Old Latin
Greek was the common language, even in Rome, until the third century CE when Latin once again became the dominant language. The exception would be S. Gaul and N. Africa, which always kept Latin. Therefore, the first Latin Biblical texts were found around 150 CE. Tertullian (b. in Carthage ca. 160) probably began writing in Old Latin in 190 CE doing his own translations from the Greek. By the time of Cyprian (d. 258) there is evidence of Old Latin manuscripts being in existence.

Old Latin was translated from the LXX, the text commonly used by Christian communities, sometimes the Old Latin, or Vetus Latina, was called “the Septuagint in Latin clothing.” The problem with the Old Latin versions of the Bible is that we do not have a complete manuscript of the Bible, but many partial ones. 32 mutilated manuscripts of Old Latin Gospels exist, containing the four canonical Gospels; but they differ substantially from one another. Other Biblical passages – Acts, Pauline Epistles, Catholic Epistles, and the Apocalypse – exist mostly in excerpts or fragments. What we have has been assembled from fragmentary manuscripts, liturgical books and patristic quotations in commentaries, sermons, letters, and so forth. As the LXX rose in popularity, interest dropped off on the Old Latin and so manuscripts were not well preserved.

And, there was never an official copy of the Old Latin, but copies were prepared on an ad hoc basis for the local use of Christian communities. After comparing readings for Luke 24:4-5 in the surviving Vetus Latina manuscripts, Bruce M. Metzger counted "no fewer than 27 variant readings!" Church Fathers indicated that there were many different versions. Augustine distinguishes between “Itala” and several other Latin versions and lamented the uneven quality of the translations. In about 396, Augustine complained that anyone who was able to get a hold of a Greek manuscript translated it into Latin, no matter how much he knew about either language. Jerome complained to Pope Damasus that there were almost as many versions as manuscripts.

One of the oldest and best manuscripts of the Old Latin is the CODEX VERCELLENSIS (known by the symbol “a”), (SHOW SLIDE) being kept at in the cathedral treasure room at Vercelli in northern Italy. It contains the four Gospels, in the order usual in the Western Church—namely, Matthew, John, Luke, Mark. It is written in silver letters, in very narrow columns, on extremely thin vellum stained with purple. The passage shown is John 16,23-30. In verse 26 this MS. has a curious reading, due to an accidental omission of words: instead of "Ye shall ask in my name; and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you," it has "ask in my name, and I will pray for you." The passage may be seen at the top of the second column: "in nomine meo petite et ego rogabo propter vos," the words "et ego" being added above the line. This manuscript was written in the fourth century, and is therefore as old as the oldest Greek uncials of the Bible.

The Old Latin is designated in critical apparatus by small letters of the Latin alphabet. The most important African manuscript is Codex Bobbiensis, symbol “k.” It is noteworthy, containing the intermediate ending of Mark. Probably copied around 400 in Africa, is similar to quotes made by Cyprian of Carthage (250 CE). It wound up in an Irish monastery of Bobbio in n. Italy and is now in the National Library at Turin.
The Largest manuscript (pages measuring 20-36 inches) is the Codex Gigas (the giant). Written in the 13th cent. by the Benedictines in Bohemia, acquired by the Imperial Treasury in Prague and captured by the Swedish army in 1648 by the Swedes and still resides in the Royal Library in Stockholm. Also called the “Devil’s Bible” because it has a huge picture of a wicked devil. According to legend, a Monk who had been confined to his cell for breaking the discipline, finished the manuscript in a single night with the aid of the devil, whom he summoned for help. The book of Acts and Revelation are in Old Latin.

Due to the wide variety of forms that the text of the Bible circulated in the Latin-speaking church, a more standard and accurate text was desperately needed for doing theology and liturgy. Pope Damascus I (366-384) commissioned Jerome in 382 to make it so. Jerome was born between 340-50, studied grammar and rhetoric in Rome and was known to be a scholar in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He had dedicated himself to an ascetic life and the study of theology, living as a hermit. He learned Hebrew from a Jewish Christian. As a priest he studied under Apollinarius of Laodicea and Gregory of Nazianzus.

**Roman Psalter and Gospels**

The first project Jerome undertook was a partial revision of the Psalter from the LXX. It was introduced into the liturgy at Rome and is still in use in the Office at St. Peter’s at the Vatican. Jerome worked very quickly on this first edition, following a relatively good Latin manuscript and compared it to some old Greek manuscripts, probably belonging to the Alexandrian type of text.
Gallican Psalter

Jerome did a second version of the Psalter in Palestine, where he served as the head of a monastery near Bethlehem from 386. It was based on the Hexapla of Origen which he found at Caesarea. It is a revision of the fifth column of the Hexapla, the LXX. He also made similar revisions of the entire OT, but only the texts of Job and fragments of Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes have survived. It is believed that the Gallican Psalter was first used liturgically in Gaul, hence the name.

The Gallican Psalter was adopted elsewhere and is still used as the official Roman edition of the Vulgate. Jerome continued to revise and even after translating the Psalter from the Hebrew, it failed to catch on like the Gallican Psalter did.

Scenes from the Life of King David
Gallican Psalter with Canticles, by Nikolaus Bertschi

Germany, Augsburg, c. 1520
The Library Company of Philadelphia, MS 4, fol. 1

Jerome’s Hebrew Translation

Jerome’s greatest achievement turned out to be in 390-405 when he did his translation from the original text in Hebrew into Latin. He disagreed with Augustine who believed that the LXX was the real inspired version of the Hebrew Bible. Jerome had a deep knowledge of Hebrew and did not have the advantage of dictionaries or grammars in his day. He used the Greek versions of the LXX, Aquila, Smmachus, and Theodotion – and any info he could get from the Jewish side.

It is not known exactly which Hebrew text that Jerome had before him, making textual criticism difficult.

Latin Vulgate

Over a period of centuries, Jerome’s version became recognized and it was named the “Vulgate” in the 16th century when it became the common edition (“vulgar”). Jerome’s translation was on par with the Old Latin by the seventh century and gained on the Old Latin in the 8th and 9th centuries. Jerome, in a letter, complains that his new version was initially disliked by Christians who were familiar with the phrasing of the old translations. However, as copies of the complete Bible were infrequently found, Old Latin translations of various books of the Bible were copied into
manuscripts along side Vulgate translations, inevitably exchanging readings. Jerome’s version became the first officially authoritative text by the Roman church at the Council of Trent in 1546. But wasn’t printed until **1590 under Pope Sixtus V (the Sixtine ed.) (see slide)**. The Vulgate was revised under Pope Clement VIII (Clementine ed.) in 1592, ‘93, ‘98. All these editions were trying to clean up the NT translations, or restore the text of Jerome. Actually, it is not known if Jerome worked on the rest of the NT, other than the Gospels which he did based on the Hexapla’s LXX.

The Vulgate wasn’t revised again until the Neo-Vulgate in 1979, which never really caught on much because the services weren’t being done in Latin anymore.

**Noteworthy Manuscripts**

There are more than 8,000 Vulgate manuscripts in existence today, most containing several textual types as sources (cross-contamination).

1. **Codex Amiatinus**: The most celebrated manuscript of the Latin Vulgate Bible, remarkable as the best witness to the true text of St. Jerome and as a fine specimen of medieval calligraphy, now kept at Florence in the Biblioteca Laurentiana. It contains the whole Bible. The symbol for it is written *am* or *A* (Wordsworth). It is a huge book, measuring in height and width 19-1/4 inches by 13-3/8 inches, and is 7 inches thick – very awe striking, weighing in at 75 pounds. Some consider it as perhaps "the finest book in the world." It is from the 7th or 8th century, given as a gift to Pope Gregory in 716. **The slide is of the Scribe Ezra, found in the manuscript.**

2. **The Codex Fuldensis** is a manuscript based on the Latin Vulgate made between 541 and 546 in Capua. It contains the 27 canonical books of the New Testament, the apocryphal Epistle to the Laodiceans, and a copy of Jerome's *Prologue to the Canonical Gospels*. The manuscript survives in the monastic library at Fulda. **The two dots or umlaut represent a textual variant.**

3. **The Lindisfarne Gospels** is an illuminated Latin manuscript of the four gospels. The Latin is close to the Codex Amiatinus. The manuscript was produced on the island of Lindisfarne, England in Northumbria (NE England) in the late 7th century or early 8th century, and is regarded as one the finest examples of a religious art style that combined Anglo-Saxon and Celtic themes, what is now called Hiberno-Saxon art.
The Lindisfarne Gospels, thought to be the work of a monk named Eadfrith, who became Bishop of Lindisfarne (698 – 721). In the 10th cent., an Old English translation of the Gospels was made: a word-for-word gloss inserted between the lines of the Latin text. This is the first translation of the Gospels into the English language.

The slide is from the opening words of the Gospel of Matthew.

4. The Book of Kells: The Book of Kells contains the text of the four gospels based on the Vulgate. It does not, however, contain a pure copy of the Vulgate. There are numerous variants from the Vulgate, where Old Latin translations are used rather than Jerome's text. The book, as it exists now, contains preliminary matter, the complete text of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and the Gospel of John through John 17:13. The remainder of John and an unknown amount of the preliminary matter is missing and was perhaps lost when the book was stolen in the early 11th century. Today it consists of 340 vellum leaves. It is an ornately illustrated manuscript, produced by Celtic monks around AD 800, now kept at Trinity College, Dublin.

The slide contains text from the Gospel of John written in Insular majuscule by the scribe known as "Hand B".

Influence of the Vulgate on the Western Church

This version of the Bible was familiar to and read by Christians for over a thousand years (c. AD 400–1530). The Vulgate exerted a powerful influence, especially in art and music as it served as inspiration for countless paintings and hymns. Early attempts to translate the Bible into contemporary languages were invariably made from the Vulgate, as it was esteemed as an infallible, divinely inspired text. Even when Protestants sought to replace the Vulgate for good with translations in the language of the people from the original languages, they could not avoid the enormous influence of Jerome's translation, with its dignified style and flowing prose. The closest equivalent in English is the King James Version. It shows a marked influence from the Vulgate in its dignified prose and poetic rhythm.
VulSearch & the Clementine Vulgate project

What is the Clementine Vulgate?

After the Council of Trent, which declared in 1546 that the Vulgate alone was to be held as "authentic in public readings, discourses, and disputes, and that nobody might dare or presume to reject it on any pretence" (Sess. IV, De editione et usu sacrorum librorum), the Holy See undertook the task of producing a corrected, standard text of the Vulgate for the use of the universal Church. In 1590, an edition was duly produced in Rome by a commission of scholars, revised further by Sixtus V, and finally approved by him. After his death a further revision was carried out under the Jesuit Franciscus Toletus, and finally the work was printed in 1598 during the pontificate of Clement VIII, whose name has been attached to it since 1641. The Clementine text was the official version of the Vulgate until 1979.

Parallel Latin/English Psalter

The Parallel Latin/English Psalter is an HTML document combining the Latin text of the Book of Psalms from the Vulgate with the English text of the Book of Psalms from Challoner's revision of the Douay translation.

If you don't mind seeing some ads, you can now Search this site.

The Parallel Latin/English Psalter has been incorporated into the Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies (ORB).

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http://medievalist.net/psalmstxt/home.htm