions whose spoken vernaculars diverged. It was heard in worship, memorized in schools and monasteries, excerpted in sermons, surrounded by commentary, and reused in prayer, law, poetry, visual art, and political argument. Yet “influence of the Vulgate” must be stated carefully, because readers often met its wording through liturgy, patristic works, or a vernacular derivative rather than a complete Latin Bible.

11.1 Christian biblical Latin was inherited and remade

Jerome did not invent Latin Christianity's vocabulary. Old Latin translators and earlier Christian writers had already adapted ordinary Latin, borrowed Greek words, and given familiar terms new scriptural senses. Jerome retained much of that inheritance in the Gospels and other revisions; his Hebrew-based books added further constructions and lexical choices. The composite Vulgate thus records several layers of Christian Latin rather than one author's uniform style.

The official *Nova Vulgata Praenotanda* offers a compact analysis of the inherited register. It notes words rare or absent in classical authors, Christian senses attached to existing Latin terms, Greek loans, Hebraic turns, and repeated expressions formed through close translation. Such features should not be treated simply as "bad Latin." They belong to a translation language shaped by the desire to carry scriptural structures and by centuries of ecclesial use.

At the same time, "literal" is not one stable technique across the corpus. A Greek-based Old Latin sentence, Jerome's revised Gospel, his Hebrew translation, and an anonymous Epistle revision can preserve different kinds of source-language pressure. Linguistic conclusions must therefore identify the book and textual form, just as historical ones do.

11.2 Liturgy, memory, and textual conservatism

Liturgical repetition made certain readings unusually durable. The dominance of the Greek-based Gallican Psalter over Jerome's Hebrew Psalter is the clearest large-scale example: communal singing and the inherited network of antiphons, collects, and commentary favored continuity that philological source priority alone could not displace. Gospel pericopes, canticles, and short formulae similarly developed lives partly independent of complete Bible manuscripts.

This use could conserve older wording inside a later textual environment. A copyist or preacher might restore a memorized reading; a liturgical book might retain an Old Latin form after a Vulgate Bible became normal; a later revision might leave a familiar phrase untouched for pastoral reasons. Liturgical attestation is therefore valuable textual evidence, but it must be dated and classified rather than assumed to reproduce Jerome.

11.3 The infrastructure of learning

Medieval study made the Vulgate more than a running text. Prologues offered a theory of the books; chapter lists and later standard divisions made passages locatable; glosses placed inherited interpretation around the biblical column; concordances turned verbal recurrence into an instrument of research. The Paris Bible's common order and chapter system helped teachers and students refer to Scripture across copies even when their verbal texts differed.

Latin also enabled a scholar in one region to use work produced in another. Bede, Alcuin, the compilers of the *Glossa ordinaria*, scholastic theologians, and early-modern controversialists did not all read the same exact Vulgate, but they inhabited an overlapping textual language. The Clementine edition later narrowed the textual reference for Catholic institutions without erasing the manuscript history present in older commentaries.

11.4 Vernacular Bibles and cultural attribution

Many medieval and early-modern vernacular translations used a Vulgate form as a source, sometimes alone and sometimes beside Greek, Hebrew, or another vernacular. The Vulgate consequently mediated biblical names, phrase patterns, and interpretations into European languages. But a general claim that a modern phrase "comes from the Vulgate" requires a demonstrated chain: the relevant Latin reading, a known translator's source, and evidence of later adoption. Similar wording may instead descend independently from Greek, liturgy, a Father, or a later translation.

Visual art presents the same caution. A scene may reflect a Vulgate-specific detail, a sermon, an apocryphal narrative, or an iconographic convention not recoverable from the biblical wording alone. The Vulgate was an immense common reservoir, but it rarely acted without interpreters and institutions.

Pope Francis's 2020 apostolic letter *Scripturae sacrae affectus* expresses the tradition's later ecclesial memory: medieval Europe learned, prayed, and thought through Jerome's Bible, and the text nourished literature and art. As a reception

claim this is well founded. As an authorship formula it remains compressed; the historical account supplied here identifies the Old Latin and anonymous materials that the honorific phrase “Jerome’s Bible” includes.

11.5 A durable success with more than one cause

The Vulgate endured because it could serve many settings at once: worship and private reading, basic teaching and advanced exegesis, portable codex and monumental pandect, local use and transregional exchange. Jerome’s authority mattered, as did the quality of particular translations. So did the copying capacity of monasteries, Carolingian reform, the Paris book trade, print, conciliar and papal reception, and the habitual power of familiar language.

No single cause explains sixteen centuries. The Vulgate’s cultural depth arose from the interaction between text and community—and its textual plurality is part of that history, not an embarrassment external to it.

12 Claim Audit: What the Shorthand Conceals

The following audit does not replace the narrative or the evidence map. It identifies recurrent formulations that collapse distinct acts, books, or kinds of authority.

Common claim	Historically supportable core	Required correction
“ Damasus commissioned Jerome to translate the Bible. ”	Damasus is securely connected with Jerome’s revision of the four Gospels in Rome, 382–384.	The preface bounds that project to the Gospels. Jerome’s later Old Testament projects had other occasions, and the rest of the New Testament is anonymous.
“ Jerome translated the Vulgate. ”	Jerome made its most consequential named components: the revised Gospels and most Hebrew-canon Old Testament books.	The received Bible also contains anonymous New Testament revision, Greek-based Psalters, and Old Latin books and readings.
“ Jerome translated straight from the Hebrew. ”	Hebrew governed most of his new Old Testament translations.	His source was a late-antique Hebrew tradition; he also used Greek versions, Old Latin, exegesis, and teachers, and he first produced Greek-based revisions.
“ The Vulgate replaced the Old Latin Bible. ”	Vulgate forms gradually became predominant in the Latin West.	There was no one Old Latin Bible and no replacement date; coexistence, correction, and mixture continued for centuries.
“ Codex Amiatinus is Jerome’s original Vulgate. ”	It is the earliest surviving complete Vulgate Bible and an exceptionally important early witness.	It was made around 700 at Wearmouth–Jarrow, about three centuries after Jerome, and combines book-specific sources.
“ Alcuin standardized the official medieval Vulgate. ”	Alcuin’s revision and the Tours scriptorium greatly influenced medieval Bibles.	His text was neither invariant nor demonstrably promulgated as the empire’s sole edition; Theodulf and local traditions followed other methods.
“ The Paris Bible established the medieval text. ”	Paris Bibles spread a common compact format, order, paratext, and chapter system.	Their influence arose through schools and book production, not a universal decree, and verbal variation continued.
“ Trent declared the Vulgate superior to Hebrew and Greek. ”	Trent declared the old Vulgate authentic among Latin editions for specified public uses.	The decree’s comparison is among Latin editions; Pius XII later stated that its authenticity was juridical, not primarily critical.

Common claim	Historically supportable core	Required correction
“The Clementine Vulgate is the text Trent approved.”	The Clementine became the durable Roman response to Trent’s call for an accurate Vulgate.	It appeared in 1592, after the Sixtine edition of 1590; Trent in 1546 could not have named its exact text.
“A critical Vulgate is what an average medieval Christian read.”	Critical editions reconstruct early attainable forms from selected witnesses.	Medieval readers encountered particular manuscripts, lectionaries, Psalters, glossed books, or later printed editions, not a modern eclectic reconstruction.
“The <i>Nova Vulgata</i> is the Clementine updated for spelling.”	It deliberately preserves inherited wording where adequate.	It revises from modern critical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts and is a new official Latin edition with a different editorial purpose.
“Official” and “original” mean the same thing.	Both can describe a real relation between a text and an institution or a historical stage.	A typical edition governs use; a critical edition reconstructs a textual stage; a manuscript witnesses one copy. The categories answer different questions.

Two positive rules follow. First, name the unit: Gospel revision, Hebrew Genesis, Gallican Psalter, Clementine printing, Stuttgart critical text, or second typical *Nova Vulgata*. Second, name the kind of claim: authorship, source relation, manuscript reading, editorial reconstruction, or ecclesiastical status. Most apparent contradictions disappear when those two coordinates are supplied.

13 Conclusion: A Tradition Made by Translation and Reception

The Vulgate is best understood as a successful composite tradition. Before Jerome, Latin Christians already possessed many scriptural translations based chiefly on Greek. In Rome Jerome revised the four Gospels conservatively against Greek manuscripts under Damasus. He then worked through distinct Old Testament projects: Greek Hexaplaric revisions, more than one Psalter, and new translations in which Hebrew became governing without becoming his only scholarly resource. Other hands revised the rest of the New Testament, while several books in the later Bible remained Old Latin.

The collection became “the Vulgate” through reception. Late-antique and early-medieval readers copied, mixed, and increasingly preferred its components. Codex Amiatinus shows a complete monumental Bible around 700 without transporting the reader back to an autograph. Alcuin and Theodulf pursued different Carolingian corrections; Paris workshops and schools regularized book design and reference systems; correctoria preserved continuing disagreement. Gutenberg multiplied a late-medieval text, and print made both uniformity and error easier to propagate.

Trent’s 1546 act answered an ecclesial need among competing Latin editions by conferring juridical authenticity for specified public uses and demanding accurate printing. The Sixtine and Clementine editions were successive Roman efforts to supply that stable text, with the Clementine governing Catholic Latin use for centuries. Modern critical editions then reopened the manuscript evidence to reconstruct the earliest attainable forms. The *Nova Vulgata* answered still another question: how to provide a contemporary typical Latin Bible faithful both to critical source texts and to Christian biblical Latin.

These stages should not be ranked on one axis. An early manuscript, a critical text, a received early-modern edition, and a modern typical edition possess different kinds of historical or institutional significance. Precision about those purposes makes the tradition more, not less, coherent.

The conventional sentence “Jerome translated the Vulgate” can survive only as honorific shorthand. The deeper history is richer: Jerome’s extraordinary work stood at the center of a Bible made by translators, anonymous revisers, scribes, worshiping communities, scholars, printers, councils, popes, and modern editors. The name endured because those communities repeatedly found ways to preserve, correct, and reuse a Latin Scripture without ever reducing its history to one act.

A Scope, Terms, Evidence, and Limits

A.1 Question, range, and reader

This account asks how a plural Latin scriptural world became the family of texts later called the Vulgate, how that family changed in manuscript and print, and what different ecclesiastical and scholarly editions intended to establish. It begins with the Old Latin evidence of the second through fourth centuries and ends with the second typical edition of the *Nova Vulgata* in 1986. The status of official online texts and the bibliography have been checked through 17 July 2026.

The principal geography moves from the early Latin Christian communities of North Africa and the western Mediterranean to Rome, Bethlehem, the monasteries and schools of the medieval Latin West, early modern printing centers, and modern Roman and academic editorial institutions. The languages in play are Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and, for a few books, Aramaic or an intermediary vernacular. “Latin” itself covers changing registers: the forms useful to an early Christian congregation, Jerome’s learned late-antique prose, a Carolingian corrector’s grammatical norm, and a modern commission’s Christian biblical Latin are related but not identical objects.

This is a historical study, not a critical edition or a translation of Scripture. It does not decide disputed readings, reconstruct a complete fourth-century archetype, supply a manuscript census, or infer present doctrine and discipline from past use. Ecclesiastical acts are treated as primary evidence for the status they conferred; they do not by themselves prove what a fourth-century translator wrote. Modern critical scholarship helps interpret early evidence; it does not determine the theological or juridical authority of an ecclesiastical act.

Modern copyrighted translations and scholarship are summarized rather than reproduced. No manuscript image or facsimile is incorporated.

A.2 Four evidentiary layers

Layer	Representative evidence	Use and limit
Contemporary or near-contemporary	Jerome’s prefaces and correspondence; Augustine’s correspondence with Jerome; early manuscripts	Establishes what a named participant claimed or what an artifact contains. A polemical letter still has an occasion and a rhetorical purpose.
Ancient and medieval reception	Augustine’s treatises; Gregory the Great’s practice; Carolingian correction programs; medieval Bible formats	Shows how texts were received, compared, and used. It does not turn a later description into eyewitness evidence for an origin.
Institutional act	Trent’s 1546 decrees; the Clementine preface; papal and conciliar acts concerning critical editions and the <i>Nova Vulgata</i>	Establishes promulgation, public use, or editorial purpose at the act’s own date. Its language must not be projected backward.
Modern reconstruction	Critical editions and professional text-critical history	Compares witnesses and proposes dates, relationships, and earliest recoverable forms. Conclusions vary in confidence and remain distinct from manuscript fact.

A.3 Terms that can mislead

Old Latin or *Vetus Latina*.

A modern collective designation for Latin biblical forms earlier than, or independent of, the Vulgate revisions. It is not the title of one uniform edition. The evidence includes manuscripts, fragments, patristic quotations, and liturgical witnesses.

Vulgate.

A later title for the Latin biblical tradition associated principally, but not wholly, with Jerome. In late antiquity

editio vulgata could instead designate the commonly received Septuagintal form of the Old Testament. Calling Jerome’s work “the Vulgate” is convenient only if that anachronism is acknowledged.

Original text.

Avoided unless the object is specified. This study instead speaks of a translator’s recoverable source text, the earliest attainable Vulgate form, a manuscript reading, or the text printed by a named edition.

Authentic.

At Trent this was a status for the old Vulgate among Latin editions in defined public uses. Pius XII later explained that the status was juridical rather than primarily a judgment of critical reconstruction (*Divino afflante Spiritu*, 20–22).

Official and critical.

These answer different questions. A typical edition governs an institutional use; a historical critical edition reconstructs a textual stage from selected witnesses. One label does not entail the other.

A.4 Publication boundary

This source-audited historical study was checked through 17 July 2026. It is not a critical edition, a project translation of Scripture, or a claim that every book or reading called “Vulgate” was translated by Jerome. Independent historical and text-critical review remains outstanding.

B Timeline: Acts, Witnesses, Editions, and Judgments

Dates before print often describe a range or the earliest secure attestation rather than a publication day. The “class” column prevents a later judgment or surviving witness from being mistaken for the event it describes.

Date	Class	Stage	Qualification
Second–fourth centuries	Translation and transmission	Greek-based Latin biblical translations circulate in several forms, now collectively called Old Latin.	No single <i>Vetus Latina</i> edition or complete exemplar is known.
382–384	Revision	In Rome Jerome revises the four Gospels against Greek manuscripts under Damasus.	The secure Damasian project is the Gospels, not a whole Bible.
Later 380s	Revision	Jerome works with Hexaplaric Greek materials on Old Testament books, including the Gallican Psalter tradition.	Exact dates and survival differ by book; Roman Psalter attribution is disputed.
About 390–405	Translation series	Jerome translates most Hebrew-canon Old Testament books in stages with Hebrew governing.	This is a convenient range, not one continuous commission or a dated complete Vulgate.
403	Contemporary letter	Augustine’s Letter 71 questions the pastoral and ecclesial effects of Hebrew-based readings and narrates the Jonah-plant dispute.	A report by a participant, not a survey of all Latin churches.
About 404	Contemporary reply	Jerome’s Letter 112 (Augustine, Letter 75) defends his source work and answers Augustine.	Augustine’s Letter 82 is a subsequent response, not the letter Jerome answered.
About 405	Contemporary letter	Augustine’s Letter 82 continues the exchange and qualifies disagreement with esteem for Jerome.	The correspondence preserves both philological and pastoral concerns.

Date	Class	Stage	Qualification
Fifth–seventh centuries	Transmission	Vulgate and Old Latin forms coexist, mix, and acquire differing regional histories.	No universal replacement date is recoverable.
About 700; journey in 716	Material witness	Codex Amiatinus is made at Wearmouth–Jarrow; Ceolfrid sets out with it as a gift for Rome.	Earliest surviving complete Vulgate Bible, not Jerome’s autograph.
789	Institutional program	Charlemagne’s <i>Admonitio generalis</i> calls for careful copying of scriptural and liturgical books.	A reform mandate, not the promulgation of one surviving Vulgate text.
About 800	Editorial programs	Alcuin completes a revised pandect; Theodulf conducts a distinct comparative revision.	Their methods and manuscript families must not be merged.
About 1230 onward	Book form and reference	Paris Bibles spread a common compact form, order, and chapter divisions.	Commercial and educational diffusion, not a universally official recension.
Late 1455	Printed edition	The Gutenberg Vulgate is probably completed at Mainz.	First great Western book from movable metal type; its text is late medieval, not a critical return to Jerome.
8 April 1546	Conciliar act	Trent declares the old Vulgate authentic among Latin editions for named public uses and requires accurate printing.	Juridical status is not a declaration of critical perfection or superiority to source languages.
1590	Roman edition	Sixtus V issues the Sixtine Vulgate.	It is replaced in the Roman publication sequence after Sixtus’s death.
1592, 1593, 1598	Roman editions	Clement VIII issues the Clementine text and two corrected printings.	Durable early-modern norm; not the edition named by Trent in 1546.
1889–1954	Critical edition	Wordsworth, White, and successors publish the Oxford Vulgate New Testament.	Large critical apparatus; title convention overstates Jerome’s authorship outside the Gospels.
1907	Critical project	Pius X entrusts a critical Vulgate Old Testament to Benedictine scholars.	Distinct from a modern source-language translation.
1926–1995	Critical edition	The Roman/Benedictine Vulgate Old Testament appears in eighteen volumes.	A book-by-book reconstruction of early attainable Latin.
1943	Papal interpretation	Pius XII’s <i>Divino afflante Spiritu</i> explains Trent’s Vulgate authenticity as juridical rather than primarily critical.	Affirms the authority and use of original-language texts.
1963	Conciliar act	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> 91 calls for completion of Psalter revision with Christian and liturgical Latin in view.	Immediate mandate concerns the Psalter; the later commission extends to the whole Bible.
1965	Commission	Paul VI establishes the Pontifical Commission for the <i>Nova Vulgata</i> .	New modern revision, not continuation of the Roman earliest-text edition.
1969	Editions	First Stuttgart critical hand edition appears; revised <i>Nova Vulgata</i> Psalter is published separately.	Similar dates but different institutions and purposes.

Date	Class	Stage	Qualification
1969–1977	Working publications	Components of the <i>Nova Vulgata</i> appear in separate volumes.	Revised further before the one-volume typical edition.
25 April 1979	Papal promulgation	John Paul II promulgates the <i>Nova Vulgata</i> as typical, especially for the Latin liturgy.	Typical status does not make it an ancient-text reconstruction.
1986	Typical edition	Second typical edition of the <i>Nova Vulgata</i> .	Incorporates revisions for clarity and consistency.
2007	Critical edition	Fifth revised Weber–Gryson Stuttgart Vulgate.	Standard compact scholarly hand edition of the historical Vulgate.

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- British Library. Add MS 10546, a Tours Bible in the Alcuinian tradition; catalog record and full digital coverage.
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- Library of Congress. “The Gutenberg Bible,” Library of Congress Bible Collection.
- *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae editionis* (Rome: Typographia Apostolica Vaticana, 1590), Bavarian State Library catalog and digital artifact; and *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae editionis* (Rome: Typographia Apostolica Vaticana, 1592), National Central Library of Rome digital artifact. These verify the two editions as artifacts, not the motives for replacement.

C.4 Critical editions and modern reconstruction

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