RYLANDS MS FRENCH 5: THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF A MEDIEVAL BIBLE PICTURE BOOK

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Rylands MS French 5, a thirteenth-century book containing a series of miniatures drawn from the Old Testament, was the subject of a monograph by Robert Fawtier in 1923. Fawtier, whose discussion provides a solid foundation for our understanding of this manuscript, identified MS French 5 as an example of a Bible picture book, a relatively rare type of medieval manuscript in which scriptural and hagiographical stories are relayed primarily by means of pictures rather than by text. This article sets out to build upon Fawtier's work specifically with regard to the primacy of the images in MS French 5 over its text – both from the standpoint of production as well from the manner in which MS French 5, and other similar manuscripts, were intended to function as 'readable' books.

Rylands MS French 5 is a small, squarish volume containing a

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series of full-page miniatures whose subjects are primarily drawn from the biblical books of Genesis and Exodus (figs 1a and 1b).
The manuscript presently consists of forty-eight vellum folios (foliated in pencil by a modern hand) interspersed with thirty-seven sheets of laid paper. Each folio measures c.145 mm x c.185 mm. The gatherings were originally made up of groups of four bifolia, though losses have resulted in several gatherings of fewer than eight leaves. An inscription on the verso of the final folio reads ‘xxviii doupples de histoire . . .’, a figure which, if taken as the number of pairs of miniatures in the book at the time the inscription was written, agrees with those missing according to the present arrangement of the gatherings. The book was rebound, probably in the seventeenth century, at which time the above inscription was added; vellum scraps from another medieval book were used as binding tabs.

The pictorial cycle in MS French 5 begins with the Creation story from the opening chapters of Genesis and continues up to the marriage of Moses to the daughter of the priest of Madian (Exodus II:21). The scriptural events are told through a series of full-page, single-subject miniatures executed by an artist working in a late version of the ‘Channel Style’, a style of illumination which comes to the fore in the years around 1200 and which is found in numerous manuscripts from various regions in northern Europe (fig. 2). The illuminator painted only on one side of each folio, creating a series of diptychs alternating with two blank pages of vellum.

The text, which appears along the top and, if necessary, the bottom edges of each miniature, was added in two distinct hands, certainly after (but perhaps not long after) the miniatures were executed. It takes the form of short legends which most often simply describe the scene depicted in a given miniature; several miniatures, however, possess legends which also fill in episodes missing from the miniature cycle or include brief allegorical or moralizing.

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2 The watermarks of this paper have been identified as those of the Strasbourgian paper firm of Wendelin Riehel and assigned a date after 1600; see Fawtier, Manuscrit French 5, 1 and note 1.

3 The manuscript as it exists today consists of seven gatherings which can be reconstructed as follows: 1 (fos 1–2, x, 3–4, x, 5, x); 2(x, 6–12); 3(13–20); 4(21–25, x, 26–27); 5(x, x, 28–33); 6(34–38, x, 39–40); 7(41–48). Fawtier's reconstruction differs only slightly from mine; see Fawtier, Manuscrit French 5, 3.


5 The artist utilized the hair side of each folio for the painted compositions. That this was a conscious effort to make use of the less smooth side of each piece of vellum is suggested by the much rougher scraping typically found on the side of each folio on which a miniature was to be painted.
The vast majority of these legends are only a line or two in length and there is no indication that any preparation for the addition of the texts was made prior to the completion of the images. Both of the scribes write in French – apparently a Picard dialect\(^7\) – and make use of a formal Gothic bookhand. Most of the legends are executed in a hand which is early thirteenth century in date; the hand in which are written the remaining legends – no more than seven in total – is likely to be later, but perhaps only slightly, than the first.\(^8\)

Evidence drawn from the legends, the narrative progression of the pictorial cycle and comparisons between MS French 5 and other Old Testament cycles permits the following conjectural reconstruction of the cycle in MS French 5\(^9\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verso</th>
<th>recto</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fo.1: First Day of Creation</td>
<td>fo.2: Second Day of Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Third Day of Creation)</td>
<td>fo.3: Fourth Day of Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.4: Fifth Day of Creation</td>
<td>(Sixth Day of Creation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The Fall [Gen. III:1–6])</td>
<td>fo.6: Expulsion from Paradise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.7: Birth of Cain</td>
<td>fo.8: Offerings of Cain and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.9: Murder of Abel</td>
<td>fo.10: God speaks to Cain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.11: Cain killed by Lamech</td>
<td>fo.12: Lamech murders his servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.13: Noah builds the ark at the Lord's command</td>
<td>fo.14: Dove returns to the ark with an olive branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.15: The Drunkenness of Noah and the curse of Ham</td>
<td>fo.16: Building of the Tower of Babel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.17: Melchizedek offers bread and wine to Abraham</td>
<td>fo.18: Abraham meets the three angels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.19: Destruction of Sodom</td>
<td>fo.20: Lot and his family flee Sodom; Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.21: Sacrifice of Isaac</td>
<td>fo.22: Meeting of Isaac and Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fo.23: Isaac sends Esau out to hunt and promises his blessing; Rebecca overhears</td>
<td>fo.24: Jacob receives Esau's blessing from Isaac</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^6\) For a transcription of these legends, see Fawtier, *Manuscrit French 5*, 3–6.

\(^7\) Fawtier, *Manuscrit French 5*, 7.

\(^8\) I am grateful to Dr Michelle Brown for her opinions on the hands of both scribes.

\(^9\) Entries in parentheses indicate those missing from the cycle as it survives today.
Clearly MS French 5 does not survive in its entirety; no other extant medieval manuscript breaks off the biblical narrative—either textual or pictorial—at the marriage of Moses and Sophora. The precise nature of the original (or intended) pictorial cycle and the form and content of any texts to which this cycle was initially appended must be reconstructed solely on the basis of comparison with similar cycles in other books. Citing the theories outlined in

Perhaps the closest comparisons to the pictorial cycle in MS French 5 from the standpoint of content are those found in certain illustrated examples of the Haggadah, a set of images and texts used in the celebration of the Jewish feast of the Passover. Haggadoth, particularly those of the Spanish group, often include a cycle of miniatures which recount the story of Moses, and sometimes incorporate miniatures depicting scenes from the Creation through the life of Moses. For discussions and illustrations of such cycles, see J. Leveen, The Hebrew Bible in art (London: British Academy, 1944), 96–104; see also B. Narkiss, Hebrew illuminated manuscripts (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1969).

two earlier publications, Fawtier identified the two most obvious groups of books for comparisons: psalters, which in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries often incorporated relatively lengthy prefatory cycles devoted to biblical subjects, and Bible picture books, which convey the stories of the Old and New Testaments, and sometimes the lives of popular saints as well, by means of pictures, rather than, in the first instance, by text.11

Fawtier's examination of the evidence available to him led him to the conclusion that MS French 5 should be located within the latter group.12 Seventy years of progress in the study of medieval illuminated books have brought numerous additional psalters and several more Bible picture books to light; none of these has in any way weakened this conclusion. If MS French 5 was intended as part of the prefatory cycle of a psalter, that psalter would have contained a series of miniatures which outshone any other such cycle to survive in terms of its narrative density, that is, the slow pace with which it worked its way through the narrative of the Old Testament, and, had it survived intact, in the quantity of its miniatures. Its format (full-page, single-subject compositions) and layout (illumination on one side of each folio only) are also remarkable when compared to those of most contemporary heavily illustrated psalters.

However, simply to conclude that MS French 5 is an example of a Bible picture book is to leave the task unfinished as this small group of manuscripts is itself extremely diverse in size, page layout, narrative content and the relationship between texts and images. To begin with, the single-subject miniature format used throughout MS French 5 is extremely rare even among Bible picture books. Most often an arrangement which allows for four separate subjects to be included on each folio was preferred; manuscripts which display this arrangement include the Morgan Bible Picture Book, the Egerton Genesis and the London-Rovigo Bible Picture Book (figs 3 and 4).13 Indeed, lengthy biblical cycles

11 Fawtier, Manuscrit French 5, 33; De Lisle, 'Livres d'images', 794; Catalogue LXVII de Ludwig Rosenthal, art. 177.
12 Fawtier, Manuscrit French 5, 33-43.
13 Respectively: New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 638; London, British Library, Egerton MS 1894; and Rovigo, Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Concordi, MS 212 and London, British Library, MS Add 15277. There is a certain amount of flexibility regarding the number of compositions per page in each of these books, however; when deemed necessary, a single composition could be extended horizontally over the space of two compositions or vertically to fill the entire length of the picture block. In some cases, an entire folio is utilized for a single scriptural episode. See, for example, the entry into the ark on fo. 3r of the Egerton Genesis, as well as the building and subsequent destruction of the Tower of Babel on fos 5v and 6r of the same book. The Pamplona Bibles of the late twelfth century (Amiens, Bibliothèque Communale, MS lat. 108 and Harburg, Oettingen-Wallerstein Collection, MS 1,2 lat 4o, 15) also include a number of full-page, single-subject compositions but most often the page is divided horizontally with one miniature above the other. The Velislav Bible (Prague, University Library, MS XXIII. C.124, Lobk. 412) of c.1340-50 also makes use of the two-subject format.
included in other types of books also tend to make use of some sort of multi-compositional arrangement – an arrangement which adds visual interest and takes up less space, resulting in a more cost-efficient product;\textsuperscript{14} even in the most lavishly decorated Gothic Psalters, full-page, single-subject miniatures, especially those executed on only one side of each folio, are relatively infrequent.\textsuperscript{15}

The surviving manuscripts which consistently make use of full-page, single-subject miniatures are often so fragmentary as to be difficult to reconstruct. The single leaves now in the Walters Art Gallery and the Musée Marmottan include some miniatures of this type, as well as some folios with illumination on one side only, but the extent of the survival of this cycle precludes its firm identification either as the prefatory cycle of a Psalter or as a Bible picture book.\textsuperscript{16} Likewise, a series of New Testament miniatures made in northern England around 1200 may have been intended as a separate Bible picture book or as part of the prefatory cycle of a Psalter.\textsuperscript{17} This manuscript originally consisted of fifty-one full-page, single-subject miniatures painted on only one side of each folio.

\textsuperscript{14} The mammoth cycle in the Munich Psalter (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm. 835) displays, for the most part, two scenes per page, as does the Huntingfield Psalter (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.43), with its prefatory cycle of ninety-one subjects drawn from the Old and New Testaments as well as the several saints' lives. The scenes in the Trinity College Psalter (MS B.II.4) are mostly six to a page. The biblical picture cycle which prefaces the encyclopaedic \textit{Omne Bonum} in the British Library (Royal MS 6.E.VI) for the most part includes four separate frames per folio; see L.F. Sandler, \textit{Gothic manuscripts 1285–1385} (London and Oxford: Harvey Miller and Oxford University Press, 1986), no. 124; see also Lucy Freeman Sandler, \textit{‘Omne bonum: compilatio et ordinatio} in an English illustrated encyclopedia of the fourteenth century’ in \textit{Medieval book production: assessing the evidence}, ed. L.L. Brownrigg (Los Altos Hills, CA: Anderson-Lovelace, 1990), 183–200. Another quadripartite pictorial division appears in MS Vatican Lat. 8541, a mid-fourteenth-century Hungarian manuscript which depicts the lives of numerous Hungarian saints; see \textit{The Vatican Library: its history and its treasures}, eds Alfons Maria Cardinal Stickler and Leonard E. Boyle (Belser: Yorktown Heights, NY, 1989), 144 and plates lxix–lxixa–lxixb. The Old Testament cycles found at the beginning of some illustrated Haggadah make use of various multiple composition arrangements; for an illustrated Haggadah which includes four subjects per page, see British Library, Add. MS 27210.

\textsuperscript{15} The artists of the Leiden Psalter (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, MS lat. 76A) illuminated only one side of each folio, though nearly all folios contain two subjects, one stacked above the other. Many of the miniatures in the St Louis Psalter (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS latin 10525), all of which also were painted on only one side of each vellum folio, are full-page, single-subject compositions, though numerous others use a slim central column to divide the picture space vertically and to place distinct moments in the cycle side by side.


\textsuperscript{17} Private Collection; see Nigel Morgan, \textit{Early gothic manuscripts I}, no. 16. The original cycle as it now exists begins with Joachim and Anna before the High Priest and ends with the death and assumption of the Virgin. In the case of this cycle, confusion as to its original form and function has arisen because there is more evidence for lengthy New Testament (as opposed to Old Testament) cycles within the context of psalter decoration.
and, although additional texts and miniatures were interspersed with the original set in the fifteenth century, the initial organization of this manuscript suggests that, like MS French 5, it too was intended to display a series of diptychs.

The Huth Bible, a Franco-Flemish book of c.1250, is generally referred to as a picture book rather than as the prefatory cycle for a now-lost Psalter (fig. 5). The manuscript contains fifty-eight full-page miniatures whose subjects are drawn from the Old and New Testaments and the life of St Thomas the Apostle, and the relatively large proportion of images devoted to the Old Testament (forty-four out of fifty-eight, or just over 75 per cent), the small, squarish shape of the book, as well as the use of the full-page, single-subject format make it unlikely that the Huth Bible was originally appended to a Psalter. The Huth Bible provides us with perhaps the closest surviving comparison to MS French 5. It is similar to MS French 5 in size and shape and, though it is likely to post-date the Rylands Library manuscript by at least twenty years, the style of its miniatures suggests that it too was made in north-eastern France or Flanders. The layout of the Huth Bible, with its miniatures painted on only one side of each folio and arranged for the most part in pairs facing each other and alternating with two blank pages, is identical to that of MS French 5. Further, its Old Testament narrative cycle proceeds at a pace directly comparable to that of the earlier manuscript, using the majority of its cycle (as it survives) for Old Testament scenes beginning with the Creation and ending with Moses and the Burning Bush. Finally, the brief inscriptions accompanying the miniatures in the Huth Bible appear, like those in French 5, to post-date the production of the miniatures.

MS 76 F.5 (anc. cod. AA. 261) in the Hague’s Royal Library offers a further comparison which is slightly earlier in date than MS French 5. It was executed in the years around 1200 and is likely to

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18 Chicago, Art Institute, MS 1915.533; see Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago, xvi (1922), 75. This manuscript was formerly in the collections of Henry and Alfred H. Huth; see the sale catalogue for this collection (Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 15-17 and 20-24 November, 1911), Lot 739. See also, S. de Ricci, Census of medieval and renaissance manuscripts in the United States and Canada, vol. 1 (New York: H.W. Wilson & Co., 1935), 514. I must thank Jay Clarke of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago for providing further information on this manuscript.

19 However, the final fourteen miniatures in the Huth Bible, those devoted to the New Testament and the life of St Thomas, are bound out of order and this may indicate that some miniatures from the series have been lost.

20 This point was noted already by Fawtier who included two images from this book in his monograph on MS French 5; see Fawtier, Manuscrit French 5, 43 and plate xlv.

21 MS French 5 measures approximately 18.5 x 15 cm; the Huth Bible 16.8 x 12.4 cm. Both manuscripts are squarish and less rectangular than most quartos.

have been commissioned for, if not made within the precincts of, the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Bertin. The Hague Bible Picture Book is made up of forty-six folios illuminated only on one side. Its pictorial cycle is drawn from the Old and New Testaments (each given thirty-five and fifty-seven scenes respectively) and the lives of numerous saints (seventy scenes in all); unlike those in MS French 5 and the Huth Bible, however, its miniatures typically depict four distinct events.

That two other surviving picture books from the same area include miniatures from the New, as well as the Old Testament and also a number of images devoted to various saints allows the possibility that the pictorial cycle of MS French 5 originally extended beyond the opening chapters of Exodus, perhaps jumping directly to the New Testament and proceeding from there to a group of hagiographical images. The development in precisely this area of France of the illustrated *libelli sanctorum* in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and their enduring popularity into the high medieval period, should not be overlooked here. These books, which most often consisted of a cycle of miniatures depicting events from the life of a local saint (typically the patron saint of the abbey for which the book was intended) followed by a selection of texts to be read on relevant feastdays and celebrations, gave rise to lengthy cycles of pictorial narrative which increasingly appeared without the actual text of the relevant *vita* and so over time gained a certain measure of independence from the liturgical texts (scriptural readings, prayers, etc) that they accompanied. The shape, format and layout of these books are all reminiscent of those in the manuscripts discussed above, especially in MS French 5 and the Huth Bible.

Speculations as to the full extent of the pictorial cycle in MS French 5 must remain exactly that; whether this manuscript originally contained an extended Old Testament cycle, like that of the Morgan Bible Picture Book, or a cycle which included New Testament, and possibly even hagiographical, images cannot now be positively determined. What can be said about this manuscript, however, is that it is unlikely to have been appended to a Psalter – or any other text – and that it should be seen as an example of an

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23 This assumption is owed to the fact that, on fo. 33v, an image of a Benedictine monk appears within the miniature devoted to St Bertin. See Delisle, *Mélanges*, 207–8; Le Comte and De Laborde, *La bible moralisée illustrée*, v, 9; Fawtier, *Manuscrit French 5*, 39.

independent pictorial cycle of the type generally referred to as a Bible picture book.

The decades just before and after 1200 were years of great change in the standard format of the biblical text. The development of glossed Bibles, the Paris recension of the Vulgate text, or the so-called university Bible, the vernacular French 'thirteenth-century bible' and the pocket-Bible are all examples of textual variants developed in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.25 Changes in the manner and extent to which Bibles were decorated were profound as well: this is the age of the Parisian Bible workshops as posited by Robert Branner, the bible moralisée and the Bible picture book.26 All of these changes in the physical nature of the Bible indicate a fundamental shift both in the way in which the Scriptures were intended to be read and in those who constituted the readership of the Bible in the high and later Middle Ages. The development of Bible picture books, with their emphasis on imagery rather than text, is perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of such a reordering of the medieval scriptural experience.

The phenomenon of the Bible picture book has not been addressed in general terms in the literature, but rather only incidentally as it might arise in a discussion of a single example of such a book.27 Even then, an essentially 'Weitzmannian' approach to the pictorial cycles contained within Bible picture books has dominated this area of scholarship. This method of examination,

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27 The most extensive general discussion remains that by Léopold Delisle; see Delisle, 'Livres d'images', passim. For a more recent, brief discussion, see F. Bucher, The Pamplona Bibles, 2 vols (London and New Haven. CT: Yale University Press, 1978), chapter 6, especially 86–90.
which involves the tracing of an individual pictorial composition or iconographic motif back through time ultimately in search of a Late Antique – or even a Classical – archetype, is based on the theory of textual recensions favoured by many literary historians since the late nineteenth century. It was developed as an art historical methodology primarily by the historian of Late Antique and Byzantine manuscripts, Kurt Weitzmann.\(^{28}\) Weitzmann’s method is valuable on the level of the isolated image, but it cannot be used to the exclusion of other methods of examination as it both obscures the many important (and confusing) issues which are relevant to a pictorial cycle as a whole, and, more importantly, it completely sidesteps the fundamental problem of the way in which a Bible picture book was intended to function within its original context.\(^{29}\)

As I have demonstrated above, it is difficult to generalize about the format and contents of Bible picture books. However, the primacy of the images over the inscriptions is universal throughout the surviving examples of this type of book. In the following pages, I shall attempt to point out some of the problems inherent in the organization and format of Bible picture books in general, using the issues brought up by the above reconstruction of MS French 5 as a starting point.\(^{30}\)

As is clear from an examination of MS French 5, there was no provision made for the addition of the inscriptions until after the cycle of miniatures was completed, and it is interesting to note that the descriptive legends in other Bible picture books are also very


\(^{29}\) Recently John Lowden of the University of London has initiated this line of research with his alternative reconstruction of the Cotton Genesis in his article entitled ‘Concerning the Cotton Genesis and other illustrated manuscripts of Genesis’, *Gesta*, xxx (1992), 40–53. His arguments have been presented in fuller form in his most recent book, *The octateuchs: a study in Byzantine manuscript illumination* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), passim.

\(^{30}\) Many of the points I make here (especially those concerning the method of production involved in the creation of a Bible picture book) could be applied equally to the biblical prefatory cycles of numerous contemporary psalters and related books. However, the salient feature of the Bible picture book – that it is intended to function primarily as a story book in pictures, often with minimal (or no) textual cues for the ‘reader’ – differs fundamentally from those Psalter cycles – mainly consisting of New Testament scenes – which typically cover the ‘scriptural ground’ in a much more episodic nature and are awarded a typological significance by the lengthy, Davidic text of the Psalms which normally follows. In other words, in psalters one tends to find Christological scenes which are readily identifiable and serve primarily as visual cues rather than as isolated frames within a slow-moving sequence and which are given their contextual meaning by the text which follows them. Neither of these points holds for Bible picture books.
often, at least in some sense, an afterthought. The mid-thirteenth-century Morgan Bible Picture Book, for example, appears to have been conceived purely as a pictorial narrative, its various captions added between c.1300 and the end of the seventeenth century. The Egerton Genesis contains texts in hands contemporary with its decoration (c.1350–75), but here again we find that the legends are clearly subordinated to the cycle of images; in most cases the ruling was executed only after the miniatures were completed and appropriate allowances were made for towers, heads and trees which would have protruded into a rectangular textblock (fig. 6). The fact that in this book the legends often fail to fill the allotted ruled space further emphasizes that the text was not a formal element of the initial design; the legends were clearly of secondary importance and were added, in a rather inexpert and casual manner, only after the pictorial compositions on a given page had been completed.

That the pictorial cycles in Bible picture books appear to have been formulated prior to the addition, and in some cases the actual composition, of the texts has profound implications for the production of such books. It is well known that the illumination and other decoration found in medieval books were nearly always executed only after the scribes had completed the copying out of the text. Clearly this system was the one that most members of the booktrade knew and were most comfortable with. To deviate from this pattern, in effect to

31 Scholars disagree on the date and origins of the illumination of the Morgan Bible Picture Book; the hand in which the inscriptions are added appears to be Italian and of the fourteenth century. Sidney Cockerell thought it likely that the illumination was executed in Paris c.1250 and the text added by an Italian scribe c.1300; see S.C. Cockerell, Old Testament miniatures: a medieval Picture Book with 283 paintings from the Creation to the story of David (London: Phaidon Press, n.d.; reprint of Cockerell's text for the Roxburghe Club, 1927), 6. Harvey Stahl suggested that the script was Bolognese and perhaps mid-fourteenth century in date; see Stahl, 'The iconographic sources of the old testament miniatures', 5. Robert Branner dated the Morgan Bible Picture Book to c.1250 and placed it within a northern French or English milieu; see Branner, Manuscript painting in Paris, 139. Janet Backhouse has connected the book to the Angevin court at Naples and prefers a dating of c.1270 for the illumination; see Janet Backhouse, Review of Manuscript painting in Paris during the reign of St Louis (by R. Branner, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), Burlington Magazine cxxi (June, 1979), 390. The later Persian and Hebrew inscriptions date from the seventeenth century; see below, note 62.

32 See M.R. James, Illustrations of the Book of Genesis (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1921) and Sandler, Gothic manuscripts 1285–1385, no. 129.

33 Even more ambiguous is the relationship between the text and image found in the Holkham Bible Picture Book (London, British Library, Add. MS 47682); see W.O. Hassall, The Holkham Bible Picture Book (London: Dropmore Press, 1954) and Sandler, Gothic manuscripts 1285–1385, no. 97. Here there is no single identifiable order in which the ruling, drawing, colouring and text were added; there are even examples of individual folios where the two sides have been treated differently. The content of the various inscriptions, several errors in identification of events or the names of biblical personages and the frequent failure of the length of an inscription to match the allotted ruled space all point toward a scribe who was composing as well as writing out the text; see Hassall, Holkham Bible Picture Book, 18–21.

invert the entire process, must have shifted the responsibility for design and overall organization to a group of craftspeople unused to such a responsibility and therefore must often have posed interesting – and at times complex – problems for those involved with the production of a Bible picture book. The extent to which this new arrangement upset the established order of things is graphically demonstrated in the three copies of a Bible picture book initially created for Sancho VIII el fuerte, King of Navarre from 1194 to 1234.

The manner of production of these three manuscripts, known as the Pamplona Bibles, as reconstructed by François Bucher offers proof that although the legends found in the books were most likely intended from the initial planning stages, the books themselves were conceived in the first instance as pictorial rather than textual compilations. King Sancho’s Bible includes images drawn from the Old and New Testaments, as well as scenes from numerous saints’ lives and an apocalyptic cycle. This book certainly received its miniatures before its legends; this is apparent from the fact that the images are invariably framed by an unbroken rectangular surround with the texts then added above, below and between the double lines of the frame as necessary.

A colophon tells us that Sancho’s Bible was completed in 1197; the first copy was executed by many of the same craftsmen only shortly afterwards and may even have been begun before the first volume was completed. Already with this copy – a book for which an exemplar was readily available – we see a reversion to the more traditional methods of book production: in the Harburg copy the text was added first, then the images laid in (note the broken framing devices which had to allow for the pre-existing lines of text). Bucher suggests that this reversion may at least partly be due to the copy having been begun before Sancho’s Bible was actually complete, and that therefore the access of the artists and scribes involved to the exemplar was necessarily limited. This is of

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35 F. Bucher. *Pamplona Bibles*, passim. The London-Rovigo Bible Picture Book may also have received its inscriptions before its miniatures. The frames for the miniatures were certainly painted first (see Rovigo, fo. 38v); the inscriptions were added after the frames were completed, as is indicated by the instances in which the scribe was forced to finish a text down a side margin in order to avoid the painted frame. There is no indication whether the text or the illumination was executed immediately after the red frames were painted in. The occasional departures from the standard page layout (usually four compartments to a page) suggest to me that at least the general design of this volume is likely to have been copied from an earlier exemplar.

36 Amiens, Bibliothèque Communale, MS Lat. 108.

37 See, for example, fo. 39v (reproduced in Bucher, *Pamplona Bibles*, Plate 98).

38 Harburg, Oettingen-Wallerstein Collection, MS 1,2, Lat. 4o, 15.


40 Bucher has found supporting evidence for this in the phonetic spellings of certain names and word combinations in the Harburg copy which are ‘properly’ recorded in the Amiens copy; see Bucher, *Pamplona Bibles*, Chapter 3, passim.
course possible, though the differences in the legends and the increased number of miniatures in the Harburg copy suggest that, though the Harburg manuscript is closely based on Sancho's Bible, it is hardly a slavish copy and that its creators simply took advantage of the exemplar at hand when constructing the new 'edition'.

A third and final copy of Bible, made in France around 1300, shows the extent to which the text was awarded primacy once the earlier manuscripts were themselves fully completed. In this manuscript, the text, which has been extended, typically occupies roughly one third of each folio in a vertical column; the miniatures run vertically down the other side of the page. Evidence from the ruling and pricking shows clearly that the text was indeed completed first, as would normally be expected, with the illuminators coming in after to finish up the job.

It should be pointed out that the inversion of text and image (at least from the standpoint of production) in the Bible picture books mentioned above provides a stark contrast to the fundamentally textual dominance in other [earlier] heavily illustrated biblical paraphrases such as the Cotton and Vienna Genesis manuscripts, the Caedmon Genesis, the Aelfric Hexateuch and the Millstätter Genesis. The Ashburnham Pentateuch (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, cod. n. acq. lat. 2334), with its carefully designed textual and pictorial layout, could be seen as exhibiting both types of emphasis: the manuscript was clearly conceived of as a vehicle for the transmission of the scriptural text of the first five books of the Bible with ordered pictorial insertions, but within the miniatures we find brief captions describing the scene and written around the figures instead of within a neatly ruled textblock. The Genesis

41 New York, Public Library, Spencer Collection MS 22; see Bucher, Pamplona Bibles, Chapter 5 and Illustrations 12–32.
43 The miniatures of the Ashburnham pentateuch, ed. Oscar von Gebhardt (London: Asher & Co, 1883). The Aelfric manuscript exhibits a format: large blocks of text interspersed with framed images, some of which include brief added inscriptions.
frontispieces from Carolingian Bibles are likely to have been adapted from the strip images found in the earliest illustrated Genesis manuscripts; though they appear to utilize pictorial narrative as the major vehicle, they were obviously meant to accompany the biblical text which inevitably immediately follows them.44

The straightforward manner in which the images in most Bibles relate to their texts (i.e. as fairly literal depictions of incidents set out in nearby sections of text) renders discussions of textual sources for such images otiose in all but a few cases. Attempts to identify textual sources for the images, and equally those for the added inscriptions, present in a given Bible picture book reveal a much more complex state of affairs. A Weitzmannian reconstruction of possible sources for the pictorial cycle and the legends in MS French 5, for instance, would be likely to include at least one, and possibly several, written (and perhaps illustrated) biblical compendia for the pictorial cycle, as well as the same, or similar, compilations to serve as an aid to the author-scribe who composed the legends. When the textual and pictorial components of MS French 5 are examined, however, a much less rigid relationship between this manuscript and its 'sources' suggests itself.

To begin with the pictorial narrative contained within MS French 5: there are three scenes in this manuscript, Lamech killing Cain (fo. 11v), Lamech killing his servant (fo. 12r) and Pharaoh offering his crown to Moses (fo. 46r), which are not strictly biblical stories; they represent pictorial accretions to the canonical scriptural stories as found in the Books of Genesis and Exodus (figs 7a and 7b). The story of Lamech and Cain, while perhaps alluded to in the Vulgate version of Genesis,45 is only clearly set out in certain commentaries and glosses on Genesis, the most important being Peter Comestor's Historia scholastica, a commentary on the Bible written in Paris in the third quarter of the twelfth century.46 A similar point can be made for the offering of the Pharaoh’s crown to Moses (who then hurls it to the ground); this incident also appears only in commentaries on Exodus rather than within the biblical text

44 Kessler, The illustrated Bibles from Tours, 13-35.
45 'And Lamech said to his wives Ada and Sella: Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech, harken to my speech: for I have slain a man to the wounding of myself, and a stripling to my own bruising' (Genesis IV:23).
46 The passage appears in chapter xxviii of the Historia Libri Genesis in which Peter Comestor cites Josephus and the Hebrews as his sources; for Peter Comestor’s text, see P.G. Migne, Patrologia latina, 198 (Paris, 1885), cols 1078-1080. The story appears in several forms in the Glossa ordinaria for Genesis. The story as it appears in the commentaries by Jerome, Strabo and Peter Comestor is typically included, with Josephus and the Hebrews again cited as the earlier sources for the story; for example, see London, British Library, Royal MS 4.C.X, fo. 15r; see also, London, British Library, Royal MS 3.E.IX, fo. 33r. For Peter Comestor and his Historia generally, see B. Smalley, The study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), especially chapter v.
Figure 1a
Manchester, John Rylands University Library MS French 5, fo. 7v
(By permission of the Director and University Librarian, J.R.U.L.M.)

Figure 1b
Manchester, John Rylands University Library MS French 5, fo. 8r
(By permission of the Director and University Librarian, J.R.U.L.M.)
Figure 2
Manchester, John Rylands University Library MS French 5, fo. 15v
(By permission of the Director and University Librarian, J.R.U.L.M.)
Figure 3
New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 638, fo. 4r
(By permission of the Trustees of the Pierpont Morgan Library)
Figure 4
London, British Library, MS Add 15277, fo. 1v
(By permission of the British Library Board)
Figure 5
Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, MS 1915.533, leaf 3
(Gift of Mrs J.J. Borland. The Art Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved)
Figure 6
London, British Library, MS Egerton 1894, fo. 6r
(By permission of the British Library Board)
Figure 7a
Manchester, John Rylands University Library MS
French 5, fo. 11v
(By permission of the Director and University Librarian, J.R.U.L.M.)

Figure 7b
Manchester, John Rylands University Library MS
French 5, fo. 12v
(By permission of the Director and University Librarian, J.R.U.L.M.)
Figure 8
Manchester. John Rylands University Library MS French 5, fo. 6v
By permission of the Director and University Librarian, J.R.U.L.M.)
This last example is particularly important as it is not normally included in pictorial cycles of Bible picture books or, for that matter, in the lengthy Romanesque or early Gothic Old Testament cycles which survive elsewhere. Clearly, then, if it were possible to isolate a single pictorial source which informed the cycle of images in MS French 5, it would not be one based solely on the canonical biblical text. If that were the case, one would expect the images to follow the biblical textual narrative; here the images depart from that narrative.

A number of iconographic motifs included in various of the scenes from MS French 5 also depart significantly from the details included in the biblical story. Many of these motifs are commonplace in Old Testament illustration by the early thirteenth century and clearly reflect much earlier pictorial accretions to the 'bare bones' of the text. One such example appears in the scene of the Expulsion (fo. 6r; fig. 8). Here an angel wielding a fiery sword pushes Adam and Eve out of the Garden. The Vulgate version of the story, however, states clearly that God, and not an angel, forced the couple out of Paradise and that he then installed Cherubim and a flaming sword before the entrance. Other scenes from MS French 5 conflate two or more moments of a single story into one miniature presumably in order to maintain the narrative 'flow' while conserving space. The miniature for the drunkenness of Noah, which includes the discovery of his father by Ham, the covering of Noah by his other two sons and Noah cursing Ham, is one obvious instance of this treatment (fig. 2). Both of these two types of artistic licence appear in numerous images both earlier and later in date, and in a variety of contexts. A third scene, however, requires some other explanation. This is the scene of the birth of Cain, in which Eve lies upon a bed holding her infant son as Adam advances across the composition to offer a bowl of food to his wife and son; a steaming cauldron sits on a cooking fire in the foreground (fig. 1a). This

Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica: Historia libri exodii*, chapter V; see also the *Glossa ordinaria* where the story is included in an abstract credited to Jerome, who, in turn, cites Josephus.


Genesis, III:23–24. For other examples of the motif of the flaming sword, see Matthias Exner, 'Flammenschwert' in *Reallexicon für deutschen Kunstgeschichte* 102, ed. K.-A. Wirth (Munich: Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, 1993), cols 698–700.

Depictions of this scene are very rare in all media at this time. A composition which closely resembles the scene in MS French 5 appears in one of the relief panels to the right of the main portal into the upper chapel of Sainte-Chapelle. A similar composition was used by the designer of the Holkham Bible Picture Book to represent the Rest on the Flight into Egypt (fo. 15r).
incident appears nowhere in the biblical text or in the best-known glosses on the story. That a miniature in a rather widely spaced set of images should be given over to a moment in a story which itself hardly occurs is remarkable and again brings up the feasibility of the connection of such a series of images with a single text.51

The legends which accompany the miniatures in MS French 5 vary widely in content and also fail to suggest any single textual source. It would, in fact, appear that the most likely sources for a number of the legends were the images themselves. In many cases, the inscriptions simply describe the actions which occur in the miniatures, such as ‘Here God creates the birds and the fish, the fifth day’52 or ‘Here the merchant sells Joseph to Putiphar’.53 In others, motives or details are filled in by the text; ‘Here Cain kills Abel, his brother, by means of envy when he saw that God loved the sacrifice of Abel more than his own’ is one such example.54 Still others mention important events in a story which have been left out of the pictorial cycle: ‘Here Joseph explains the dreams to the Pharaoh’s butler and baker who are in prison and he told the butler that he would return to his service in three days and the baker that in three days he would hang and it happened as he said to them’.55 All of these types of legend suggest that the scribe was looking at the miniatures to which the legends were to be added and that an effort was made to compose, or to adapt, their content to match as closely as possible the image, or series of images, before him.56 There are, on the other hand, some legends which include allegorical and typological references, and it might be argued that these imply the use of a textual source, perhaps a biblical commentary of

51 The text reads: ‘And Adam knew Eve his wife; who conceived and brought forth Cain, saying: I have gotten a man through God’ (Genesis IV: 1).

52 ‘Ici crie dex oiseax & peisons el quint ior’ (fo. 4v).

53 ‘Ici vendiret le marchaant ioseph a pultifar’ (fo. 28v).

54 ‘Ici ocit cayn abel son frere par envie de co quil veet que/ dex amout meiz le sacrefize abel q[u]e son’ (fo. 9v).


56 The variety in length and the wide divergence of syntax exhibited in the inscriptions in MS French 5 add further weight to this theory. Though most of the legends in MS French 5 begin with the word 'Ici' (or its variant, 'Ci') followed by 'est comment' or directly by a verb, several other forms occur in more than one instance. Among these are 'Ve(e)x ci ...' and 'Quant ...'. However, this pattern is unlike those in several other sets of comparable legends, such as those in the St Louis Psalter (all of which begin 'en ceste page' with 'est comment' following directly on in all but one instance), the Morgan Bible Picture Book ('Qualiter ...'), the Holkham Bible Picture Book ('Comment ...'), and the Rovigo-London Bible Picture Book (in most cases, 'Como ...').
some sort.\textsuperscript{57} The exegetical content of these is, however, on a relatively basic level and I see no reason to ascribe their presence in this manuscript to the familiarity of the author-scribe with any specific textual source.

What all of this evidence suggests is that the use of any particular source – textual and/or pictorial – as the basis of MS French 5 is unlikely. This is not to say that at some level information gathered from various texts or cycles of images did not play any rôle whatever in the production of this book, but rather that there is nothing contained within this book that implies any immediate reliance on a specific source or even group of sources. MS French 5 includes information found in other places, but it takes its cues from itself, not primarily or directly from external sources. We are dealing here with a compilation of images and legends which includes information drawn from a multiplicity of surviving contemporary sources; there is no reason to assume, however, the loss over time of the single source which would explain the content of MS French 5, or of any other Bible picture book. In fact, such books are anthologies or compendia of circulating knowledge or beliefs in exactly the same way that the surviving textual ‘sources’ are.\textsuperscript{58}

The presence of information gathered (indirectly) from so many different sources would not be surprising in a purely textual biblical commentary, and one should not be surprised to find a similar situation in a primarily visual commentary like a Bible picture book. However, the use of a set of images, rather than a text, as the primary mode of transmission of information does raise questions as to how, or even whether, Bible picture books were intended to function as ‘readable’ books. The function of the images

\textsuperscript{57} These include the legend which accompanies the miniature in which Abraham receives the bread and wine from Melchizedek, which reads ‘Here Abraham comes from the battle of the four kings whom he has killed and Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest, offers him bread and wine and (this) signifies the Holy Church’ (‘Ici veint abraham de la bataille de quat[re] reis q[ue] il out ocis/ e melchisedec rei de salem e p[re]st[re] li ofri pain e vin e se/nefie le sac[re]ment de sainte iglise’ [fo. 17v]). A second example occurs on fo. 46r; ‘Here is the daughter of the Pharaoh-King who brought Moses to her father when she had nurtured him until (he reached) three(?) years of age and more and the Pharaoh took his crown and he placed it on (his) head and he threw it on the floor and this signified that he [Moses] would destroy him [Pharaoh]’ (‘Veez ci la fille au rei faraon q[ui] aporta a son pere moyses q[uant] el/lot norri iusq[u’a] treiz anz e plus e faraon p[r]st sa coronne e li mist el/ chef e illa jeta a t[er]re. e ce fu senefiance q[u’il] le destriureit’ [fo. 47v]).

\textsuperscript{58} In particular, the prevalence awarded to certain biblical commentaries and paraphrases, most notably to the Historia scholastica, over others in the construction of Bible picture books seems in large part unwarranted; note, for example, the stress laid by M.R. James on the Historia scholastica as the source for the text in the Egerton Genesis; see James, \textit{Egerton Genesis}, 7-8, for a discussion of the sources of the text and 9-22 for a transcription. Further, as Nigel Morgan has recently pointed out, most lengthy, inscribed Old Testament pictorial cycles from thirteenth-century England reflect the influences of several biblical commentaries, in addition to the biblical text itself; see Morgan, ‘Old testament illustration in thirteenth-century England’, \textit{passim}. 


in the Vienna Genesis or a typical Parisian Bible of the thirteenth century is fairly straightforward as is, for that matter, the manner in which each volume was intended to be used. In the former book, the text is peppered with images which are designed to supplement the reader’s experience of the stories spelled out in the text; in the latter, pictorial decoration in part supplements the reader’s experience, but more importantly serves as a visual cue to help the reader find his or her way around an otherwise lengthy and complex text. In either case, there can be no doubt that the imagery included in these books and others like them is secondary to the text.

This is clearly not the case in a Bible picture book, and the inversion of the traditional relationship between text and image apparent from the modes of production utilized in the Bible picture books, as well as the multiplicity of texts which are needed to ‘reconstruct’ each cycle of images and its accompanying legends, must represent a major shift in the function and experience of the ‘user’ of a manuscript like MS French 5, for here it is the text which serves to ‘illustrate’ the images. In our modern, text-orientated society, rare is the person able to experience an illustrated text first and foremost as a visual experience and not primarily as a textual one. Most scholars who have written on such issues as they pertain to the world of the high and later Middle Ages assume that such emphasis on the written text was not the case and further that a certain fluidity between pictorial and textual narratives existed in the medieval mind.59 Can we really assume that cognitive perception in earlier historical eras functioned in a way so markedly different from our own? Stated simply, can a cycle of images be ‘read’ in the same way as a text?

The very inclusion of descriptive legends in Bible picture books suggests that the answer to this question is no. In the end, if the precise details of a story are deemed necessary for that story to be fully or correctly comprehended by its reader (as would certainly be the case with a story drawn from Scripture), a text-based narrative is necessary; pictures can serve only as visual cues or reminders of knowledge already gained. If Lawrence Duggan’s theories regarding the mimetic value of picture-based versus that of text-based learning are correct, we are left with the conclusion that without a closely linked text (or a very knowledgeable guide leaning over one’s shoulder at all times), a Bible picture book, or any other book ‘written’ in pictures rather than words, would have provided little in

59 This is the supposition that underlies virtually all post-medieval (and many medieval) interpretations of Gregory the Great’s famous statements concerning images and their function for the illiterate. For a recent discussion of this and a summary of the literature, see Celia M. Chazelle, ‘Pictures, books, and the illiterate: Pope Gregory I’s letters to Serenus of Marseilles’, *Word & Image*, 6/2 (April–June 1990), 138–53.
the way of informative or educational value to the 'reader'. Further, we cannot assume that a medieval reader would have recognized all of the stories related in a given Bible picture book, as there would then have been no reason to add the often largely descriptive captions. The Morgan Bible Picture Book provides perhaps the most straightforward evidence that a story told only in images did not necessarily meet the demands of the medieval reader. This book bears no sign that it was originally intended to possess any text at all and in fact received its legends up to fifty years after it was completed. Clearly, at least one early owner of this book was unable to use it satisfactorily or there would have been no need to add the descriptive legends. That a number of these later inscriptions (in an Italian hand of c.1300) misidentify the scenes which they accompany further demonstrates that one cannot assume that a reasonably well-educated member of the nobility (or the professional scribe whom he or she might employ) could be expected at this period to 'read' a set of pictures – many of which we might think of as easily recognizable Old Testament scenes – without the aid of an accompanying text.

This is not to say that the purpose of a Bible picture book could not, at least in part, have been a didactic one. In his monograph on the Holkham Bible Picture Book, W.O. Hassall stressed the connections between the contents and format of this manuscript and contemporary lay teaching aids such as cycles of wall paintings and liturgical drama. We can assume that King Sancho's Bible picture book was put together for didactic purposes, and Bucher has suggested that its thick vellum, lack of gilding and thickly applied pigment indicate that it was intended to be used frequently and perhaps even that it would have accompanied its owner on long, rough journeys and into battle. The contents of many of the less fragmentary Bible picture books do resemble compendia of religious lay training: stories from the Old and New Testaments, miracles and martyrdoms of well-known saints, the Passion cycle and the Last Judgment.

Hassall's linking of Bible picture books with the more communal types of religious teaching tools brings up the question of literacy among the members of society who would have owned Bible picture books. Only King Sancho's Bible includes an inscription specifically assigning this book to a royal owner, but the lavish illustration and the lack of standardization present in most Bible picture books strongly suggests that these books were

60 Lawrence G. Duggan, 'Was art really the "book of the illiterate"?', Word & Image, 5-3 (July-September 1989), 227-51.
61 Hassall, Holkham Bible Picture Book, 30-9.
62 Bucher, Pamplona Bibles, 39.
commissioned individually by members of society who could afford such expenditure. These were presumably aristocrats and upper gentry; the format and content of the books rules out the clergy. It is likely, at least by the thirteenth century, that many men and women from the upper echelons of society were able to read and that many appear to have been fairly learned. That the majority of surviving Bible picture books possesses texts in the vernacular, need not, as Hugo Buchthal has suggested, imply that their users were in possession of only a rudimentary education, but simply that the owners of such books preferred to read for pleasure in their own tongue; surely the upsurge of vernacular literature during the course of the thirteenth century is indicative of increased reading activity among the wealthy laity rather than a falling off of this leisurely pursuit. The points raised above with regard to what might be considered 'common knowledge' for this segment of the population further suggests that the ability to read Latin and/or the vernacular at this period does not in turn suggest a particularly advanced knowledge of biblical or hagiographical stories.

The Morgan Bible Picture Book, along with MS French 5 and the Huth Bible are lavish, expensive volumes, heavily gilded and painted in expensive pigments; in the end, the assumption must be that they were commissioned by only the most privileged people and intended for those of similar taste and rank. This raises the possibility that such books were not intended to be 'used' in any functional manner, and allows that they may have been intended as gifts or objects purely for conspicuous display. Although it has been trimmed, the Morgan Bible Picture Book, for example, shows few of the signs which typically signal heavy (or continuous) use; spots and stains are rare and the fine state of preservation of the miniatures does not suggest years of eager page-turning. The initial lack of textual inscriptions could be taken as proof that the book was not intended to be read in the literal sense. If the illumination of this

63 Janet Backhouse, in her review of Manuscript painting in Paris during the reign of St Louis by Robert Branner, proposed the Angevin court at Naples as a likely location for the manufacture of the Morgan Bible Picture Book (Burlington Magazine, cxxi/915 [June, 1979], 390).

64 For a discussion of the medieval distinctions between the terms litteratus and illiteratus and between the skills of reading and writing, see M. Clanchy, From memory to written record: England 1066–1307, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 231–40. For literacy, reading and the visual arts, see Michael Camille, 'Seeing and reading: some visual implications of medieval literacy and illiteracy', Art History, 8/1 (March 1985), 26–49.

65 Buchthal, Miniature painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, passim, especially 95–7.

66 Michael Clanchy has argued that all medieval literacy begins with a base in rudimentary Latin and that those who wrote, and, by implication, read, in the vernacular – especially in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries – were in fact 'building novel and complex structures on a foundation of Latin'. See Clanchy, From memory to written record, 233.
manuscript is indeed French, and the hand, as seems likely, is Italian, the possibility that the book was alienated from its original patron (a Frenchman) and removed to a new (Italian) context emerges. The most likely form that this alienation would have taken is that of a gift: a gift from one member of the aristocracy to another of a sumptuously illuminated picture book. The Morgan Bible Picture Book’s later history – it was presented as a gift on a diplomatic mission – is perhaps an echo of the circumstances surrounding the manuscript’s initial conception.

The Harburg copy of the Pamplona Bibles is also likely to have been produced as a gift. The Bible of King Sancho VIII, we are told in the colophon, was completed in 1197 by one Fernandus Petrus de Funes for his young, wayward king. Its copy in Harburg, as has been stated above, was produced only slightly later, its text written first and the pictures, often altered slightly, added in afterwards. Bucher has suggested that the Harburg copy, rather more lavish than the original, may have been commissioned for a friend or relative, most likely a female, by a satisfied King Sancho.

Of the early history of MS French 5, we know little beyond its likely execution by illuminators from north-eastern France and the fact that its inscriptions were added by two different scribes at some date(s) after the completion of the miniatures. It must have been an expensive book to produce, suggesting that it was intended as the possession of a wealthy aristocrat or similarly privileged individual. Its sumptuous decoration allows the possibility that conspicuous display was perhaps its most important – or even its only – intended function, though the vast differences in quality – the preparation of the vellum, the materials used, the richness of the decoration – between the surviving Bible picture books does not allow such a conclusion to be drawn solely on the basis of lavish decoration.

Indeed, the pictorial and textual variations, the divergences in size and format and what little is known about details of original intended ownership could be used to argue that the connections between the various Bible picture books are more tenuous than the differences and that students of the medieval book should not attempt to assess such books as a coherent group. In the end, it is true that this fascinating, understudied group of manuscripts shares

67 The book was presented to Shah Abbas, King of Persia, by members of a papal entourage in 1608; see Cockerell, *Old Testament miniatures*, 6–16.
70 The lack of gold leaf and the crudeness of many of the drawings in King Sancho's own Bible picture book provide evidence that gifts in the Middle Ages – even those intended for kings – were not always of the refined sumptuousness of the Morgan Bible Picture Book or of the costly materials of MS French 5.
very few points of contact. However, those similarities that Bible picture books do display, the most important among them being the consistent inversion of the traditional process of manuscript production and the use of the pictorial medium as the primary vehicle of meaning, should not be overlooked by manuscript scholars: such points raise issues vital to our understanding of medieval conceptions of literacy and visual experience. Bible picture books constitute a revolutionary experiment in the history of the illustrated book, and the need to examine such books as coherent and carefully constructed objects rather than simply as repositories of individual iconographic motifs is one that should be given high priority in the future.