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THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY is the period of the domestication of the Bible in Europe. For almost a thousand years it had been written in a language which many people did not easily understand, and copies of the Bible had belonged mainly to churches, religious institutions and the great houses of wealthy people. It was never deliberately kept from the reach of ordinary or poor people but medieval Bibles had necessarily been expensive and remote. Even the Gutenberg Bible was a patrician book. During the course of the sixteenth century the Bible was brought into the hands of the ploughman, to use a favourite image of the period. Between about 1520 and 1550, it entered the households of men and women at all levels of society, in the everyday languages of the time. Within a century of Johann Gutenberg’s invention of movable type, the printed Bible reached countless thousands of people who had never before owned or even turned the pages of any book. It was read fervidly and universally, and it became an intimate possession of daily lives. The importance of the Bible for the development of literacy and language in the sixteenth century can hardly be overstated.

The translation of the Bible into contemporary languages was primarily a feature of Protestantism. This movement towards separation from the authority of the papacy had already started by the time of the Wycliffites in the late fourteenth century, as we saw in Chapter 7. It was brought to a crisis on a European scale by Martin Luther (1483–1546), who drew up his famous manifesto of 95 theses in Wittenberg in Germany in 1517. Luther publicly denied the supremacy of the popes and the necessity of priests to mediate between God and man. He exalted the Bible as the sole authority in matters of religion. The controversy evolved rapidly into a widening schism between the new and popularist
Mose.

LXIII.

tages inn einer wolke feulen/das er sie den rechten weg fahret/vnd des nachts inn einer f-wolke feulen/das er jenen leuchet/zu wandeln tag vnd
nacht/die wolkseulen vnd f-wolkeulen weich nimer von dem volck.

XIII.

Vo der DERR redet mit Mose / vnd sprach / Rede mit
den kindern Israel/vnd sprach/das sie sich rumt lenkten
vnd jr gezele aufschlagen gegen den tal Dirotb/zwi-
schen Migdo vnd dem Meer/gegen Baal Zepho vnd
daselbs gegen vber das gezele aufschlagen ans meer/
Denn Pharao wird sagen von den kindern Israel / Sie
wissen nicht wo aus im lande/diesersten hat sie beschlossen/vnd ich
wil sein hertz verstocken/das er jenen nach sate/vnd wil am Pharao/
vnd an all seiner macht ebre einlegen/vnd die Egypter sollen innen
werden/das ich der DERR bin/vnd sie thetten also.

Und das dem König inn Egypten ward angeagt/das das volck
war geflohen/ward sein hertz verwandelt vnd seiner knecht gegen
Protestantism, originally in northern Europe, and the increasingly dogmatic and conservative Church of Rome, centred in the Mediterranean. The bitter rift is not yet healed, five hundred years later. Luther became the first champion of what in effect was an independent branch of Christianity. Luther’s own translation of the Bible into ordinary German will form an important part of the present chapter.

By chance rather than intention, the Protestants were extremely fortunate in their timing. In adopting the vernacular Bible as a public symbol of reform, they took advantage of current research by Catholic scholars into the original texts of the Old and New Testaments. Protestants made translations which were not based on the medieval Latin Vulgate but on newly edited texts of the Bible in Greek and Hebrew. This is extremely important. Their direct sources were the languages in which the Bible was originally written. Reformation translations of the Bible thus proclaimed with some reason that their revolutionary texts, even though translated, were actually purer and more authentic than the current version in the Latin of Saint Jerome. It was a stroke of strategic genius. As the battle lines between the Protestants and Catholics became more inflexible, the Catholic camp was reluctantly forced backwards into defending the authenticity of the Vulgate. In the light of recent humanistic scholarship, that position was indefensible. The new and radical form of Protestant Christianity found its cause allied to a Bible text which was older than the Church of Rome. This, as much as any other factor, conferred legitimacy on Protestantism. Let us see how it came about.

During the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century, the humanist scholars joyfully rediscovered the Latin and Greek texts of the ancient civilizations. They attempted to construct accurate texts by collecting and comparing the oldest manuscripts they could find. The history of scientific textual criticism goes back to the classical studies of the Renaissance. The period marks a vast change in mental attitude towards distant antiquity. Once scholars began examining classical texts with a new spirit of inquiry, it was inevitable that eventually the Vulgate text of the Bible should also come into consideration, for it was the best-known of all ancient Latin texts. Although not strictly classical in the purest sense, Saint Jerome’s translation of the Bible was by far the most extensive piece of Latin prose surviving from the late Roman Empire. Lorenzo Valla (1407–57) was one of the first of the humanist scholars to focus on the Bible as a Latin text.
and to question the transmission of this and other documents from the early Christian Church. His *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, written in the 1440s, is a fascinating verse-by-verse comparison of the Latin Vulgate of Saint Jerome with a selection of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in Valla’s possession. Although in theory Greek manuscripts of the Bible had probably always been available in southern Italy and the eastern Mediterranean, no one had ever systematically attempted the comparison before. The variants that Valla found were not great (perhaps even disappointingly slight) and mostly they comprise inconsistencies in the tenses of verbs, or the inclusion or omission of single words which do not affect the overall meaning of a phrase. Nonetheless, the importance of Valla’s collation is that, in the privacy of a scholar’s study, he was willing to test the sacred words of the Latin Bible against the Greek from which Saint Jerome had originally made his translation a thousand years earlier.

Hebrew manuscripts of the Scriptures were also relatively common in the Renaissance, even if they were unintelligible to many Christian scholars (Pl. 26). Jewish communities flourished in fifteenth-century Italy and the Iberian peninsula, living in some prosperity. The Hebrew Bible manuscripts which they used were mostly of no especial antiquity but had by tradition always been copied with extraordinary care. As a generalization, Hebrew biblical manuscripts were transcribed with far greater fidelity to their exemplars than the equivalent Christian books in Latin. Meticulous copying, with no allowance for error or variation, was
a religious obligation to Jewish scribes. Hebrew printing began around 1470 (the earliest books are undated). The complete Hebrew Bible (which is to say, of course, only the Old Testament in the Christian definition) was printed for the first time in 1488 in the town of Soncino, between Milan and Mantua. It was reprinted in 1491–3 and again in 1492–4. When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1498, many valuable Hebrew manuscripts remained behind and they evidently intrigued Christians into whose hands they fell. Hebrew books in the fifteenth century were made for use by practising Jews, not for any antiquarian interest among Christian biblical scholars; but no one in the late fifteenth century was unaware of the parallel universe of Jewish culture, with its curiously fascinating corpus of texts which looked back to the Old Testament from a period far earlier than the Vulgate. Martin Luther himself owned a copy of the 1494 edition of the Soncino Bible in Hebrew (Pl. 158).

Constantinople fell to the Muslims in 1453, as we saw in the previous chapter. Greek-speaking refugees escaped, some bringing books. For the first time, early Greek manuscripts became available in quantity in the West. The great fourth-century biblical Codex Vaticanus, for example, was acquired by the Vatican by 1481 (perhaps by 1475). Humanist scholars could now confront the kind of manuscript and text which Jerome himself could have used as exemplars in translating the Bible.

Medieval pictures of Saint Jerome often emphasize the ascetic and self-mortifying life of a penitent saint praying in the wilderness. In the Renaissance, the iconography of Saint Jerome changes into something infinitely more agreeable and appealing. Jerome begins to be shown as a Christian humanist, his cardinal’s hat hung on a peg, sitting among his books and surrounded by all the comforts of the life of a bachelor scholar in his university study. The earliest woodcut securely attributed to Albrecht Dürer, datable to 1492 (and frequently reprinted), shows Jerome in just such a setting, with three Bibles lying open in his library cell, one each in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Two Renaissance scholars who probably consciously modelled themselves on an image like this were Francisco
Ximénes de Cisneros (1436–1517) and Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1469–1536).

Ximénes, like Jerome, lived for a time as an anchorite. He later became confessor to Isabella of Castile (1492), archbishop of Toledo (1495), cardinal, like Jerome also (1507), and, during the minority of Charles V, regent of Castile. He was a politician but also, by passion, a scholar. Around 1498–1500, he decided to found an entire university dedicated to the three ancient biblical languages of Hebrew, Greek and Latin. He endowed it out of his own income. The university was built at Alcalá de Henares (Complutum in Latin), about 30 kilometres (20 miles) east of Madrid. Probably in the summer of 1502, Ximénes devised a plan for one of the most extraordinary and revolutionary Bibles of the Renaissance. This is the publication now known as the ‘Complutensian Polyglot’, a Bible printed in multiple languages. The word ‘polyglot’ means ‘many tongues’. It was conceived on the model of the Hexapla of Origen. This was the famous long-lost third-century compilation which Saint Jerome is reputed to have brought back to Bethlehem to use for his own preparation of the Vulgate text. The ancient Hexapla manuscript had six parallel columns of text, with the Hebrew text and its various different translations into Greek. Ximénes proposed a latter-day version, specifically as a printed book.

Cardinal Ximénes assembled an impressive editorial team and purchased or borrowed as many early manuscripts as could be found. Pope Leo X lent a Greek manuscript from the Vatican collections; others came from as far away as Venice and the island of Rhodes. The cardinal is reputed to have spent 4,000 ducats on buying seven Hebrew manuscripts. Among the most innovative textual critics employed on the project was the Hebrew scholar, Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1441–1522). There is an agreeable image of Ximénes and his editors in the biographical notes by his contemporary, Alvar Gómez. He describes how the cardinal, on his way to his office in the university each morning, would pass by the printing shop and along the street where Nebrija lived. Ximénes would stop to chat, he in the street, Nebrija leaning on the window sill. Printing of the first installment of the Complutensian Polyglot was finished in January 1514. This was to become volume V of the set, comprising the New Testament. The Greek text appeared here in print for the first time. The printing of the final volume of the Polyglot was completed in July 1517. Then (and what modern publisher does not sympathize?) the whole publication was suspended. Cardinal Ximénes died that year. The entire stock of printed sheets remained in Alcalá, still unissued. When Pope Leo X sent a commendation in March 1520, this was added on the last page of the first gathering of volume I. The book was probably finally bound up and released for publication between 1520 and 1522, years after it had been set in type.

Let us look at the Complutensian Polyglot. The Bible is in five volumes. The sixth volume comprises dictionaries, grammars and other aids to the reader. The volumes are of large size but not enormous, about the same dimensions as the Gutenberg Bible. Each title-page shows the arms of Ximénes printed in red,
null
beneath a many-tasselled cardinal’s hat. The page layout of the text is immensely elaborate (Pl. 160). In the centre of each page is a narrow and unvarying vertical column in Latin, 38 mm wide (about an inch and a half). It is printed in a small round roman type. Where necessary, the text is padded out with meaningless rows of circles, like little ‘o’s, so that it has no blank spaces. This is the sacred text of the Latin Vulgate, in as accurate an edition as the editors could make it. The general preface compares it with Christ on the Cross, flanked by thieves. For most of the Bible, then, the thieves on either side of the Vulgate are the Hebrew text in the outer margin and the Greek in the inner margin, each spiritually flawed (according to the preface) by association with Judaism or Greek Orthodoxy. Beyond this remark, however, the parent texts are presented with care and respect. The Greek text is edited from the Septuagint in the Old Testament and from the original Greek for the New Testament. It is printed in an italic script. Above each Greek word is a precise translation into Latin, so that it could be compared exactly with the Vulgate, even by a reader who knew no Greek. This is not so simple for the broad column of Hebrew text on the outer side of the Vulgate, because (of course) Hebrew is written from right to left. If translations were written above each word, every line of text in Latin would emerge in reverse. This problem must have preoccupied many editorial committee meetings in Alcalá de Henares. The solution was to place a tiny letter of the Latin alphabet, lower-case, in order from ‘a’ to ‘z’ and back to ‘a’ again, just above the start of each word in Hebrew. These are then keyed to the Latin text, with corresponding superscript letters above the nearest equivalent word in the Vulgate. The different word order between Hebrew and Latin means that the key letters are not always in alphabetical sequence when they appear in the Vulgate column, but by following the letters in order one can disinter the ancient Hebrew in its own stilted sentence structure.

This sounds complicated, but in practice it is extremely easy to use. Even without knowing a word of Hebrew, one can compare the Hebrew text with a precision which is strangely satisfying and compulsive. There are indeed slight differences, mostly of the inclusion or omission of words which affect the phrasing but not the overall sense. To help those readers who might try to teach themselves Hebrew from the Polyglot, the outer margins again include the roots of Hebrew compound words which occur in the adjacent text. In the Pentateuch volume there is a further text in the lower margin as well. This is the ancient Targum of Onkelos, the Aramaic version of the Hebrew Pentateuch, written in Hebrew characters. It too had survived with the Jewish scriptures. The Complutensian Polyglot calls it the ‘Chaldean’ translation (not strictly correctly but following Jerome’s terminology). It appears here in blocks of Hebrew type beside a literal Latin prose translation.

This is a thoroughly orthodox book. There is not a hint of proto-Protestantism or disrespect for the traditional Latin of the Vulgate. Nonetheless, the Polyglot is
a scholarly edition, attempting to restore the original texts by intelligent critical conjecture and collation. Occasionally the Greek text is actually corrected by comparison with the Latin, rather than the other way round. A famous example is the end of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13). Most Greek manuscripts of the Gospels conclude these verses with the formula ‘for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever’. This is not in the Latin Vulgate. The editors of the Complutensian Polyglot recorded that the Vulgate tradition was probably more ancient and that the concluding clause had probably been carried across unconsciously from its liturgical use in the Greek Mass. Therefore, by editorial decision, it was omitted from the Greek text as printed in the Polyglot. No medieval scholar would have been capable of making such a distinction, and even if they had become aware of a difference in text, no one would ever have selected one reading as preferable to another. The Complutensian Polyglot shows Renaissance biblical scholarship at its very best, just before even textual criticism descended into desperate polemic between Catholics and Protestants.

While the printing of the Polyglot was proceeding in Spain, the most famous northern humanist, Desiderius Erasmus, was then working on his own edition of the Gospels in the original Greek. Erasmus was one of the very great figures of the Renaissance. He was educated by the Brothers of the Common Life at Deventer and joined the priesthood in 1492. He studied in Paris, Oxford, Louvain and Cambridge. From 1521 he lived mostly in Basle. Erasmus was an international scholar of remarkable breadth and sophistication. Everyone of merit or culture sought to become his friend and correspondent, and Erasmus obliged them all. He gave much attention to his own public image. Like many men who use their cleverness to reassure themselves, he sometimes failed to distinguish wit from sarcasm. Not everyone trusted him, therefore, but no one doubted his piety, scholarship or intellect, certainly not Erasmus himself. Holbein and other artists painted him in the agreeable image of Saint Jerome among his books (Pl. 161).

Erasmus found a manuscript of Lorenzo Valla’s Collatio Novi Testamenti in the library of Parc Abbey, on the outskirts of Louvain. This text, which we encountered above, had not circulated widely. Only two manuscript copies have survived today. The scholarly curiosity of Erasmus, however, was aroused by the idea of comparing and judging the Latin of Saint Jerome against the Greek original, and he seized upon Valla’s text and edited it for its first publication, printed in Paris in 1505. At this time, the Bible in Greek was still not available in print. Around the end of 1511, Erasmus began work on an edition of the Greek New Testament.
As he did so, he constantly checked it against Jerome's translation in the Latin Vulgate, taking upon himself the brave responsibility of furnishing textual improvements to the Latin which he believed Jerome had overlooked or had translated misleadingly from the Greek. In July 1514, he reported confidently to a colleague from his former monastery that by examining the Greek original he had already improved Jerome’s version in over a thousand places. Erasmus used the verb *castigare* for what he was doing to the Latin text — to beat it into shape and to teach it a lesson. The high and unquestionable reputation of Erasmus saved him from outright accusations of interference with Holy Writ, but even his friends were distinctly uncomfortable that Erasmus was apparently rewriting the familiar Latin Bible. Martin Dorp drafted a long and reasoned letter to Erasmus in October 1514, begging him to be careful. The Church had used the Vulgate for countless generations, Dorp said, and it would be unreasonable to suppose that all Church fathers and general councils who had relied on the precise wording of the Vulgate were simply in error, especially as their judgements, based on the Vulgate, were indisputable. Erasmus preserved the letter (it is no. 304 in his collected correspondence) but continued work.

The result was an edition of the New Testament edited by Erasmus. It is substantial and heavy book, handsomely printed by Johann Froben in Basle in 1516. It has a very long Latin title beginning *Novum Instrumentum omne, diligentem ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum & emendatum* ... (Pl. 162). Even in the title, Erasmus could not resist being clever. The words *Novum Instrumentum* are what everyone else would call the ‘New Testament’. He afterwards explained that a ‘testament’ is strictly a statement of intent: a person leaving a will or covenant, for example, might make an oral testament. The written document which subsequently embodies that statement, however, is called an ‘instrument’. Therefore Christ may have left a testament to his disciples but when it was written down it became an instrument, and so the Bible was formed of Old and New Instruments, not Testaments. Erasmus enjoyed being provocative. No one accepted his ingenious improvement, however scholarly and plausible, and in later editions the New Testament version of Erasmus slipped back to its more familiar name.

His *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516 is in two parts. The first comprises parallel
columns of the original Greek text, as accurately as Erasmus could edit it, and
beside it a precise translation into the Latin which Erasmus thought Jerome
should have used (Pl. 163). The second part consists of a commentary on the
dition with alternative translations of words. The Latin which Erasmus pro-
posed included many thoughtful but controversial choices of words. For exam-
ple, the famous opening of Saint John’s Gospel in the traditional Latin Vulgate is
‘In principio erat verbum ...’ Erasmus suggested ‘In principio erat sermo ...’ Both
verbum and sermo mean ‘word’ in Latin, logos in Greek, but there is a very subtle
and disconcerting difference. Verbum is a grammatical entity; sermo is that entity
being spoken. Maybe Erasmus was actually right. Similarly, one of the most
famous phrases of the New Testament was the greeting which Gabriel gave to
the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation: Ave gratia plena, ‘Hail, full of grace’ (Luke
1:28), three words reproduced in every Book of Hours and almost every altar-
piece of the late Middle Ages. Erasmus rephrased it Ave gratiosa, ‘Hail, graceful
one’, almost the same but not quite. The Vulgate implies a state of having been
filled with grace; the Greek, as translated by Erasmus, suggests that the grace
was already there. This may seem like hair-splitting to us, five hundred years
later and accustomed to a variety of Bible translations, but half the theology of
the late Middle Ages hinges on an exact understanding of God’s relationship to
the Virgin Mary at the moment of the Incarnation. Erasmus’s choice of word
gave an unexpected new interpretation, shocking to many of his readers. A final
example of Erasmus’s rendition of the Greek leads us to what became one of the
most disputed biblical phrases of the sixteenth century. John the Baptist, preach-
ing in the wilderness, urged his listeners to repentance. The word he used in
Greek is metanoeite (Matthew 3:2). The Vulgate translates this as penitentiam
agite, ‘do penance’; Erasmus proposed Resipiscite, ‘be penitent’. To Luther, the
interpretation of Erasmus justified a spiritual turning to God; to the Catholic
Church of the Middle Ages, the doing of penance was a physical activity. There
is an enormous difference of doctrine between those two meanings. Erasmus
was not one of the Protestant Reformers, and he always remained a Catholic.
However, his Novum Instrumentum in 1516 laid out a technique for interpreting
the original Greek which the Lutheran reformers would find very valuable.

There is some evidence of haste in the preparation of the Greek text to be
printed in the Novum Instrumentum of Erasmus. Many manuscripts were used,
but probably mostly these were selected for convenience of access than for textual
supremacy. On its publication in March 1516, the Novum Instrumentum
became the first edition of the New Testament in its original language. The New
Testament volume of the Complutensian Polyglot was already printed, but it
was still in its loose sheets in storage in Alcalá and it was not yet published or
available for study. It is probable that Froben knew of this project and was there-
fore especially anxious to bring out Erasmus’s edition as soon as possible. In a
letter to Guillaume Budé in June 1516, Erasmus described the frenetic business
QVATVOR EVANGELIÆ AD VETUSTISSIMORVM EXEMPLARIVM LATINORVM FIDEM, ET AD GRAECAM VERITATEM AB ERASMO ROTE RODAMO SACRÆ THEOLOGIÆ PROFES SORÆ DILIGENTER RECOGNITÆ.

EVANGELIVM SECVNDVM MATTHÆVM.

Ille generatio
nis leui Chriñi
fili Daud, Fil;
Abrahæ, Abra;
ham genuit Ia
ac. Iaac aut, ge
nuit Iacob. Ja
cob aut, genuit Iudæ, & fratern eius.
Judas aut, genuit Phares, & Zara, e
Thamar. Phares aut, genuit Ef
rom. Efroin aut, genuit I Abram. Ar
autem, genuit Aminadab. Amina
dab aut, genuit Naaslon. Naaslon
aut, genuit Salmon. Salmon aut,
ne sunit Boos, e Rhachab. Boos aut,
genuit Obed, e Ruth. Obed auté,
genuit Iesse. Iesse aut, genuit Daud
rege. Daud aut, rex, genuit 5 So
lonem, eæ aut, uxor Vriæ.

Solomön aut, genuit Roboam.
Roboam aut, genuit Abiam. Abia
autem, genuit Afa. Afa autem, ge

genuit Iofaphar. Iosaphar autem, ge

nuit Ioram, Ioram autem, genu-

A

Johannes

Frosbeni

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of simultaneously writing, correcting and proof-reading the text. Between them, he said, he and Froben produced a printed sheet a day. Erasmus sometimes worked faster than he would have preferred. ‘Some things I purposely passed over,’ Erasmus told Budé, ‘and shut my eyes to many points upon which soon after publication I had a different opinion.’ Every author, being chased by his publisher, knows that feeling.

There is no doubt that the publication of the *Novum Instrumentum* marked a major step towards the Bible translation by Martin Luther. It presented the New Testament as a text which dated back beyond the Latin Vulgate and claimed therefore to be potentially more authentic. It offered a means of blocking out the traditional interpretation of the medieval Church and of coming face-to-face with apostolic Christianity instead. Already by 1516, Luther was preaching the doctrine of justification by faith, which is that Christ offers salvation to those who turn to him directly and place their total trust in him, without any mediation of priests or penances imposed by a hierarchical Church. He based this on a close reading of Romans 1:17. It was axiomatic that every person should understand the Bible as directly as possible, without hindrance of language or tradition.

In 1517, a year after the publication of the *Novum Instrumentum* and while the Complutensian Polyglot was still in press, Luther proclaimed his famous 95 theses from the door of the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg. Luther’s final break with Rome occurred in 1520, when he denounced the Roman Church and all its doctrines, and he invited all German princes to follow him. In June 1520, the pope declared all writings by Luther to be heretical and ordered their destruction. In reply, Luther burned the papal bull. On 3 January 1521 he was excommunicated, and he withdrew into tactical hiding at the twelfth-century castle of the Wartburg, near Eisenach in Thuringia. His principal occupation at the Wartburg was to translate the New Testament into modern German.

The Bible had existed in German before Luther. There were manuscripts in the German language in the fifteenth century. They passed almost unnoticed, attracting neither favour nor disapproval. As many as 18 editions of the Bible in German translations were published between 1466 and 1522. They were all large books for a popular market, mostly with homely woodcuts of boisterous and familiar stories from the Bible. They follow an anonymous translation prepared for the first edition, published in Strassburg in 1466, revised especially in
1473 and 1483. The text had been adapted directly and uncritically from the Vulgate, and its stilted sentences often emerge into the German language as endearingly quaint and incomprehensible as many of those in the earlier version of the Wycliffite Bible. Luther discarded all this. He must have known the German versions current in his own time but there is not a hint of them in his new translation. Luther was fluent in Latin and Greek and competent in Hebrew. He took with him to the Wartburg a copy of the second edition of the Novum Instrumentum (1519), and he began to translate directly from the original Greek in the edition of Erasmus.

Visitors to the Wartburg today are shown the room where Luther is reputed to have translated the New Testament. As furnished now, it is quite as agreeable as any sixteenth-century engraving of the cell of Saint Jerome. Luther himself referred to it as his Patmos, comparing it to the island where the exiled Saint John is supposed to have written the Apocalypse. The castle is on a high rock surrounded by forests, near the old East German border (Pl. 164). Luther’s room and its adjoining bedroom are in the northern bastion of the Wartburg above the warden’s quarters. Here, during the winter of 1521–2, Luther produced a first draft of the New Testament from Greek into idiomatic contemporary spoken German. In early March 1522, he returned to Wittenberg with his manuscript translation and he discussed it sentence by sentence with his friend, Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), a remarkably young and extremely able professor of Greek. The text was ready for printing by the late spring. The Wittenberg printer, Melchior Lotther, originally devoted two presses to printing it, and had brought a third into operation by the end of July. The book was finally published on 21 September 1522 (Pl. 165). Because of this date, it is often known as the September Testament, though the calligraphic title-page itself declares the book to be simply Das Neue Testament Deutsch. The translator’s name does not appear.

One of Martin Luther’s great strengths was his extreme ability to write clearly and articulately. The fluent literary style of his biblical translations must have had an enormous influence in promoting the Reformation in Germany. The
nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (perhaps not the most reliable of critics) described it as not only the finest work in the German language but as the greatest work of literature of any age. Many would probably agree. It is the standard translation used by millions of German-speakers today. In the 1520s, German had still been a language of many local dialects. Luther attempted to select vocabulary which was as neutral and mainstream as possible. Occasionally provincial words reveal Luther’s rural upbringing in Saxony, such as the then rare term Krippe, for ‘manger’, which thus through the Bible translation entered into modern German.

Luther’s Greek text was that of Erasmus. He adopted its decision to place the book of Acts immediately after the Gospels, as in most modern Bibles, instead of between Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles, as had been usual in the Vulgate. Luther certainly studied Erasmus’s Latin translation and notes as well as his Greek text. Some of the innovative words used in the Novum Instrumentum entered into Luther’s German translation and became immortalized, such as the gratiosa in Gabriel’s greeting to Mary (Luke 1:28), as described above, which emerges in Luther’s translation in the single corresponding word Holdselige. Where the Greek text seemed to allow it, Luther gladly chose words consistent with a Protestant interpretation of concepts of grace and salvation. Luther’s translation, however, is not polemical or deliberately phrased to favour Protestant doctrine. It aims for simple faithfulness to the apostolic original, which was precisely what Protestantism claimed to represent. The last page includes a list of eight corrections to the text noticed while the book was in press. From the moment of publication, the September Testament must have given the impression of diligence and authenticity.

The volume includes woodcut illustrations. These mostly take the form of large initials at the opening of each book enclosing pictures of the various authors, the four evangelists, Saint Paul, and so on. This is a formula for identifying books in Latin Bibles which goes back beyond the thirteenth century and which would have been very familiar to Luther’s readers, even those who had not previously used the text in German. The portraits are applied in the September Testament with a certain haphazard charm. Thus the woodcut initial of Saint John with his eagle used for the opening of John’s Gospel is reused for the start of the Epistle of Saint James, probably because no other initial ‘I’ was available. The Apocalypse opens with a woodcut ‘D’ which actually shows Saint Matthew with his angel. It was originally printed at the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, but was reused later because the letter ‘D’ was required in both texts, and the subject seemed similar enough to Saint John’s encounter with the angel of God in the Apocalypse. This careless pragmatism vanished in the printing of the Apocalypse itself, which is unexpectedly embellished with 21 full-page pictures illustrating the text. They stand out as incongruous in a publication which was mostly understated and unprovocative. The Apocalypse woodcuts were evidently designed in the
The Apocalypse at the end of September Testament includes a series of 21 full-page woodcuts. Here the blasphemous Whore of Babylon is shown wearing the triple tiara of the popes of Rome. Work of the artist Lucas Cranach the elder, one of the two publishers of the September Testament (the other was Christian Döring, a local goldsmith and businessman). It may be that Cranach himself requested their inclusion. The pictures echo those of the majestic Apocalypse of Dürer (1498) and even the crude blockbook Apocalypses of the 1450s, but they are adapted here into a visual assault on the papacy. The evil city of Babylon, doomed to destruction by earthquake, is recognizable in its woodcut as Renaissance Rome, with the Castel San Angelo unambiguously beside the Tiber. The beast from the bottomless pit (Apocalypse 11:7), the dragon which spewed out foul spirits like frogs (Apocalypse 16:13) and the blasphemous Whore of Babylon (Apocalypse 17:3) are all shown wearing the triple tiara of the popes (Pl. 166).

The scarcely veiled insult was extraordinary in 1522. Luther’s text may have been restrained and intellectual but, in the silent gloss provided by the woodcuts, he used the medium of the Bible to curse the Church of Rome.

It is credibly reported that 3,000 copies of the September Testament were printed. They cost between half a gulden and one and a half gulden each, probably depending on the binding. Compare this with 100 gulden, apparently the contemporary price of the Huntington Library copy of the Gutenberg Bible on parchment, or the 133 gulden paid by the collegiate church of Namur for a manuscript Bible in 1478. Here was a book aimed at the most popular market the Bible had addressed since the early years of Christianity. Luther himself took no fee or royalty for his work. The pope’s ban on writings by Luther had no obvious effect, and the translation evidently sold extremely rapidly. The provocatively anti-papal woodcuts caused political anxiety to Duke Georg of Saxony (1471–1539). On 6 November 1522 he prohibited the sale of the book in his territories and stated that no woman or man was to use the translation (niemands es were Weib oder Man, note that women are mentioned first). With an agreeable nod to the mercantile mentality of the north Germans, the duke offered to refund the purchase price of any Luther New Testaments surrendered to the authorities before Christmas. By then, however, the edition had already sold out. A reprint appeared in Basle in December 1522, and a new edition with
many textual corrections by Luther was published from Wittenberg in the same month. This is commonly known as the *December Testament*. The woodcuts in the Apocalypse were repeated but were arranged differently, often as pairs facing each other across the open pages. However, the papal tiaras had now been carved away from the woodblocks and the most controversial aspect of the publication was thereby evaded.

Over the next twelve years, Luther worked on his translation of the Old Testament. This was a period of extreme activity in his life, including his marriage to a former nun in 1525, and parts of the biblical work were delayed by the extraordinary pressures of defining and defending the Reformation. Luther found himself the spokesman for a movement which was transforming and dividing all of Europe, and Bible translation, however important, is slow work. As each section was finished, it was published separately. Luther's translation of the Pentateuch appeared in 1523. The following year he added German translations of the texts from Joshua to the Books of Solomon followed by the Psalter (Pl. 167). Work on the Prophets was greatly delayed. The books began appearing in 1526 but were not complete until 1532. Luther then turned to translating the Apocrypha. At each stage, he was constantly revising and reprinting parts which were already in print. The New Testament and the Psalms, especially, went through many editions, often with extensive corrections by Luther, during the 1520s and early 1530s. There were over fifty editions and reprints of Luther's New Testament between 1522 and 1529 alone (Pl. 168), not including further editions of separate portions of the New Testament. The peak was in 1524, when there were 47 different editions of parts of Luther's translation. Many were printed under Luther's general supervision in Wittenberg by Hans Lufft, but others were reprinted freely in Basle (especially), Augsburg, Strassburg, Zurich, and occasionally elsewhere. There was no copyright in the early sixteenth century. Once a book was in print and was demonstrably selling well, there was little to prevent other publishers from making their own reprints. The entire Bible in Luther's translation was finally published as a single consecutive entity in Wittenberg in the autumn of 1534 (Pl. 156). It was called *Biblia, das ist die gantze Heilige Schriftt Deusch* ('The Bible, that is the entire Holy
Writing in German) and Martin Luther's name appeared on the title-page.
Most of the Old Testament was translated from the Hebrew. Luther does not seem to have had access to a copy of the Complutensian Polyglot. He certainly used the 1494 Soncino edition of the Hebrew Bible, for his marked-up copy survives in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (Pl. 158), and he owned the Hebrew edition of the Psalms printed by Froben in 1516. He used the Vulgate and the Greek Septuagint. Luther was competent in Hebrew, though never a great Hebraist. Just as he revised his Greek translations with Melanchthon, so Luther took advice in Hebrew from the scholar Matthäus Aurogallus (c.1490–1543). Many Jews in the 1520s had sympathy with Luther, and the Jewish biblical commentator, Abraham Farissol (c.1451–c.1525), had hopes of Luther's conversion. In later years Luther turned against the contemporary Jews and his hostility led at least in part to their expulsion from Saxony in 1543.

A major part of the success of Luther and of all early Protestant Bibles was the insistence that the texts were taken directly from the original languages. This caught the public imagination. Even people with no scholarly background became fascinated with the apparent authenticity conferred by translating from Greek and Hebrew scriptures. We can illustrate this with an eye-witness description of an encounter with Martin Luther. A Swiss student of theology, Johann Kessler, wrote an account of his travels in the 1520s, called the Sabbata. One day in February 1522, he recounts, he and a friend escaped from heavy rain into the Black Bear inn in Jena. Seated at a table was a strange-looking man in breeches, doublet and a red hat. Unknown to them, this was Martin Luther in disguise, travelling from the Wartburg back to Wittenberg. He was reading a Hebrew Psalter. Two merchants joined them at one of the tables and they all fell into conversation together, over drinks and later during dinner. One of them remarked that he would give one finger to be able to read the Scriptures in Hebrew. Luther said that he too wished to master Hebrew and so he practised reading it daily. He added that it was necessary to know Greek and Hebrew to understand the Bible. One of the merchants produced a copy of one of Luther's biblical commentaries, just published, and asked if his new companions had seen it yet. Luther, still unrecognized, said he hoped to acquire one when he reached Wittenberg. The landlord, unable to contain himself, announced that this man was Luther himself, but none of the other diners believed him. Even in
Bibles of the Protestant Reformation

a country inn, then, in the first years of the Reformation, travellers of no great
distinction did not find it odd or out of place to be discussing the fascination of
the Bible in Hebrew and Greek. That is a situation which would have been inconceivable even a hundred years earlier.

Luther honoured and preserved the entire Bible. His more radical colleagues
might not have agreed with him. Since the Gospels were the central text of
Christianity, some Reformers argued that no other texts were necessary, or that
other parts of the Bible had no logical purpose except in so far as they predicted
or proclaimed the Gospels and the life of Christ. This line of reasoning opened
the possibility of radical reformation of the Bible too. If the pope and bishops
could be pruned away as unnecessary accretions, why not parts of the Bible too?
There was a moment in the 1520s when the Reformers were casting off so many
of the long-established traditions of the Roman Church that they might easily
have been carried away into paring away considerable parts of the Bible and the
Apocrypha as irrelevant. The canon of the Bible was probably in more danger in
the early sixteenth century than at any period since the fourth century. Reformers
looked again at the credentials of each biblical text. It is difficult to find
explicit allusions to Christ in some books of the Bible, such as the Song of Songs
(always a strangely worrying text), or the book of Esther (which never even
mentions God), or the Apocalypse. Other Old Testament books were mainly con
cerned with laws and patterns of behaviour which were self-evidently addressed
specifically to Jewish life in ancient Palestine. By the Renaissance, scholars knew
enough ancient history to place such texts in context. In the end, however,
Luther evaded the issue. He drew a distinction between parts of the Old Testa
ment which had a historical relevance to the ancient Jews to whom they were
directed, and those which were still to be regarded as the active precepts of God.
He simply accepted all books of the Bible as inspired by the Holy Ghost, but not
all as being of equal value. He compared the lesser books of the Bible with the
straw in the manger in Bethlehem, which was laid there by the Holy Ghost to
support the Christ Child. Elsewhere he compared them with the swaddling bands
which wrapped the Child.

Let us look at the Luther Bible as a book. The first complete edition, Witten
berg, 1534, is a large heavy quarto, usually bound in two volumes. The title-page
to each volume has a full architectural border (Pl. 169). At the top, leaning over
the balustrade of a kind of mezzanine gallery, is a bearded figure, apparently God
himself, writing a scroll inscribed Gottes wort bleibt ewig ("God's word remains
forever", from Isaiah 40:8). There are cherubim on either side of him. Those on
the left hold an open manuscript, doubtless a Bible. One of those on the right
struggles with a vast book in a Gothic binding while the other holds a document
with a hanging seal. This must be God's covenant. On each side of the title are
Germanic knights in armour, holding banners. At the foot of the page, a crowd of
cherubim has gathered on the steps to read, admire and adore an open book. This
The first edition of the complete Bible in Luther's translation was published in Wittenberg in 1534.

is a title-page, therefore, which venerates the Bible as a physical object distributed from the court of Heaven. The German knights give a reassuringly contemporary chivalric endorsement. Turn the page and this is reinforced, for there is a charter of privilege from Duke Johann Friedrich of Saxony (1503–54). It is a book which brings a certain authority to itself. In later editions, the duke's portrait appears.

The Bible itself is divided into seven sections, each with separate sequences of folio numbers. These correspond with the distinct campaigns in which Luther translated the text. They comprise the Pentateuch (133 leaves), Joshua to Esther (212 leaves), Major and Minor Prophets (94 and 59 leaves respectively), the Apocrypha (106 leaves) and the New Testament (200 leaves). This adds up to 889 leaves, almost 1,800 pages of text. The book has a total of 184 woodcuts, mostly printed for the first time in this edition.

The inclusion of pictures in early copies of the Luther Bible must tell us something about the anticipated use of the book by its readers. The great public folio Bibles, like the Gutenberg Bible or the English 1611 Authorized Version, have no illustrations. Even illuminated manuscript Bibles usually had no pictures beyond miniatures enclosed in initials. The Luther Bibles, however, were clearly intended for domestic use, perhaps by people whose level of literacy was often unsophisticated. All owners of Luther Bibles must already have known Bible stories from pictures, for no one in the late Middle Ages or Renaissance could have avoided the multitude of biblical imagery appearing everywhere from church walls to inn signs. The use of woodcuts in Luther Bibles would provide a reassuring anchor. The illustrations occur mainly in the narrative books.

Genesis, for example, includes pictures of familiar subjects such as the Garden of Eden, Noah’s flood, Noah’s family kneeling before the rainbow, Lot being led from Sodom by angels, the sacrifice of Isaac, and so on. From the books of prophets to the New Testament epistles, the woodcuts occur only at the opening of books. The Psalms, for instance, open with a beautiful half-page image of King David in his bedroom in a sixteenth-century castle. There are no pictures from
the life of Christ. The Protestants did not outlaw devotional art (Luther himself regarded the commandment about graven images to be one of those directed specifically to the ancient Jews in Sinai) but they were anxious to avoid any possibility of idolatry. Pictures of Christ or (especially) of the Virgin Mary would seem inappropriate. The Gospels in the Luther Bible are therefore illustrated by pictures of the Evangelists, such as Saint Matthew seated at a cluttered table in an elegant garden bower, with his angel opposite him and the Holy Dove above. It is a civilized and uncontroversial scene. The Apocalypse, however, returns with its damning woodcuts, now recut in oblong shape and increased to 26. The beasts and the Whore of Babylon are once again shown unambiguously as the pope in papal tiaras.

Typographically, Luther Bibles are very easy to read, especially the editions produced in Wittenberg. This too must have been a deliberate policy. The text is in a single column of large print. It is presented in a rounded Gothic type, then traditional for vernacular texts. It is divided up by sense into short and visually distinct paragraphs, and the sentences are punctuated by neat oblique strokes. Marginal notes are in a smaller and distinctive type, and there is no confusion as to what is biblical. Chapters are marked by woodcut initials on square panels, usually in classical or leafy designs. The pages have folio numbers as well as the traditional thirteenth-century running-titles and chapter numbers. The Luther Bible is not only in a language which was easy to understand but was arranged in print in a way that made it extremely accessible.

It is worth emphasizing the extraordinary use which the Reformers made of the printing press. The impact of the Reformation would have been inconceivable without the invention of printing in the fifteenth century. Gutenberg had produced an orthodox Latin Bible and he had taken advantage of a huge market for printed indulgences. Luther launched the Reformation by an attack on indulgences and he dethroned the Latin Bible from the heart of western Christendom, but he used the printing press as no one had ever done before. Over 3,700 separate editions of books and pamphlets by Martin Luther were published in his lifetime, not including Bible translations. This is an immense number for any one author, even by today's standards. It is an average of almost two publications a week for most of his adult life. In his time, Luther was by far the most extensively published author who had ever lived. Many contemporary portraits show him holding a book. The Reformers fully
understood and exploited the propaganda value of the printing press, and of engravings and woodcuts (Pl. 170). The Luther Bible was printed and reprinted over and over again. Most editions were of several thousand copies. When the Wittenberg printer, Hans Lufft, retired from business in 1572, it was said that he had by then printed almost 100,000 Bibles in Luther's translation. At 1,800 pages a copy, that would be nearly 180 million pages of the Bible passing through Lufft's press alone. It was a fundamental part of the Protestant belief that the Word of God should be made available to speak directly to all people. The printing press provided a means of achieving this which some saw as divine intervention and which confounded critics of the Reformation because it was completely irreversible. The first public burnings of Protestant books took place as early as 1521, and the first burning of a printer in 1527. To offer martyrdom to any opponent is a risky political manoeuvre, which often achieves an opposite effect. Destruction of some copies of a book only adds to the value of those that remain. The fact that the Catholic Church reacted so violently to the printed texts of the Reformation is evidence that they realized and feared the power of the press. In no way did the Protestants invent the art of printing, but they found themselves in possession of a tool for propaganda which made the Reformation unstoppable.

We have so far looked principally at the Reformation Bible in Germany, for it was there that Luther established a pattern of Bible translation and publication which was rapidly repeated across northern Europe. Luther's September Testament was published in 1522. A New Testament in Dutch, translated from Luther's edition, appeared as early as 1525. In 1524 and 1526 respectively, the text was already in Danish and Swedish, both translated from Luther's version. The whole Bible was in Dutch by 1526, Swedish by 1541 and Danish by 1550 (Pl. 171). There was even a Finnish New Testament published in Stockholm in 1548, translated directly from the Greek. It is a squat little book, like a miniature Luther Bible. Holland and Scandinavia eventually became uncontroversially Protestant. Denmark and Sweden are still soundly Lutheran.

Italy remained Roman Catholic throughout the Reformation, and still is. The Catholics found themselves in a difficult position with regard to the Bible in vernacular translations. On the one hand, they sought to defend the traditional position of the Church as the interpreter of the Bible as transmitted from Saint Jerome. On the other, it was abundantly clear to Catholic scholars and humanists that editions based on the Greek and Hebrew were probably closer to the original texts. The Bible was available in an Italian translation made from the Vulgate by
a Venetian monk, Niccolò Malermi (c. 1422–81), abbot of the monastery of San Michele di Murano, on the island in the lagoon of Venice. His translation was first printed in 1471 and remained in print until 1567. The final edition proclaims its endorsement by the Holy Inquisition, an assembling of papal credentials in support of a work of patently obsolete scholarship (Pl. 172). In the meantime, another translation had been made by the Florentine humanist, Antonio Brucioli (c. 1495–1566). His edition pretends to be taken from Greek and Hebrew sources but it derives mostly from the Latin of Erasmus. His text of the New Testament was printed in Venice in 1530 and the complete Bible in 1532. Although Brucioli was a Catholic, his sympathies towards Protestantism made his translation open to suspicion. It was placed on the papal Index of banned books in 1559.

The first true Protestant Bible in the Italian language was that of Giovanni Diodati (1576–1649), professor of theology in Geneva. It was addressed primarily to Italian-speaking Protestants in Switzerland. It was translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek and was first published in Geneva in 1607. The woodcut on the title page conveys an agreeably rustic image of Reformation Switzerland, showing a farmer sowing a field on a mountainside, with the motto in French, "Son art en Dieu" (Pl. 173). Facing the opening page of Genesis is a quotation from II Timothy 3:16–17, on the value of the Scriptures to all people of God, for teaching, reproving, correction and training in righteousness. These are all acceptable Protestant virtues. Diodati’s translation has remained in print ever since and is even now a principal version of the Bible in the Italian language.

If anything, Spain remained even more aggressively Catholic than Italy. This was the country of the Spanish Inquisition, originally set up in 1479 to correct elements of Islam and Judaism. Cardinal Francisco Ximénes de Cisneros, genial and humane editor of the Complutensian Polyglot, was himself the Grand
Inquisitor of Spain. In the sixteenth century, however, the Inquisition turned on Protestantism with great vigour and relentless cruelty. It was extremely effective. A few portions of the Bible translated into Spanish from 1490 onwards survive only as fragments. The first index of banned books issued by the Inquisition in Toledo in 1551 prohibited absolutely any Bible in Castilian or any other vulgar tongue. The first complete Bible in the Spanish language was the translation of Cassiodoro de Reyna (c. 1520–94), a former monk from Seville. He converted to Protestantism and ministered to a Spanish congregation in London in the late 1550s. Pursued by charges of heresy and homosexuality, Reyna moved across to Antwerp in 1563 and later to Frankfurt-am-Main. His Spanish Bible was published in Basle in 1569. He used sources in Hebrew, Greek and Syriac. Like the Luther Bible, the title-page of Reyna’s edition cites Isaiah 40:8 on the eternity of the Word of God, but this time (defiantly) it quotes it in Hebrew.

France suffered terrible anguish at the Reformation. Protestants and Catholics confronted each other intemperately for centuries. In the end, the Protestants, or Huguenots, withdrew from France but not without experiences of fearful persecution. Each camp translated and promoted multiple versions of the Bible in the French language, pretending to exclusive accuracy and no knowledge of each other’s editions. Events began innocuously enough. Jacques Le Fèvre d’Étaples (c. 1455–1536) was librarian of the monastery of St-Germain-des-Prés in Paris and a humanistic scholar in the circle of Erasmus. He was a liberal churchman but a Catholic. He had translated works of Aristotle. He was well connected in the royal court and Church hierarchy. An anonymous French translation of the New Testament, securely attributed now to Jacques Le Fèvre, was published in Paris in 1523, and a complete Bible in 1530. The title declares its loyal Catholic source *selon la pure et entiere traduction de sainct Hierome*, ‘in accordance with the pure and complete translation by Saint Jerome’. Revised editions appeared in 1534 and 1541. In a final revision, it became the model for the so-called Louvain Bible (*selon l’édition Latine*), published in Louvain in 1550. This text was then promulgated by the Catholics. Many other supposed translations which followed (including those of Besse, 1608, Deville, 1614, and Frizon, 1621) were little more than the Louvain Bible slightly adapted. Altogether the text probably appeared in upwards of 200 subsequent editions.

In the meantime, a cousin of John Calvin, the Swiss reformer, had produced
the first French Protestant edition. The translator was Pierre Robert Olivetan (c.1506–38). He was a native of Noyon, in northern France. He joined a group of French-speaking Swiss Reformers in 1532. Olivetan's translation of the Bible was published in Neuchâtel in Switzerland in 1535, with a preface dated *des Alpes* on 12 February 1535. The text, like all Protestant Bibles, declares itself to be taken directly from the Hebrew and Greek. In practice, it was evidently based on the text of Le Fèvre, collated against the Latin of Erasmus and others. The mutual indebtedness across enemy lines becomes even more complicated, for Olivetan's translation was apparently then used for the Louvain revisions of the Catholic Bible in 1550. The French Protestants and Catholics would gladly have massacred each other (as happened on Saint Bartholomew's day in 1572 when between 5,000 and 10,000 Huguenots were killed in Paris and elsewhere) but they silently took phrases from each other's French Bibles. Olivetan's translation was corrected and reprinted often, especially in Geneva (Pl. 174). The edition published by Robert Estienne in Geneva in 1553 was the first printed Bible with its text divided into numbered verses. That device has survived ever since, in almost all Bibles, Protestant and Catholic.

The official Catholic position throughout this period was one of defending the primacy of the medieval Latin Vulgate as the only true Bible, supported by a thousand years of tradition. The status of the Vulgate was confirmed in 1546 at the Council of Trent (1545–63), the conference held by Catholics to define and strengthen their traditional Church against the advances of Protestantism. In order to deflect accusations that the Latin text itself might have become inaccurate over centuries of copying, a new and scholarly edition of the Vulgate Bible was commissioned by Sixtus V (pope 1585–90). A commission of bishops and scholars collated the text against many early manuscripts, including the *Codex Amiatinus* (above, p. 33). They produced what is known as the 'Sixtine' edition, finally published by the Vatican in 1590. Political wrangles and criticisms within the Church required its withdrawal and replacement by a monumental revision in 1592, usually called the 'Clementine' edition, after Clement VIII (pope 1592–1605). This then became the standard Catholic Bible, endorsed as the true Bible for the next 350 years. Any subsequent translations for use by Catholics were taken from the Clementine Vulgate. A version for German Catholics was made by Kaspar Ulenberg (1549–1617), revised and reissued in Mainz in 1662.

A French Catholic translation was made by two brothers, Antoine le Maistre (1608–58) and Louis Isaac le Maistre (1613–84, known as 'De Saci'), published in 1667. Italian and Spanish translations from the Clementine Vulgate eventually followed, but only as late as the end of the eighteenth century.

This has already become a long chapter, but let us finally look at England. The situation there was different from elsewhere in Europe, because (as we saw in Chapter 7), the vernacular Bible was already illegal long before the Reformation. It therefore began with an official handicap. Once England became Protestant,
however, the translated Bible then became a symbol of state. This is unique in Europe. Only England has an 'Authorized Version' of the Bible, issued under the auspices of a king who was head of the Church.

William Tyndale (c.1494—1536) is the saintly hero of English Protestants. He was a man of good academic credentials and Christian piety. He lacked the physical presence of Luther and the self-confidence of Erasmus: he was short, 'of no great stature', according to John Foxe. At the time of the publication of Luther’s September Testament in 1522, Tyndale conceived the idea of producing a contemporary rendering of the Bible in English. The anti-Wycliffite constitutions of Archbishop Arundel were still legally valid in England, prohibiting any translation of the Bible unless it had been approved by the local diocese. Tyndale therefore applied to Cuthbert Tunstall, bishop of London, to endorse his work as translator. The bishop declined. Here we see the refreshing internationalism of Renaissance scholarship, for Tyndale simply moved to Germany, probably in April 1524, and continued work as normal, beyond the close scrutiny of English law. He knew Greek and Hebrew. He used the Greek text in the Novum Instrumentum of Erasmus and the German translation by Luther. Within a year he had already completed a New Testament in fluent contemporary English. It was being printed in Catholic Cologne in 1525 when, it is said, the printers boasted
Tyndale's first attempt at publishing an English translation of the New Testament was interrupted by legal action in 1525. Only a single fragment survives, now in the British Library, one of the absolute rarest of any major printed books (Pl. 175). It is a section of 31 leaves in quarto, comprising Saint Matthew's Gospel as far as chapter 22. It includes a woodcut author-portrait of Saint Matthew and marginal notes, all of which closely resemble the September Testament of Luther.

On arrival in Worms, Tyndale initiated a new edition, probably completed in 1526. Its title-page emphasizes its authentic pre-Vulgate credentials, 'as it was written'. Unlike the stately Cologne fragment or the first Luther Bibles, this was a little pocket-sized book, on the scale of many manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible, easy to conceal. Unbound copies were smuggled into England, apparently through Antwerp, and were sold furtively. Records of trials give some flavour of the trade, such as 'About Christmas last, there came a Duche man, beyng now in the Flete, which wold have sold this Respondent ii or iii Hundreth of the said N. Testaments in English', priced at 9 pence each. This illegal first edition too is now a book of extreme rarity. For many years, only two copies were known, a very imperfect volume (lacking 71 leaves) in the library of St Paul's Cathedral in London, and an enchanting illuminated copy, lacking only its title-page, in the
collection of the Bristol Baptist College. In 1994 the Bristol copy was acquired by the British Library. The publicity which ensued flushed out a third surviving copy, entirely complete, which had been unacknowledged for centuries in the Bibelsammlung of the Württembergische Landesbibliothek in Stuttgart (Pl. 176).

Like Luther, Tyndale then moved back to the beginning of the Bible and translated the Pentateuch. He worked directly from the text in Hebrew. The translation was apparently published in Antwerp in January 1530, though it has a colophon pretending that it was 'emprinted at Malborow in the lande of Hesse, by me Hans Luft'. Malborow is Marburg and Hans Luft was the name of Luther's busy printer in Wittenberg; both are spurious names to obfuscate the provenance. Antwerp was a possession of the Holy Roman emperor, still aggressively Catholic and allied to England in league against Lutheranism. Tyndale in the meantime was translating the Old Testament (Jonah was published in 1531) and revising the New Testament. This was printed in Antwerp in 1534, with a true colophon naming the printer and Tyndale as translator. Tyndale was arrested in May 1535 and was imprisoned at Vilvorde, north of Brussels. There is a heart-rending letter which he wrote from prison, begging for warmer clothes to see him through the coming winter in his unheated cell and asking for his Hebrew Bible, grammar and dictionary, all of which had been impounded. He was convicted of heresy in August 1536 and was strangled first and then burnt at the stake in Vilvorde. According to Foxe, his last words were 'Lord, open the king of England's eyes'.

The eyes of Henry VIII were already opened very wide indeed. In 1533 he had married Anne Boleyn, the second of his six successive wives. To do so, he had been obliged to divorce Catherine of Aragon and to declare England's independence from the Church of Rome. Anne herself was openly sympathetic to Protestantism. She patronized Miles Coverdale (1488–1568), a former assistant to Tyndale. Coverdale prepared a second English translation of the Bible, mostly from the Vulgate and from Luther's German text, rather than from the Greek or Hebrew. This was printed probably in Cologne in 1535 and was imported into England, where a fulsome dedication to Henry VIII was quickly inserted into every copy. Henry was as susceptible to flattery as to women. A combination of religious needs and political expediency brought about a very rapid change of royal policy towards the Bible in the English language. The king embraced Protestantism
with passionate enthusiasm. He allowed himself to be made head of the Church of England. The prologue to Coverdale's Bible suggested that Henry VIII's title 'Defender of the Faith', which the pope had conferred on the king in 1521 for his opposition to Luther, could as well be used by Henry in defence of the Protestant Bible in English. In 1537 two printing-shops issued Bibles in London, including two further editions of Coverdale's Bible and a new version again, under the pseudonym of Thomas Matthew, dedicated to 'the moost noble and gracous Prynce Kyng Henry the eyght'. On 5 September 1538 the king commanded that a copy of the Bible in English should be placed in every church in England.

The history of the English Bible since 1538, like that of the Church of England itself, has largely been shaped by committees. The so-called Great Bible of 1539 was a composite translation, assembled by 'dyverse excellent learned men', according to its title-page. The woodcut which surrounds the title shows Henry VIII himself distributing copies of the Bible to his grateful subjects to the right and left (Pl. 177). It is pleasantly reminiscent of the ninth-century miniature in the First Bible of Charles the Bold (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 1), which we encountered at the end of Chapter 1, showing Saint Jerome distributing Bibles to his monks (Pl. 21). The difference is that Jerome was the translator; and Henry VIII was, at best, a late-come convenor of translators. Further English Bibles of the Reformation were all the results of multiple enterprises. The 'Geneva' (or 'Breeches') Bible of 1560 was the work of at least three translators. The Bishops' Bible of 1568 was prepared by a committee of approximately seventeen scholars, mostly bishops, chaired by Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury 1559–75. The most influential English Bible
of them all was entirely the product of committees. The meeting of the Hampton Court Conference in January 1604 suggested that a definitive Bible in the English language should be prepared under the patronage of the King James (king of Scotland 1567–1625, king of England from 1603). The king himself announced the appointment of 54 different translators. Forty-seven of them are recorded by name. They were divided into six sub-committees, meeting in Westminster, Oxford and Cambridge. The result was the monumental ‘King James’ or ‘Authorised Version’ of the Bible, first printed in 1611 and since then probably the most widely read and best-known book ever published in English (Pl. 178).

These English Bibles are Protestant translations. It must be emphasized that the fundamental differences of meaning between the traditional Latin Vulgate text and the Lutheran or Anglican translations are usually very slight. Versions vary only in their choice of words to express the same meaning. Even when the Reformers went back to the original Hebrew or Greek, the text of the Scriptures was found to have survived the Middle Ages more or less accurately. Fanatical adherents of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century wrote hysterical pamphlets deploring each other’s corruption of the sacred Scriptures. They exaggerate outrageously. In practice, Protestant and Catholic versions of the Bible told exactly the same story. Some individual words are understood slightly differently. A Roman Catholic Bible might opt for vocabulary like ‘church’, ‘priest’, ‘challice’, and ‘charity’. A Protestant Bible might translate those same words from the Greek as ‘congregation’, ‘elder’, ‘cup’ and ‘love’. The cumulative effect of such vocabulary might convey a different emphasis to accounts of primitive Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles, for example, or the Epistles of Saint Paul. The Catholics pointed to the proven traditions of the Church for over a thousand years. The Protestants constantly emphasized that they were going back far beyond the time of Jerome. That is the great difference. That is why, until recently, the Protestant translations triumphed. The Great Bible of 1540 proclaimed itself as ‘translated after the verye of the Hebrue and Greke textes’. The Geneva Bible of 1560 described itself as ‘translated according to the Ebrue and Greke’. The 1611 Authorized Version is called the Holy Bible ‘translated out of the Originall Tongues and with the Former Translations diligently compared and revised’. This is the most famous book title in the English language.