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BOOK REVIEW

Alderik H. Blom, *Glossing the Psalms. The Emergence of the Written Vernaculars in Western Europe from the Seventh to the Twelfth Centuries*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017. xvi + 322 pp. with 14 figures.

Reviewed by **Kees Dekker** (University of Groningen)

The importance of the Psalter in the onset and development of medieval vernacular literacy in North-Western Europe is hard to overestimate. At the time when the spread of Christianity in early medieval Europe intensified the use of the written word, the Psalter stood out as a pivotal book in the Old Testament, not only because of its traditional importance in Jewish and Christian exegesis and liturgy, but also because in the monastic culture which anchored Christianity in its newly appropriated territories, the Psalter had to be chanted on a weekly basis. As Alderik Blom explains in *Glossing the Psalms*, novices in these monasteries were forced to learn the psalms and canticles by heart even before they had learned to write (pp. 37–38), remnants of which practice still lingered on in denominational schools in the 1960s, as this reviewer can still remember. The Psalter's seminal role in early medieval education, liturgy, exegesis and music is substantiated by a wealth of documents in which the Latin text of the psalms is clarified with the help of the various vernaculars. Alderik Blom's groundbreaking study analyses three strands of such documents: glossed psalters and commentaries, psalters with interlinear glosses, and *glossae collectae* based on the psalms. All of these documents were written between c. 800 and c. 1200 A.D., in the context of various emerging Western European vernaculars: Old Irish, Old English, Old High German, in particular the Alemannic dialect, Old Saxon and Old Frisian. Emanating from a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Blom's study enriches our knowledge of the methodologies of glossing and commenting in the early Middle Ages, as well as the ways in which early commentators conceived of the relationships between Latin texts and the vernacular languages. Blom's excellent book could not have been written without the author's profound knowledge of Latin (with occasional excursions to Greek and Hebrew) as well as all the vernacular languages it discusses. The book is, therefore, by implication, also an appeal to teach these languages to students of the Middle Ages.

The formal subdivision of *Glossing the Psalms* is delineated by the three types of documents mentioned above: Part One discusses glossed psalters and commentaries (Chapters 4 and 5), but also includes three introductory chapters to the

entire book (Chapters 1–3); Part Two discusses interlinear version of the psalter (Chapters 6–14); while Part Three contains an analysis of two glossaries (Chapter 15), as well as the conclusion to the entire book (Chapter 16). The book ends with a very useful appendix on formal and functional aspects of glossing, a bibliography, manuscript index and subject index. An *index locorum* would have been helpful, but is not there. Although the book takes the form of a triptych, in which the middle panel is the centre of attention, it is important not to lose track of its linear structure and of the importance of its methodology, outlined in Chapter 2.4, for all texts under investigation. It might have been clearer, therefore, to set off Chapters 1–3 and 16 from the three central studies, as an introduction and conclusion in their own rights.

The methodology of Blom's analyses, explained in Chapter 2 and summarised in the appendix, is not only essential to a good understanding of the main chapters, but also offers new perspectives on the analysis of text glosses. Packaged in a useful binary distinction, the contents of annotated manuscripts is divided into 'principal text' and 'paratext' (p.10), the latter term being explained along the lines of the rather wide definition by Gerard Genette (1997: 3). While Blom rightly classifies glosses among the many forms of paratext subsumed under Genette's definition, one may question his decision to adopt Frank Cinato's blanket definition of a written gloss as "the sum of paratextual accretion which specifies and diversifies the information contained within a principal text" (p.11). First, should titles, rubrics or introductions, included among Genette's forms of paratext, be seen as glosses, since they might specify or diversify information? And secondly, what to do with the possibility that the original lemmas are no longer present within the principal text on the page because of scribal errors or misinterpretations (on which, see Langbroek 2001). The latter eventuality would certainly be covered by the concept of intention expressed in Gernot Wieland's definition of text glosses as "any one or more words, letters, and symbols written in the margin or between the lines of a text, i.e. anything on the page which is not text proper [read principal text], but which is intended to comment on the text" (Wieland 1983: 7).

Highly useful for anyone researching glosses and glossaries are the terminological distinctions highlighted by Blom between (a) 'auctorial paratext' and 'allogenic paratext' (p.12), to diversify between glosses inserted by authors of principal texts and those added by later scribes; (b) 'stratigraphy' and 'redaction' (p.13), the former signifying "diachronical sequences of layers [of glosses] written in separate hands", the latter defining the ultimate collection of glosses in a manuscript in contradistinction to that in other manuscripts; (c) 'text proximity' and 'text distance' (p.15), indicating the genetic closeness of a gloss to its principal text, even across manuscripts, or the distance between a gloss and its principal text, for example if a gloss occurs in an alphabetical glossary and is

therefore at least two stages removed from its original position (stage one being the *glossae collectae*). Most essential, however, for a good understanding of Blom's analyses is his distinction between 'formal aspects of glossing' and 'functional aspects of glossing'. The formal aspects comprise palaeographical and codicological phenomena such as the hands in which the glosses were written, their form (written out in full, abbreviated or encoded), and their location on the page. The three functional categories of glossing, 'substitution glosses', 'supplement glosses' and 'commentary glosses' (explained in Chapter 2.4.3) are the filaments holding the chapters together. While terms such as substitution and supplement seem to speak for themselves, this section merits careful study. Substitution glosses replace a lemma with a "more or less exact lexical equivalent or perceived equivalent" (type a), or with an explanation (type b), and can therefore be 'intra-lingual', using the same language as the gloss, or 'interlingual' in the case of a translation. Supplement glosses, on the other hand, add one or more words to clarify the morphology or syntax of the principal text, either by supplying a complete constituent (subject, object, etc.) (type 1) or by adding words to an existing constituent (type 2), or by syntactical glosses, in the form of 'construe or syntax marks'. Four subtypes of commentary glosses complete the list of functional aspects: lexical and etymological comments (type 1), additional information on morphology or syntax (type 2), variants from other psalter versions (type 3), exegetical or historical information (type 4). The functional categories highlight the importance of morphology and syntax in Blom's methodology: grammatical information was, as the analyses in the remaining chapters demonstrate, a prominent aim of early medieval glossators.

The importance of this methodology is proven in Chapters 4 and 5, the longest chapters in the book, which offer a discussion of two psalters with text glosses and two glossed commentaries. While most of these glosses are in Latin, those in the vernacular are nearly all in Old Irish, which provides these chapters with a linguistically unified corpus. Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of the glosses in the Southampton Psalter, now Oxford, St John's College Library, C.9, a tenth-century psalter written in Ireland, which contains glosses by two glossators, both inserting inserted text in Latin and Old Irish. Blom's division of the chapter into hierarchically ordered sections and subsections helps the reader navigate the complexities of the glosses. First, a distinction is made between Latin and vernacular glosses. Subsequently, for both categories, the glosses are then divided by strata, and only then are the formal and functional aspects discussed for each stratum. The advantage of this division is that in the final analysis the vernacular language(s) are given a central position, high up in the structural hierarchy, even though the vernacular glosses are outnumbered by their Latin counterparts. The examples are spaciously laid out, with psalter text in capitals and the gloss text in a

smaller font, with printing in red and in different font sizes to distinguish between glosses from different strata. The examples are referenced to the relevant psalms and verses – not to editions, such as, in the case of the Southampton Psalter, the recent edition by Pádraig Ó Néill (2012), an important source in Blom’s study, and not to the foliation in the manuscript. The latter omission is unfortunate, as the manuscript has been digitised in high-quality images and can now be consulted online in the Cambridge University Digital Library.¹ As the manuscript does not give the numbers of the psalms, the reader needs to consult an edition or conduct hit-and-miss searches in the online facsimile to find the original texts and glosses. Thus, all examples on pp. 60 and 61, with references to psalm 135 can be found on folio 92v, including the unreferenced example, “HEREDITATEM ISRAHEL POPULO SUO ...,” (p. 61), which occurs at the very top of folio 92v and derives from psalm 134: 12. Likewise, the Psalter of St Caimín, University College Dublin, Franciscan A 1, which is the second Irish psalter analysed here, can be found integrally online with catalogue description, as part of the *Irish Script Online* project, which is the source of Figure 2 (p. 78) in the book.² In an age of rapidly increasing digitisation of manuscripts, it is essential, in my view, that references to manuscripts are included, also to manuscripts which have not (yet) been digitised, as there is a distinct chance that digitisation will occur well within the lifespan of a book’s print run. Moreover, it makes a book such as this outstanding study so much more stimulating if readers – scholars and students alike – have the manuscripts, virtually, on their desks. The major advantage of Blom’s methodology is that it allows a comparative analysis of glosses to the psalms in different versions, in the case of Chapters 5 and 6, of two psalters with interlinear and marginal glosses, and two glossed commentaries to the psalms, while also allowing comparisons and distinctions between different kinds of paratext within the same manuscript, for example, in the case of the two glossed psalters, between interlinear and marginal texts. The conclusions that are drawn from these four documents allow for interesting and sophisticated observations about functional differences between Latin and Irish, in different manuscripts. Most fascinating, however, are the correspondences. As Blom explains: the use of Irish in the glosses to the actual psalter text is largely restricted to lexical substitution in the form of translations, while in glosses to the marginal paratext “the vernacular is used regularly for longer commentary glosses” (pp. 89–90), an observation which Blom rightly connects with sociolinguistic domains, posing the question of whether the lower prestige of the vernacular precluded its use in exegetical comments.

1. https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/C_9.htm

2. <https://www.isos.dias.ie/english/index.html>

In the next part of *Glossing the Psalter*, Blom applies the same method of analysis to a selection of interlinear versions of the Psalter. These differ from the psalters in Chapter 5 in being “more or less complete word-for-word, or better form-for-form transfers into another language or register, provided interlinearly to a, generally Latin, principal text” (p. 131). Since no interlinear versions glossed in a Celtic language have survived, this part of the book considers only examples from the West Germanic linguistic realm, i.e. psalters glossed in Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon and Old Frisian. The specific questions and problems associated with interlinear versions are discussed in Chapter 6, in which Blom introduces the reader to the scholarly discussion about the status and function of interlinear versions, either as proto-translations for which the interlinear glosses should be read ‘horizontally’, or as aids for reading of the principal text, in which case the relation between lemmas and glosses is ‘vertical’. In the former case, the appraisal of these glosses takes place via a reading process, while in the latter case, there is an important oral aspect of explanation which is not a visible part of the paratext, but still belongs to it. The seven test cases are presented in a chronological order of production, beginning in Chapter 7 with a set of fragments titled ‘the Old Alemannic Psalter Fragments’, dated to about 820, and concluding in Chapter 13 with the Old Frisian Psalter Fragment which has been dated to about 1200. Chapters 8, 10 and 12 discuss complete Latin psalters with Old English glosses: the Vespasian Psalter, the Regius Psalter and the Lambeth Psalter; Chapters 9 and 11 analyse two fragments of psalters with Old Saxon Glosses: the ‘Lublin/Wittenberg Fragments’ and the ‘Paderborn Fragment’. The decision to present the psalters and fragments in a chronological order is understandable but also somewhat remarkable bearing in mind the concluding remark in Chapter 14 that a chronological development did not cause the varieties observed between the psalters; instead, more importance is attached to cultural and geographical variables (p. 241). Nonetheless, Blom’s detailed, sophisticated analyses of the individual psalter manuscripts and fragments open up new horizons for the readers and bring to the fore the typical characteristics of each interlinear version. The fixed template of the discussions, following the methodology outlined in Chapter 2, enhance the possibility for the reader to think along and engage with these discussions. We are helped in some cases by the repeated use of similar fragments in the discussions of different psalters, for example psalm 106: 6–10 for the Old Alemannic Psalter Fragments, the Vespasian Psalter, and the Regius Psalter (pp. 148, 165, 193). The observations and conclusions are manifold and reveal especially the variations in glossing principles and methods in the different psalters. Remarkable examples of the techniques applied (and perhaps invented) by scribes include the use of punctuation as an instrument to understand the Latin text in the Old Alemannic Psalter Fragments, and the strict adherence to morphological agree-

ment between lemmas and glosses, together with relative freedom at a syntactic level, in the Vespasian Psalter. In the end one learns that a similar method of interlinear glossing was applied differently and with various expectations and purposes, rendering obsolete the question of what 'the' purpose of such glossed psalters may be and whether, as an entire text category, they were meant to be read vertically or horizontally.

The third category of texts analysed in *Glossing the Psalms* concerns glossaries containing entries (i.e. lemmas and interpretamenta) deriving from the psalms. Originating in the tradition of *glossae collectae* (the compilation of glossaries from glossed texts), such glossaries were copied, rearranged and reformatted in a substantial number and variety of manuscripts. Blom discusses two families of such glossaries: one is the so-called Leiden or *Rz* family, deriving its dual nomenclature from manuscripts containing the earliest representatives: Leiden, University Library, VLQ 69, and Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Aug 99 (neither of which contains psalter glosses); the other is the M (for Mondsee) Glossary tradition, which constitutes one of the most important sources of glosses in Old High German. In the discussion of the *Rz* family, there are one or two issues that require adjustment. Of the four *Rz* glossaries containing glosses (presumably, Blom means Old High German glosses) on the psalms, two are referred to as St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 292 (p.247). The information in footnote 798 suggests that the first reference is to St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 299 (BStK 225) (see Bergmann & Stricker 2005: 536–540); the second is indeed St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek 292 (BStK 221). The two manuscripts under discussion in Chapter 15, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 19440 and Clm 18140 both originate from the library of Tegernsee in Bavaria and belong to the Mondsee family and stand in direct relation to one another, in the sense that the scribes compiling the glossary in Clm 18140 used Clm 19440 as an exemplar. Both glossaries are testimony to the vibrant glossing culture in the monastic community at Tegernsee, where scribes rearranged and corrected glosses as they copied them from one manuscript to another, while, as the analysis in *Glossing the Psalms* shows, the functional characteristics of the glosses in their original glossed psalters or interlinear versions are still visible. As Blom contends, in Clm 19440, all commentary glosses are in Latin, while substitution glosses, both in Latin and in Old High German, mirror the Latin lemma precisely. It seems that Clm 18104 is one step further in the chain, with a more diverse collection of glosses gleaned from a greater variety of exemplars.

In his conclusions to *Glossing the Psalms*, Alderik Blom rightly points to the intricacy of the paratextual networks which his investigation has uncovered. Glossed psalters and commentaries, interlinear versions and psalter glossaries are far from mono-dimensional. Instead, this book reveals the many dimensions


which appear when the right questions are paired with the appropriate methodology. The combinations of principal text and paratext, Latin and the vernacular, and grammar and textual history, paint a philological picture of a category of texts which still offers many new discoveries. With its detailed investigation of texts, vocabulary and grammar in Latin, Old Irish, Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon and Old Frisian glosses, Alderik Blom's study of glossing the psalms is not for the fainthearted. However, for those who persevere, the chapters constitute a voyage of discovery through Psalterland which no-one who is interested in the languages and literature of early medieval North-Western Europe can afford to miss. *Glossing the Psalms* makes a highly important contribution to the study of written culture in the early Middle Ages.

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