

RICHARD'S ENGLISH BIBLE

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The re-location last year by Mr. Wheeler of the copy of the New Testament in English once owned by Richard III when Duke of Gloucester naturally aroused much interest amongst members.¹ Its location in the New York Public Library had been obscured for 50 years by the fact that the description in the standard catalogue of North American manuscripts (itself not published until the 1930s) did not refer to its association with Richard in any way.² In this article the manuscript will be described more fully than it has ever been hitherto, and its important position amongst the manuscripts of the first English Bible demonstrated. In the second part Richard's ownership will be discussed.

Part 1: The Bible Itself

It is a medium-sized volume ($10\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{4}$ inches) of 6 plus 276 vellum pages,³ bound in sheepskin, and written about 1390. The first six pages contain a Kalendar of the Saints, with the lessons inserted, in a different hand to the body of the text but written about the same time.⁴ The Kalendar is for the usage of Sarum, as is usually the case. The Bible text is written in two columns, and contains all the books of the New Testament in the earlier English version (see below), with the usual prologues. A somewhat later hand has gone over the text making a few corrections, and adding page numbers, and chapter and verse numbers in the margins. Sir Frederick Madden and Josiah Forshall, the editors of the Wycliffe Bible, used this text (their manuscript *S*) for the Prologue to the Epistle to the Romans, and to the Epistles of Peter, John and Jude, and the Apocalypse. They also collated it verbatim throughout the text.⁵ This collation was not entirely accurate, and is done in such a manner as to obscure the dialectal variations in this manuscript.⁶

The text of Richard's English Bible is, as mentioned above, in the so-called early version. The Wycliffe Bible exists in two forms, an earlier and a later. The former, representing the first translation, is much more literal than the later. The Latin order of words is often retained, as are Latin constructions, it is in fact very difficult to understand at times. This difficulty was felt at the time, and revisions were soon made, culminating in a much more intelligible and idiomatic version, known now as the "later version." Manuscripts exist representing many stages of the transition from "early" to "late." The manuscript under discussion occupies a most interesting position in this progression, in that the text partly shows a half way stage between the two versions, an intermediate version in fact. In the very earliest translations difficult phrases were rendered direct from the Latin into what must have been nearly incomprehensible English, later a more idiomatic translation was added as an explanation, then the explanation was used first, and finally, in the later version, the explanation stood alone. Manuscript *S* shows the explanation being used first. These glosses, as they are known, were underlined in the manuscript, as they are in the extract printed below. It also shows other changes, so that

although Latinisms abound e.g. "the whiche" in verse 23 (for "qui"), and "son of God living" in verse 16 (for "filius Dei vivi"), the general effect is a fairly readable and not unattractive English.

Richard's English Bible is also interesting for another most important reason. It is one of a group which may, if Dr. Fristedt is correct, represent the dialect of the very first translation. He has argued that this dialect is that of the East Midlands, of Leicestershire in particular. Since John Wycliffe lived in his parish of Lutterworth in Leicestershire for the last four years of his life, during the period when the "early version" was being prepared, this supports Fristedt's theory that, contrary to the usual view at present, Wycliffe took a large practical part in this translation.⁸ Some of the particular idiosyncrasies in this manuscript which mark it out as being written in the dialect of the East Midlands (also the dialect of the North and North-west Midlands) may be seen in the printed extract. These are the ending "ende" to the present participles (e.g. "answerende," "seiende"), and the retention of the final "n" on infinitives (e.g. "to blamen").

The following passage from the manuscript of Richard's Bible is a new transcription, probably the first ever made. It is printed in parallel with the same passage from the New English Bible for purposes of comparison. To make the transcript easier to read the punctuation has been modernised, capital letters introduced for proper nouns, and the old English "thorn" and "yogh" transcribed as "th" and "g" or "y" respectively. Abbreviations have been expanded, especially "Jhu," uniformly given as "Jhesus"

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

Chapter 16, verses 15 to 28

WYCLIFFE BIBLE

¹⁵ *Jhesus seith to hem, "Sothely whom
sey yee me to ben?"*

¹⁶ *Symon Petre ansirende seide, "Thou
art Crist, the sone of God lyvende."*

¹⁷ *"Forsothe" Jhesus answerende
seide to hym, "Blessid art thou, Symon
Bariona, that is the sone of kulver, for
flesh and blod shewede nat to thee, but
my fader that is in hevenes.*

¹⁸ *And I say to thee, for thou art Petir
and upon thys ston I shal bilde my
churche, and the gates of helle shul not
han mygt or strengthe agen it.*

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

"And you," he asked, "who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Then Jesus said: "Simon son of Jonah, you are favoured indeed! You did not learn that from mortal man: it was revealed to you by my heavenly Father. And I say this to you: You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my church, and the forces of death shall never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; what you forbid on earth shall be forbidden in heaven, and what you allow on earth shall be allowed in heaven." He then gave his disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

¹⁹ And to thee I shal gyve the keyes of the kyngdom of hevenes; and what ever thou shalt binden up on erthe, shal be bounden in hevenes; and what ever thou shalt unbinden upon erthe, shal ben unbounden in hevenes."

²⁰ Thanne he commaundede to his disciples that they shulden sey to no man, that he was Crist.

²¹ Fro that tyme Jhesus bigan to shewyn to his disciples that it behoveth hym go to Jerusalem and suffren many thingis of the eldes and scribes and princes of prestis; and be slayn, and the thridde dai to risen up ageen.

²² And Petre, takende hym to, bigan to blamen hym, seinde "Far be it fro thee, Lord; this thing shal not be to thee."

²³ The whiche, turned seide to Petir, "Go aftir me Sathanas; thou art sclandre to me; for thou savourest not, or understondist not, tho thingis that ben of God, but tho thingis that ben of men."

²⁴ Thanne Jhesus seide to his disciples, "If eny man wile cumen after me denye he hym self, and take his crosse, and solewe me.

²⁵ For he that wile maken his soule saaf, that is, his lyf, shal leesen it; forsothe he that shal leese his soule for me shal finden it.

²⁶ Sothli what profiteth it to a man, if he wyne al the world, treuly he suffre perishynge of his soule? Or what chaunging shal a man gyven for his soule?

²⁷ For manes sone is to comen in glorie of his fadir, with his angelis, and thanne he shal yelde to every man aftir his werkis.

²⁸ Treuli I sey to you, there ben summe of hem stondende heer the which shul nat tasten deth, til they seen manes sone comenade in his kingdam."

Then Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Away with you, Satan; you are a stumbling-block to me. You think as men think, not as God thinks." Jesus then said to his disciples, "If any one wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me. Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self.

What will a man gain by winning the whole world, at the cost of his true self? Or what can he give that will buy that self back?

For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will give each man the due reward for what he has done. I tell you this: there are some standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Part 2: Richard's Ownership

As is well known to members, at the foot of page 1 of this Bible is an inscription in a fifteenth century hand "*a vo' me ly Gloucestre.*" On this inscription rests the case for Richard having once owned the manuscript. As mentioned above, the standard catalogue of North American manuscripts (De Ricci and Wilson, see note 2) does not refer to the possibility that Richard of Gloucester could have owned it, nor do the New York Public Library accept this.

De Ricci and Wilson ascribe it to "an early Duke of Gloucester" of about 1400.² They may have been influenced by Messrs. Quaritch, the booksellers via whom it went to New York, who described it in their catalogue as possibly having belonged to a dependant of Humphrey of Gloucester. Humphrey inscribed his name in the book to signify that the owner was under his protection.⁹ Duke Humphrey's motto was "*loyale et belle.*"

Whatever may be the reason it appears that in American scholarship there is some reluctance to admit that "Gloucestre" can be Richard of Gloucester. It is difficult to see why. Sir Frederic Madden identified the inscription as being in the hand of Richard of Gloucester,⁴ and this statement has not been challenged, although the signature is admittedly not very like other undoubtedly authentic signatures. Secondly, the motto is closely similar to "*loyaulte me lie*" which is definitely associated with Richard; and finally there is nothing to connect either of the two previous Dukes of Gloucester with the manuscript. No suggestion that either Duke ever used such a motto can be found. None of this evidence connects Richard unequivocally with the manuscript of course, the inscription could have been written by anyone. However a strong chain of circumstantial evidence exists, and lacking any indications to the contrary, there seems no reason not to accept that Richard of Gloucester owned this English New Testament.

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My thanks are due to Mr. William Hogarth, Vice-Chairman of the American Branch, for obtaining for me the microfilm of the Bible (De Ricci MS 67) from which I have worked. Mr. Hogarth played an important part last year in work which preceded the loan of the Bible to the National Portrait Gallery. (P.W.H.)

1. Catalogue of the National Portrait Gallery Exhibition (1973), p. 29.
2. S. De Ricci and W. J. Wilson: *Census of Mediaeval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada* (1935-37), p. 1325, no. 67.
3. Not 210 folios as De Ricci and Wilson, followed by the N.P.G. Catalogue, describe it. There are no foliation numbers, the pages of the New Testament are numbered in a later hand 1 to 275. The number 276 has probably been removed in binding at some time.
4. J. Forshall and F. Madden: *The Holy Bible made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his followers* (1850), Vol. 1, p. lxxiii, no. 162.
5. J. Forshall and F. Madden, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. xxxvi.
6. S. L. Frisstedt: *The Wycliffe Bible, Part I* (1953), p. 33.
7. *Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 2 (1969), pp. 399, 403-406; Frisstedt, *op. cit.* P. 136.
8. See Frisstedt *op. cit.* pp. 49-50, 89-92 for references to this group of manuscripts, and pp. 98-101, 118; 101-102 for his arguments on the dialect and authorship questions respectively.
9. Quaritch: *General Catalogue 1875-1877*, Vol. 1, p. 539.