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Apocalyptic Verses: Mnemonic Techniques in the Versifications of the Book of Revelation in the Late Middle Ages (s. XIV–XV)

The Book of Revelation and Biblical Versification

Among the numerous memorable stories told in the Bible, the prophecy of Christ heard and seen by John on the Aegean island of Patmos and subsequently recorded by him in the Book of Revelation is probably the most striking one: the gates of Heaven are opened and God is seen seated on his throne in front of which seven flaming torches burn in a sea of crystal; angels, elders, and other mystical creatures sing and adore God day and night (Apoc. 4); seven seals are opened one by one to unleash on the world unimaginable horrors such as horsemen riding on various colored stallions and bringing devastation, despair, and death, while earthquakes cause the sun to become black, the moon to turn the red of blood, and the stars to fall from the sky (Apoc. 6). At the opening of the seventh seal seven angels blow their trumpets one after the other raining further afflictions and deadly plagues upon the earth and its inhabitants (Apoc. 8–9). Among them who can forget Abaddon's winged and crowned locusts, huge as horses, with human faces, long feminine hair, lions' teeth, and scaled bodies (Apoc. 9:7–11); or the red dragon (also called Satan in the text) with his seven heads, ten horns, and long tail, battling fiercely but ultimately unsuccessfully with Archangel Michael (Apoc. 12:3–7); or the beast that rises from the earth in order to deceive mankind and mark the right hand or the forehead of his followers with the number 666 (Apoc. 13:11–18)? Still, not everything in the Book of Revelation is terrible and terrifying. At the end, the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment, at which the righteous would be saved for eternity, are foretold (Apoc. 22), and thus, in addition to instilling eschatological fear, the text also offers utopian hope.[1]

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1   For interesting contributions to the topic, see Labahn, M., Lehtipuu, O. (ed.), *Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (Leuven, Paris, Walpole (Ma) 2011).

The meaning of the Book of Revelation is not easy to comprehend. Is it a prophesy of events that will really come to pass or is it an allegory of mankind's struggle for salvation? The most unusual feature of this biblical account is the impossibility for the reader to understand how time flows in the text. Past, present, and future seem to be both specifically determined and continuously interwoven into a narrative that pulls the story into overlapping and sometimes contradictory temporal dimensions that appear to be both part of history and outside it. The effect is disconcerting and surreal. It is hardly surprising, then, that the exegetical tradition on the Apocalypse begins at the dawn of Christianity and continues throughout the Middle Ages (and beyond).[2] Likewise, it follows that the text motivates millenarian movements of various shapes and doctrines, and the vivid imagery of the prophecy inspires striking artistic representations, not only in manuscripts but also in church decoration.[3] The preoccupation with the second coming of Christ and the end of time seems to be ubiquitous in the medieval period, with one marked exception: the field of Latin biblical versification. I am not saying that individual elements from the Book of Revelation are not alluded to in the verse Bibles written in the period from Late Antiquity to the fourteenth century. What is surprising, however, is the fact that the poets do not versify the apocalyptic account on a grander scale as they do with many other biblical books from both the Old and New Testament.[4]

On the one hand, it is obvious that one does not expect to find a versification of the Apocalypse in biblical paraphrases that engage only with a particular textual component of the Bible, be it a specific narrative episode such as the account of the six days of creation, the tales of Susanna and Dinah, and the story of Christ's nativity; or an individual biblical book such as Ecclesiastes, Esdra, Joshua, Tobit, Job, etc.; or even a larger, but still incomplete, biblical segment such as the Pentateuch or the Old Testament. On the other hand, the question remains as to why the Apocalypse is missing from the full-scale biblical versifications of Lawrence of Durham (ca. 1110–1154), Peter Riga (d. 1209), and Alexander of Ashby (d. 1209 or 1214) whose poems the *Hypognosticon*, *Aurora*, and *Breuissima comprehensio historiarum* cover biblical content extensively.[5] This is at first a puzzling omission until one realizes that for the biblical versifiers of the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries the Bible

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2   An overview of the earliest tradition, see McNamara, pp. 208–259.

3   It is both impossible and unnecessary to present here a bibliography of the scholarly output concerning the Apocalypse. I will just mention two of the most recent publications on the topic which both conceptualizes previous results and offers new departures: Van Duzer, C., Dines, I. (ed.), *Apocalyptic Cartography*; and Yarbro Collins, A. (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Book of Revelation*.

4   The corpus is outlined and discussed in Dinkova-Bruun, G., Biblical Versifications from Late Antiquity to the Middle of the Thirteenth Century, pp. 315–342.

5   For the editions of these works see Daub, S., *Gottes Heilsplan-verdichtet*; and Alexander Essebiensis, *Breuissima comprehensio historiarum*, ed. G. Dinkova-Bruun.

represents the master narrative informing the history of mankind. Thus, their poems are organized according to the Augustinian Six Ages of the World and do not engage with the Apocalypse and the Final Judgment after which the seventh age of eternal peace and bliss is expected to begin. The seventh age is thus not of this world and for the time being remains outside the historical periodization of human history seen as an unfolding flow of events moving towards its predestined fulfillment and end. This understanding of history is widespread in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as is seen also in the hugely influential *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor (d. 1178), which in many cases was mined for historical details by the biblical poets. In this context it is understandable that the ambivalent, highly enigmatic, and post-worldly content of the Book of Revelation was left by the "historians" (be they poets or historiographers) to the scholarly endeavours of the theologians, the mystical interpretations of the millenarians, and the inspired representations of the artists.

Guido Vicentinus's *Margarita*

Things seem to change in the fourteenth century when the genre of biblical versification enters a new stage of development.[6] At that time the impulse of creating a verse Bible becomes textual rather than contextual, and the poets are concerned with covering not just every biblical book but every biblical chapter. The poems of the previous generation were written, as is well known, for mnemonic and didactic purposes,[7] but only in the fourteenth century do the versified Bibles become veritable mnemonic tools aiming to train the memory rather than teach meaning. One could even wonder whether these textual constructs were indeed meant for the public classroom rather than for private exercises in memorization. In this new approach to biblical versification the Apocalypse would naturally be included in the poems, although not by conscious and conceptual choice, but rather simply by virtue of it being the final book of the Bible.

This novel trend seems to begin with Guido Vicentinus, prior of the Dominican Convent of Santa Corona in Vicenza in 1295 and bishop of Ferrara between 1304 and 1332, the year of his death (Kaeppeli, vol. 2, p. 78–80, nos. 1417–1420). Guido's poem *Margarita* is preceded by two prologues, one in prose and one in verse, both of which can be read as manifestos of what the new mnemonic verse Bible should look like and do. The prefaces are addressed to Clement V, pope from 1305 to 1314, a

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6   A concise account of the progression and changes in the genre of biblical versification is provided in Dinkova-Bruun, G., Introduction to Chapter V: *Biblical Poetry*, pp. 299–302.

7   See Dinkova-Bruun, G., Why Versify the Bible in the Later Middle Ages and for Whom?, pp. 41–55; and Dinkova-Bruun, G., The Verse Bible as Aide-mémoire, pp. 115–131.

fact that also provides the date of the poem's composition.[8] What Guido describes in the forewords to his *Margarita* is an extraordinary departure from previous versifying attitudes. In this pearl of a text, which comprises 1500 hexameters, Guido generally dedicates two verses to the main and most noteworthy points (*principalia et notabilia*) of each and every biblical chapter with the purpose of helping the feeble human mind retain the vast text of the Holy Scripture.[9] Guido is aware that this mechanical approach might not be pleasing to everybody, but he dismisses these potential critics as a bunch of ignorant people. It is true that his predecessors, among whom Guido explicitly mentions Peter Riga's *Aurora*, Matthew of Vendôme's *Tobias*, and Alain of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, rendered in a splendid style the historical books of the Bible while adding profound allegories and beautiful moral lessons to them, but none of these works covered the Holy Scripture in its absolute entirety. In fact, the poets before Guido followed the chronology of biblical history rather than the order of the biblical text. Guido even enumerates the books traditionally omitted by the earlier authors, among which he also correctly includes the Apocalypse.[10] However, the fact that the *Prouebria Salomonis* and the *Ecclesiastes* are also mentioned in this context is an indication that Guido had never seen a copy of the *Aurora* which contained these two anonymous and relatively rare accretions to Riga's original.[11]

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8   The prologues to Guido's *Margarita* are discussed in more detail in Dinkova-Bruun, G., Biblical Versification and Memory, pp. 53–64, esp. 53–57.

9   The two exceptions from the rigid rule of two verses per chapter are seen in the versification of Psalm 118, which is covered in 44 hexameters rather than the 2 hexameters generally given to any other psalm, and the versification of the final chapters in each of the four Gospels, which deserve a more detailed treatment because they tell the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection; see Dinkova-Bruun, G., Biblical Versification and Memory, p. 56 and n. 11.

10 Prose prologue to Guido's *Margarita* (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Reg. Lat. 1746, fols. 3r–4r): "Possem autem a nonnullis ignorantibus intencionem meam non immerito reprehendi, cum plures preclarissimi uiri et actores nominati de libris diuinis merite luculentissimo sermone conscripserint et uarios libros ediderint, sicut fuit Petrus Riga in libro qui appellatur *Aurora* et *Thobias* et *Anticlaudianus* et alii, quod ego post tantos uiros et tam excellentes auctores, quibus nullo modo ualeo comparari, aliquid scripsisse presumpsi. Licet autem predicti auctores libros historiales Biblie uel omnes aut aliquos eorum uersibus exametris et penthametris secundum quod unicuique complacuit egregio stilo depinxerint, profundas et allegorias et pulcras moralitates, (fol. 3v) addendo sicut maxime Petrus Riga qui non solum libros omnes ystoriales, sed aliquos alios diseruit luculenter, nullum tamen reperi qui libros omnes Biblie metrico sermone descripsit. Psalterium enim et Prouerbia Salomonis et Ecclesiastes et Librum Sapiencie et Ecclesiasticum et tres Prophetas Maiores, scilicet Ysaiam, Iheremiam et Ezechielem, et duodecim Prophetas Minores et Epistolas canonicas et Apocalipsim quilibet intermisisse uidetur. Seruauerunt eciam prefati auctores in libris Biblie magis ordinem rei geste, sicut fecit magister in *Hystoriis scolasticis*, quam ordinem librorum et capitulorum qui communiter in Biblia obseruatur. Mea uero intencio fuit de omnibus et singulis capitulis librorum Biblie aliquos flores colligere et ordinem ac modum seruare qui traditur in diuina scriptura et communiter in Biblia continetur. Et ideo non laboraui uerbis exquisitis seu rethoricis et poeticis (fol. 4r) uti, sed uerbis illis quantum commode potui, quibus utitur diuina scriptura, ut melius ualeant in memoria retineri."

11 These additional poems are edited in Dinkova-Bruun, G., Liber Ecclesiastes: An Anonymous Poem, Incorporated in Peter Riga's *Aurora*, pp. 159–172; and Dinkova-Bruun, G., *Prouerbia Salomonis,* pp. 9–44.

Guido proudly states that he has made an effort not to use exquisite words of rhetoric and poetic flare. For him the actual biblical expressions hold the most beauty and power, so these are the phrases he has chosen to include in his verses. In short, there are three characteristics distinguishing the *Margarita* from its predecessors: one, it contains the entire Vulgate, not only all its books but also all its chapters; two, it preserves the order of these books and chapters perfectly; and three, it uses vocabulary borrowed directly from the biblical text, thus avoiding fancy figures of speech and external exegetical interpretations. These specific traits establish the standard followed by all biblical versifiers after Guido. Complete and concise, regimented and plain, the new type of verse Bible transforms memorization into a mechanical exercise by abandoning the narrative rooted in the logical progression of history and creating a mnemonic tool based on the systematic predictability of textual order and the comfortable familiarity of linguistic expression.

The Book of Revelation comprises 22 chapters, and is accordingly versified by Guido in 44 hexameters as prescribed by his own two-verses-per-chapter rule. For the sake of brevity, I have chosen to concentrate in this article on the last six chapters of the biblical narrative, where we read about the punishment of the Whore of Babylon (chapter 17), the fall of Babylon (chapter 18), the wedding feast of the Lamb and the rider on a white horse (chapter 19), the defeat of Satan and the Final Judgment (chapter 20), the new Heaven and Earth and the new Jerusalem (chapter 21), and finally, the second coming of Christ (chapter 22). Guido's versification of these dramatic events is competent and immensely readable but somewhat bland and colourless:

> 17 Aspicitur mulier meretrix Babilon, reserantur
>   Que septem capita, que cornua uincit et agnus.
>
> 18 Angelus exclamat: "Cecidit Babilon," quia uixit
>   Deliciis reges, plangent, merces pereuntque.
>
> 19 Post alleluya, laudes cantantur, et agnus
>   Aduocat ad cenam, risidens in equo dominatur.
>
> 20 Angelus hinc Sathanam religat mittens in abissum;
>   Soluitur, et fallax cruciatur, quisque resurgit.
>
> 21 Cuncta nouantur, abit dolor, ornatus quasi sponse
>   Vrbis Iherusalem sequitur quam scriptus, et intrat.
>
> 22 Angelus ostendit fluuium uitaleque lignum;
>   Spernit adorari Ihesus: "Ipse ueni cito splendens."[12]

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12 The text is transcribed from Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Reg. Lat. 1746 (s. XVin.), fols. 81v–82r. The numbers to the left of the verses refer to the biblical chapters; they are found also in the mansucript. The book is introduced by the rubric: "Incipiunt capitula libri Apocalipsis, numero XXII" on fol. 82r.

It is understandable that compressing entire chapters into just two hexameters meant that much had to be omitted, but in the case of the Apocalypse this approach led to the sacrifice of the narrative's most vivid imagery. For example, in Guido's chapter 17, which can be translated as "The female whore of Babylon is seen and the seven heads and the horns, which the Lamb conquers, are revealed," the *meretrix* is indeed mentioned, but there is not even an allusion to the fact that she is dressed in purple and scarlet; that she is covered in gold ornaments, precious stones, and pearls; that a secret name is written on her forehead; and that she, drunk with the blood of the faithful, holds in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and impurities. The same is also true for the beast, on which she is sitting. Simply referring to its seven heads and ten horns falls short of the biblical depiction of a timeless mysterious creature symbolizing mountains, kings, and destruction.

Another case in point is also seen in Guido's chapter 21, where the beauty of the New Jerusalem is referred to as *ornatus urbis Iherusalem* – but such a cursory note cannot possibly capture the bejewelled sight of the golden city conjured in such marvellous detail in the biblical text. Poetically, what Guido does is clearly not enough, but mnemonically his hexameters work perfectly, since they succeed in evoking what the poet passes over in silence. No wonder then that Guido himself calls his verses *capitula*, clearly alluding to their summary and utilitarian character.

Petrus de Rosenheim's *Roseum memoriale*

Guido's *Margarita* became a success. This is seen, on the one hand, in its considerable manuscript transmission (we know of at least thirty manuscripts containing the work), and on the other, in the fact that the poem was subsequently imitated and revised. One such revision was produced a century after Guido's time, that is, in 1423–1426, by Petrus de Rosenheim (1380–1440), a monk at the Benedictine monastery of Melk.[13] Even though Rosenheim adopted the two-verses-per-chapter rule championed by Guido, his *Roseum memoriale divinorum eloquiorum* represents the next level of mnemotechnic poetry. This is how the final six chapters of the Book of Revelation are represented here:

1	Ad septem nunc ecclesias **Apocal** reseratur	Apocalypsis
	Mira uidet domini facta Iohannes ibi.	
17	**R**espicitur mulier meretrix Babilon, reseratur	Et uenit unus
	Quid septem capita, quid quoque cornua sint.	
18	**S**ucclamat "Cecidit Babilon" hic angelus, unde	Et post hec uidi

13   For a preliminary discussion of the *Roseum memoriale*, see Tiedje, S., The *Roseum Memoriale Divinorum Eloquiorum Petri de Rosenheim*, pp. 335–353. For Peter's life and works, see Rosenfeld, H., Petrus von Rosenheim OSB, cols. 518–521.

	Reges et merces deliciis pereunt.	
19	**T**unc alleluia, laudes iubilantur, et agni Cena datur, sed eques hic residet dominus.	Post hec audiui
20	**V**inctus abit nequam uictor Sathan, hunc et abissus Annis mille ligat, morsque secunda patet.	Et uidi angelum
21	**A**t noua sunt cuncta, dolor abstersus, decor urbis **S**ponse Iherusalem stat uario lapide.	Et uidi celum nouum
22	**B**issenos fructus lignum reddens, fluuiumque Angelus ostendit, se nec adoret ait.[14]	Et ostendit mi

As can be seen from this example and the examination of the entire work, the *Roseum memoriale* differs from the *Margarita* in three significant ways. First, the meter has changed from hexameters to elegiacs. Second, the distichs are arranged in an abecedarian order using twenty of the letters of the Latin alphabet, leaving out K, X, Y, and Z, and using V to represent both U and V as a single letter, while adding J after I. When a given biblical book contains more than twenty chapters, the abecedarian order re-starts with the letter A, as is seen in chapters 21 and 22 of the text above: *At noua sunt cuncta* and **B**issenos *fructus*. Since this arrangement could potentially cause confusion, Peter always includes the name of the biblical book, even if it had to be abbreviated, in the first verse of the versification of that book, which in our case is demonstrated by the opening line "Ad septem nunc ecclesias **Apocal** reseratur." Further difficulties in identifying one's place in the biblical text are prevented by the addition of the first words of any given chapter in the right margin of the poem. When a second set of twenty verses begins (*secunda vigena*, as Peter calls them), the pentameter always starts with the letter S, as can be observed in the second line for chapter 21: "**S**ponse Iherusalem stat uario lapide." The pentameter for *tertia vigena* would start with the letter T, which we do not see here. This arrangement represents an ingenious mnemonic web that can be quite useful, once the reader understands how to navigate through its various intricate components.[15] Finally, the third difference with the *Margarita* – and this is the one true departure from Guido's programme – is seen in the fact that the *Roseum memoriale* does not versify the Psalter. Consequently, the length of the poem is reduced from 1500 to 1194 verses, which might offer a memorizing advantage, but which defeats Guido's purpose and pride in offering a full and complete versification of all biblical books.

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14 The text is transcribed from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 20203 (s. XV, Tegernsee), fols. 140v–142v (chapters 17–21 are found on fol. 142r–v). This is a very interesting manuscript from Tegernsee, whose small size suggests that it was a portable object used for private study.

15 For further devices used by Peter to facilitate cross-referencing and searchability, see Tiedje, S., The *Roseum Memoriale*, pp. 338–340.

Despite these modifications in meter, organization, and content, the actual text of the *Roseum memoriale* is very similar to Guido's style, in some instances with expressions repeated verbatim. If we compare the rendering of chapters 17 and 21 of the Apocalypse, which were discussed earlier, we can see immediately that Peter introduces only minute changes in his hexameters which generally continue to carry the same meaning and employ the same linguistic choices as Guido's verses.[16] The pentameters, however, are more imaginative, probably because here Peter had to shorten Guido's original because of the meter. As a result, in chapter 17 he removes from Guido's verse the reference to the victorious battle of the Lamb against the whore's beast, and in chapter 21 he replaces the very important fact that only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life can enter the New Jerusalem with a mention of the various stones used in the construction of the city. Thus, at least in these two cases, Peter's poem represents a slightly impoverished redaction of Guido's text. Still, the *Roseum memoriale* claimed a place of prominence in its own right. Not only is it preserved in as many manuscripts as the *Margarita* (thirty), but it was also printed for the first time in 1470, only forty years after its composition, and subsequently reprinted multiple times in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries (Rosenfeld, col. 519). In addition, similarly to the *Margarita*, the *Roseum memoriale* received its own revised version produced in the late fifteenth century by Johannes Schlitpacher (1403–1482) – Peter's student, confrere at Melk, and a fellow reformer (Worstbrock, 1992, cols. 727–748). Johannes uses Peter's work as a basis for his *Biblia metrica* or *Gemma Biblie* but decides that dedicating two verses per biblical chapter is unnecessary and reduces the coverage to one hexameter per chapter. At the same time, Johannes follows Rosenheim in his abecedarian arrangement and the omission of the Psalter. As a result, the *Gemma* is only half the length of the *Roseum memoriale* and by necessity its contents are even more cursory, as can be seen in the versification of the final six chapters of the Apocalypse:

17	**R**espicitur meretrix, de qua docet angelus ipsum.	
18	**S**ed cecidit Babilon, flent reges, merx quia cessat.	
19	**T**unc daturt alleluia, rex regum dominatur.	
20	**V**inctus demon abit de carcere, post datur ignis.	
21	**A**t noua sunt, stat urbs, lapides ornant preciosi.	
22	**B**is sex sunt fructus ligni, cadit hinc ut adoret.[17]	

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16 For example, Guido's first line on chapter 17 reads: "Aspicitur mulier meretrix Babilon, reserantur," which is rendered by Peter as: "Respicitur mulier meretrix Babilon, reseratur." Thus, the only two changes made here are the verb *aspicitur* becoming *respicitur*, and the plural in *reserantur* becoming the singular *reseratur*. As for chapter 21, Guido's "Cuncta nouantur, abit dolor, ornatus quasi sponse" becomes in Peter: "At noua sunt cuncta, dolor abstersus, decor urbis," which basically says the same thing even after the rewriting.

17 The text is transcribed from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 18980 (s. XV, Tegernsee), fol. 38r.

From everything discussed above it becomes apparent that, notwithstanding their differences and particular characteristics, the poems of Guido Vicentinus, Petrus de Rosenheim, and Johannes Schlitpacher are closely related to each other, creating a direct line of dependence of the later versifier on the work of his predecessor. These compositions are, thus, members of the same literary family of systematic and compressed versifications of the Bible that are mainly concerned with facilitating memorization by using the actual wording and order of the biblical text. The verses these poets write are plain and matter-of-fact, but they still comply with the rules of grammar, and even though their style is telegraphic and abrupt, the *Margarita*, the *Roseum memoriale*, and the *Gemma Biblie* can still be read like any other medieval poem.

The anonymous *Capitula versifice scripta* and the *Summarium Biblicum*

The situation changes dramatically in the last two examples to be examined here, both found together in an early fifteenth-century manuscript from Prague containing an anonymous marginal and interlinear commentary on the New Testament supplemented with mnemonic poetry.[18] The first of these works is the anonymous *Capitula versifice scripta*, a poem that is relatively rare,[19] whereas the second one is the hugely popular *Summarium Biblicum* found in over 400 manuscripts.

The *Capitula* dedicates one line per chapter, as did Johannes Schlitpacher, but in contrast with Johannes's *Gemma Biblie* the verses of the *Capitula* no longer make any grammatical sense. They are composed of unconnected strings of nouns in different cases and verbs in different tenses, making the whole work a bizarre construct. Thus, the final six chapters of the Apocalypse are represented in the following manner:

17	Coccineam, poculum, ebriam, exponit, pugnabunt.
18	Cecidit, exite, quantum, ue, longe, molarem.
19	Laus, laudem, agni, cecidi, gladius, claues, missi.
20	Cathenam, animas, partem, missus, liber, missus.
21	Nouam, absterget, sicienti, ciuitas, eget.
22	Lignum, nox, uenio, tempus, lauant, foris, testor.[20]

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18 Prague, National Library, Ms. VI D 21 (before 1413, Bohemia). For a study using this manuscript, see Cermanová, P., Constructing the Apocalypse, pp. 66–88.

19 The versification of the Gospels from the *Capitula* are printed in Dinkova-Bruun, G., Remembering the Gospels, p. 235–273, edited from two manuscripts, one from Copenhagen and one from Vienna. For the third witness from Prague, see Doležalová, L., The Biblia Picta Velislai, pp. 327–348, spec. 334–336.

20 The text is transcribed from Prague, National Library, Ms. VI D 21, fols. 768v–769r.

In order to understand the poet's versifying technique, let us look at the hexameter dedicated to chapter 22 of the Book of Revelation. It reads: "Lignum, nox, uenio, tempus, lauant, foris, testor," or in translation: "Tree, night, I am coming, time, they wash, outside, I warn." The strangeness of this line is explained by examining the biblical text from which the words are lifted with minimal or no change. They also follow precisely the order in which they appear in the biblical chapter from which they are taken. Both these features – familiarity and order – are again the hallmarks of this memorizing enterprise. The following table will bear this out:

Word in *Capitula*	Biblical verse	Text in Bible
Lignum	Apoc. 22:2	et ex utraque parte fluminis **lignum** vitae
Nox	Apoc. 22:5	et **nox** ultra not erit
Uenio	Apoc. 22:7	et ecce **venio** velociter
Tempus	Apoc. 22:10	**tempus** enim prope est
Lauant	Apoc. 22:14	beati qui **lavant** stolas suas
Foris	Apoc. 22:15	**foris** canes et venefici et impudici et homicidae et idolis servientes et omnis qui amat at facit mendacium
Testor	Apoc. 22:18	con**testor** ego omni audienti verba prophetiae

Three features of this verse invite comment. First, the use of *nox* for verse 5 is a misrepresentation of the biblical text, which states: "And there will be no more night." Even though it is understandable that the *non erit* could not be included for metrical reasons, having just *nox* is somewhat confusing. We see the same situation in the previous line (for chapter 21), where the last word in the verse is *eget* for the biblical *non eget*, because Apocalypse 21:23, from which the verb comes, clearly states that the New Jerusalem will be illuminated by the glory of God and thus will not need the sun and the moon.

Second, the last word *testor* is a shortened version of the biblical *contestor*, an abbreviation that again had to be introduced for metrical reasons. This peculiar method of fitting in biblical vocabulary is also attested in other sections of the *Capitula*, where the poet even uses nonsensical forms such as *clau* for *clauditis*, *pul* for *pullos*, and *ga* for *gazofilacium*.[21]

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21 Dinkova-Bruun, G., Remembering the Gospels, pp. 242–244.

Finally, and this realization comes as a surprise, the strange verse of the *Capitula* actually packs in more mnemonic clues than any of the previously discussed poems. Since they all depend on each other, Guido Vicentinus, Petrus de Rosenheim, and Johannes Schlitpacher basically mention two general ideas for Apocalypse 22: one from the beginning of the chapter where the angel shows John the river and the tree of life, and one from the middle where the Lamb announces his imminent second coming and forbids John to worship him. The verse of the *Capitula*, however, alludes to much more than that, by mentioning that **the time** of the Lamb's return is near; that when the event occurs there will be **no night**; that those who **wash** their robes will be allowed to enter the city, while dogs, sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood will remain locked **outside**. The verse even includes **the warning** that, upon fear of severe punishment, nobody should alter the wording of the prophecy told in the Book of Revelation.

Despite all of this ingenuity, the modern reader cannot help but wonder how useful this type of mnemonic versification is and how it functioned in reality. It seems obvious that a thorough knowledge of the Bible was already required in order for the *Capitula* to work as an aide-memoire, or perhaps the idea was to make the medieval memorizer go back to the biblical text and look there for the key words in the poem in front of him, thus refreshing his memory of what the Bible actually says. Whatever the intention, the anonymous *Capitula* can even less be called a literary creation than the already borderline cases of Guido's *Margarita*, Petrus de Rosenheim's *Roseum memoriale*, and Johannes Schlitpacher's *Gemma Biblie*.

The tendency exhibited in the anonymous *Capitula versifice scripta* is taken to the extreme in the hugely popular *Summarium Biblicum*, supposedly written by the thirteenth-century poet Alexander de Villa Dei, but quite likely not by him.[22] The *Summarium* versifies the complete biblical text in 200 hexameters, and the Apocalypse in just four lines, giving each chapter of the Bible a single word:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Septem.	Bis bine.	Tres.	Sedes.	Soluere.	Sextum.

7	8	9	10	11
Milia.	Thuribulum.	Puteumque.	Tonitrua.	Testes.

12	13	14	15	16	17
Pugna.	Due.	Cantant.	Plagas.	Phialas.	Meretricis.

18	19	20	21	22
Flebunt.	Ad cenam.	Surgunt.	Sponsam.	Venio iam.

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22   See Jean De La Haye, *Biblia Maxima*, vol. 1, pp. 1–10; and Doležalová, L., *Biblia quasi in saculo,* pp. 5–35, which contains a transcription of the text from the Cistercian codex Lilienfeld 145 (s. XIV).

This is so incomprehensible that all copies of the *Summarium* are accompanied by interlinear glosses, which often are not the same. While examining the key words the *Summarium* choses as representative of each biblical chapter, we have to admire the resourcefulness of its creator. These are truly central concepts in the chapters, with the whore of Babylon (*meretrix*) representing chapter 17, the weeping (*flebunt*) at the fall of Babylon standing for chapter 18, the marriage supper of the Lamb (*ad cenam*) for chapter 19, the first resurrection of the souls (*surgunt*) for chapter 20, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven dressed as the bride of God (*sponsam*) for chapter 21, and the second coming of the Lamb (*venio iam*) for chapter 22. However, this rationalization of the contents of the *Summarium*, does not make its text less cryptic for the non-initiated reader. The poem clearly has a mnemonic value, but what is this value exactly? And let us not forget that the poem is found in 400 manuscripts. Why? The modern reader can only marvel at how such an obscure text could be so popular (Doležalová, 2012).

Conclusion

This article started with the question "Where are the versifications of the Book of Revelation?" As I have shown, they have been found in the biblical mnemonic poems of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but they are not what we might have expected. The Apocalypse is included in these late medieval verse compositions only because they strive to cover the complete text of the Bible, book per book and chapter per chapter. Being meticulous and orderly does not make these poems poetic. As a consequence, the ambiguity of the Apocalypse's highly imaginative narrative is completely lost and the enigma of the end-times glossed over. From a prophecy bristling with portents the Book of Revelation has become a tame and plain text, similar in character and expression to the rest of the Bible. Indeed, the Apocalypse was eventually versified but in the process it became a much-diminished version of itself. The general tendency in the biblical versification from the late Middle Ages is towards gradual compression and excessive brevity that in some cases verges on obscurity and incomprehension, as we have seen in the *Summarium Biblicum*. In this type of mnemonic poetry rules of grammar are bent and the traditional poetic expressiveness abandoned in the service of crafting tools for memorization. We, as countless medieval students before us, are of course grateful to Guido Vicentinus, Petrus de Rosenheim, and Johannes Schlitpacher for creating verses of such ingenuity and precision, but one cannot help but wonder what Hildebert of le Mans, Lawrence of Durham, Matthew of Vendôme, or Peter Riga would have done with the Book of Revelation, had they decided to versify it. I personally would not have minded reading a poem on the flapping wings of those flying horse-sized non-locusts. Being

meticulous, orderly, and Bible-quoting certainly helps the memory and provides practical usefulness, but it hardly creates poetry.

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Greti Dinkova-Bruun

Apocalyptic Verses: Mnemonic Techniques in the Versifications of the Book of Revelation in the Late Middle Ages (s. XIV–XV)

With the appearance of Guido Vicentinus's poem *Margarita* in 1305/1314 the long-lived and venerable genre of Biblical versification entered a new period of development. With Guido's work as a model, the verse Bibles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries became veritable mnemonic tools for mastering the vast contents of Holy Scripture. This article examines this literary metamorphosis through the prism of the verse rendering of the Book of Revelation in the poetic compositions of Guido Vincentinus (d. 1332), Petrus de Rosenheim (1380–1440), Johannes Schlitpacher (1403–1482), as well as the anonymous *Capitula versifice scripta* and Ps.-Alexander de Villa Dei's *Summarium Biblicum*.

Greti Dinkova-Bruun

Apokaliptični verzi: Mnemonične tehnike v verzificiranju Janezovega Razodetja v poznem srednjem veku (14.–15. stoletje)

Ključne besede: svetopisemsko verzificiranje, Knjiga razodetja, Guido Vicentinus, pomnjenje, mnemonična poezija, Petrus de Rosenheim, Johannes Schlitpacher

Ko je bila med letoma 1305 in 1314 objavljena pesem Guida Vicentina *Margarita*, je že dolgo prisoten in spoštovan žanr biblijske verzifikacije vstopil v obdobje novega razvoja. Ob Guidovem vzoru so v verze prelite Biblije 14. in 15. stoletja postale pravo mnemonično orodje za obvladovanje velikega svetopisemskega vsebinskega sklopa. Članek obravnava te literarne metamorfoze, ki jih je v verze preoblikovana Knjiga razodetja doživela v poetičnih stvaritvah Guida Vicentina († 1332), Petrusa de Rosenheima (1380–1440), Johannesa Schlitpacherja (1403–1482), pa tudi neznanega avtorja, ki je sestavil *Capitula versifice scripta*, in Psevdo-Aleksandra de Villa Dei, ki je sestavil *Summarium Biblicum*.