

# VALLA ON BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP:

metadiscourse at the court of Nicholas V



By Annet den Haan

*Lorenzo Valla's Annotations to the New Testament have been the object of study both as part of the history of Biblical scholarship and in the context of Valla's own intellectual development. The work was, however, embedded in the intellectual context of the Vatican court in the 1450s, where several humanists were engaged in Biblical scholarship. A comparison of Valla's approach to the Bible with that of Cardinal Bessarion, George of Trebizond, and Giannozzo Manetti shows that these authors shared a set of principles which they debated among themselves and applied each in their own way.*

## Introduction

Like the other chapters in this volume, this contribution concentrates on humanist metadiscourse in one particular field, in this case Biblical scholarship. I use the word 'metadiscourse' to denote the way the authors concerned discuss and reflect on their practice, ranging from their statements and claims about the purpose and relevance of their work to concrete instructions as to how the work is to be carried out. For my investigation of humanist metadiscourse on Biblical scholarship, I take the work of Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) as a starting-point. Written in the middle of the fifteenth century, Valla's *Annotations* to the New Testament were discovered and published by Erasmus half a century later, and they had an immense impact on Erasmus' own *Novum Instrumentum* (1516).

In the past, Valla's notes have been studied in roughly two ways: as part of the history of Biblical scholarship, and as part of Valla's own intellectual development. Valla's reception in the early sixteenth century was such that his new philological approach to the Bible could be (and often was) studied as part of a progressive line that was seen to culminate in modern Biblical criticism. This was done, for example, by Charles Trinkaus and Jerry Bentley.<sup>1</sup> Looking backwards in time, Cornelia Linde investigated the assump-

---

<sup>1</sup> Trinkaus 1970; Bentley 1977; Bentley 1983.

tions and beliefs underlying the Biblical scholarship of a number of medieval and early Renaissance authors, including Valla.<sup>2</sup> The place of the *Annotationes* in the context of Valla's oeuvre was thoroughly examined by Mario Fois, Giovanni di Napoli, and Salvatore Camporeale.<sup>3</sup>

What all these studies have in common is that they pick and choose from among Valla's notes in order to illustrate a broader development. Christopher Celenza problematized this approach, proposing to study the notes in their own right, reading each comment in the context of the work as a whole. When this is done, the philological nature of the work stands out much more clearly than its occasional theological implications.<sup>4</sup>

Building on these earlier studies, the present paper suggests that Valla's *Annotationes* deserves to be studied in the context of fifteenth-century Roman humanism. Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455) was one of the most prominent patrons of humanism of his time. At his court, numerous commentaries to and translations of Greek works were produced, including the translation of Xenophon's *Cyropedia* by Poggio Bracciolini, translations of Plato and Aristotle by George of Trebizond and Giovanni Tortelli, and Valla's versions of Herodotus and Thucydides.<sup>5</sup> In this environment, several scholars were engaged in Biblical scholarship, and their work was informed by a set of shared principles – a common metadiscourse. These principles were philological in nature, which helps explain why Valla's notes, in sharp contrast to some of his other works, are only occasionally concerned with theological issues. The shared metadiscourse, however, was applied in various ways, and the humanists debated it among themselves. The humanists discussed in this paper did not all reside at the Vatican at the same time, and they held very different positions there. Although it is likely that there were connections between their works, these are often difficult to prove. Yet they were all part of the same intellectual context.

In what follows, Valla's work on the Bible and its underlying principles will be introduced first, as well as the attack on him by Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459). Next, Valla's view on Biblical scholarship will be compared with some of the arguments forwarded in the debate between Cardinal Bes-

---

<sup>2</sup> Linde 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Fois 1969; di Napoli 1971; Camporeale 1972. Some of Camporeale's work on Valla was recently published in English translation (Camporeale 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Celenza 1994. In an article on Valla's theology, John Monfasani remarks that, theologically speaking, the notes are 'weak soup.' Monfasani based his discussion on other works (see footnote 25 below).

<sup>5</sup> Valla's translation of Thucydides is discussed by Marianne Pade elsewhere in this volume.

sarion (1403–1472) and George of Trebizond (c. 1395–c. 1472). Finally, Valla’s case will be compared to that of Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459).

### Valla’s *Collatio* or *Annotationes*

Valla worked on his notes to the New Testament during the 1440s and 1450s, both in Naples and Rome.<sup>6</sup> In 1446 he lost his working copy, and after his move to Rome in 1447 he started all over again. Because of his doubtful reputation with regard to religious matters, it had been impossible for him to acquire a position at the Vatican under Eugenius IV. But Nicholas V, the humanist Pope, was more open-minded and more sensitive to Valla’s obvious talents. Valla would eventually rise to become papal secretary in 1455.

Once at the Vatican, he showed his work on the New Testament to close friends, intending to dedicate it to Nicholas V. He wrote a preface addressed to the Pope, but the work was not published in his lifetime.<sup>7</sup> Valla’s notes are known today mostly through Erasmus’ edition of them, which appeared in 1505. This text, which is commonly referred to as the *Annotationes*, after Erasmus’ title for the work, is based on the later redaction written in Rome.<sup>8</sup> An earlier version, closer to the Neapolitan redaction that Valla lost, was discovered several decades ago in a Parisian manuscript. This redaction was published by Alessandro Perosa in 1970, and is now known as the *Collatio*.<sup>9</sup> The *Collatio* and the *Annotationes* partly overlap, and I distinguish between the two only when necessary.

The purpose of Valla’s work on the New Testament was to correct the Vulgate, the Latin translation commonly used in his time, which was ascribed to Jerome.<sup>10</sup> Valla was familiar with Jerome’s writings and he highly admired the Church Father.<sup>11</sup> And yet, by criticizing the Vulgate, he challenged Jerome’s authority. Valla’s excuse was that the Vulgate in the fif-

---

<sup>6</sup> For the development and sources of Valla’s work, see e.g. Bentley 1983, 34–36.

<sup>7</sup> This text exists in two versions; the second dates from 1449. They were published for the first time by Alfonso De Petris together with his edition of the *Collatio* (Valla 1970), and more recently by Christopher Celenza, with facing English translation (Celenza 2012).

<sup>8</sup> The full title of Valla’s notes in Erasmus’ edition is *Laurentii Vallensis viri tam graecae quam latinae linguae peritissimi in Latinam Noui testamenti interpretationem ex collatione Graecorum exemplarium Adnotationes apprime vtiles*. The work was published in Valla 1962, vol. 1, 801–895. This is a reprint of the 1540 *Opera omnia* edition.

<sup>9</sup> Valla 1970.

<sup>10</sup> The name ‘Vulgate’ was not yet in use in the fifteenth century, but I use it here for convenience’s sake.

<sup>11</sup> Valla annotated a copy of Jerome’s correspondence. Interestingly, there seems to be no connection between these marginal notes and Valla’s *Annotationes* to the New Testament (Manfredi 1992).

teenth century was not identical with the translation Jerome had written: not only had the text become corrupted over time, but Jerome may not have been the author of the Vulgate in the first place.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, Valla legitimized his revision project by identifying with Jerome and by borrowing his argumentation. Just as Jerome had corrected the existing Latin translations in his time, Valla corrected the errors in the Vulgate.<sup>13</sup>

Valla's reflections on the practice of Biblical scholarship concern mainly two points. Firstly, he requires fidelity to the Greek.<sup>14</sup> Where the Latin and the Greek differ, the Greek must be in the right. This is why Valla follows the Greek variant readings in his manuscripts and aims at consistent translation of Greek terms. He was convinced that a good Latin version of the Scriptures was required as a basis for sound theology, and argued that exegesis should be based not on the Latin, but on the source text.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, Valla felt free to criticize authorities such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas for not knowing Greek. For example, at John 18:28, part of the Latin manuscript tradition reads *ad Caipham* (to Caiaphas) instead of *a Caipha* (from Caiaphas), which corresponds to the Greek. In the context of the passage, the former reading is problematic, and Augustine tried to account for it by giving a convoluted interpretation of the verse. Valla criticized Augustine for this:

Hoc in loco incassum laborat Augustinus eruere sententiam contra Evangelii ueritatem; quem non consuluisse graecum fontem, multo magis mirum quam in superioribus fuit, cum praesertim permulti codices latini reperiantur uenerandae uetustatis in quibus legitur 'a Caipha.' (Valla, *Annotationes* at John 18:28)

---

<sup>12</sup> E.g. in the *Annotationes* at Luke 16:2 and 1 Corinthians 2:9. For the Renaissance debate on Jerome's authorship of the Vulgate, see Rice 1985, 173–199.

<sup>13</sup> Valla makes this point most explicitly in his preface to the *Annotationes* (Celenza 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Valla's interest in the Greek text of the Bible was not shared by the Italian humanists in general, as appears from contemporary manuscript collections: copies of the Greek New Testament are scarce, new and better manuscripts were not an object for humanists hunting for 'new' classical texts, and the Bible is typically catalogued after Greek classics and Patristics (Manfredi 2005).

<sup>15</sup> For Valla's textual criticism and comments on translation and exegesis, see Bentley 1983, 36–66. Valla comments on inconsistency in the Vulgate in many places throughout the *Annotationes*, e.g. at Mark 14:72 and John 9:31. The most famous example of a misinterpretation based on an inaccurate translation is the notion of cooperative grace, which Valla dismisses because it was based on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:10 (Trinkaus 1970, vol. 2, 575). Monfasani qualifies the theological significance of Valla's note, though (Monfasani 2008, 23, n. 53).

Here Augustine struggled in vain to produce a meaning contrary to the truth of the Gospel. It is strange that he did not consult the Greek source here, even more than in the above, especially because there are numerous Latin manuscripts available, of a respectable age, which read *a Caipha*.

Valla also comments on Thomas Aquinas's lack of Greek skills in the *Annotationes* at 1 Corinthians 9:13. There, he reports a story in which the Apostle Paul appears to Thomas, praising him for understanding his epistles better than anyone else. Valla sarcastically remarks that he does not believe this to be a true story – it would have been much more convincing if Paul had pointed out some of Thomas's erroneous interpretations resulting from his lack of Greek.<sup>16</sup>

Valla's criticism of authoritative authors was one of the main reasons why his contemporaries objected to his work on the Bible. Poggio Bracciolini wrote a series of invectives (*Orationes* or *Invectivae*) against Valla in which, among other things, he addresses Valla's Biblical scholarship.<sup>17</sup> His main objection to Valla's earlier work – especially the *Elegantiae* – was that Valla did not respect the ancient authorities. Although Poggio had not seen Valla's work on the New Testament when he wrote the first *Invectiva* in 1451, he expected Valla to be disrespectful towards Jerome and others in the *Annotationes*, and in any case he objected to any attempt to replace the Vulgate translation. Valla replied in his first *Antidotum* (1452) that he had not changed sacred Scripture – nor Jerome's translation, for that matter. Jerome had only corrected an existing translation, not provided a new one; the Latin translation revised by Valla was no longer identical with Jerome's text, and no translation could be as authoritative as the original anyway.<sup>18</sup> In the *Antidotum*, Valla expressed the same philological principles as in the *Annotationes*: only the Greek text is authoritative, not the Latin translation, even if it is sanctified by tradition.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> For Valla and Thomas Aquinas, see Camporeale 2014, 145–202.

<sup>17</sup> On the long-standing conflict between Poggio and Valla, see Valla 1978, 25–37. The Latin text of Poggio's *Invectivae* was published by Fubini – this is a reprint of the 1538 Basel edition (Bracciolini 1964, vol. 1, 188–251). The passage about Valla's work on the New Testament is on pp. 199–200.

<sup>18</sup> Valla, *Antidotum Primum* I, 135–153 (Valla 1978). Lack of respect for authorities is a general concern in Poggio's writings against Valla, also regarding other authors in addition to Jerome. Poggio's disapproval, then, does not primarily concern Biblical scholarship. Monfasani qualified the importance of Valla's *Collatio* in the controversy with Poggio (Monfasani 2008, 28).

<sup>19</sup> Camporeale points out that Valla's criticism at the expense of the authorities is absent from the earlier *Collatio*, and from earlier redactions of the *Disputationes dialecticae*: it postdates the controversy with Poggio (Camporeale 1972, 308).

Secondly, while rendering the Greek faithfully is paramount, Valla also objected to the bad Latin that comes with an overly literal translation method. The rules of Latin elegance apply to sacred and secular texts alike. In the *Annotationes*, Valla often mentions issues of grammar and idiom that he had already discussed in his *Elegantiae*, his main work on correct Latin usage. He believes that theology is subservient to the rules of grammar, like any other discipline:

[... ] quanquam sint qui negent theologiam inseruire praeceptis artis grammaticae. At ego dico, illam debere seruire [*sic*; = seruare] etiam cuiuslibet linguae usum, qua loquitur, nedum literatae. Nam quid stultius, quam linguam, qua uteris, uelle corrumpere, et committere ne ab iis, apud quos loqueris, intelligaris? Nemo enim intelligat eum, qui proprietatem linguae non seruat, quam nemo unquam fuit qui non seruaret uolens et prudens, sed per imprudentiam labens. (Valla, *Annotationes* at Matthew 4:10)

[... ] although there are those who deny that theology must obey the rules of grammar. But I say that theology must observe the usage of whatever language it speaks, and not least if it is a cultured language. For what is more foolish than to corrupt the language you use, to the effect that you are not understood by those to whom you speak? Nobody would understand someone who does not observe the special characteristics of the language. And nobody in their right mind ever neglected that on purpose; if they slipped up it was inadvertently.

The rules of grammar to which Valla refers are derived from classical examples, and pagan authors are quoted alongside Christian ones. Valla comments on linguistic purity in various ways. He repeatedly expresses his disapproval of the use of Graecisms and of literal translations in the Vulgate.<sup>20</sup> In his preface to the *Annotationes*, he writes that the Vulgate is often confusing and unclear, “[... ] non interpretis vitio, sed interpretationis lege atque necessitate, utique illius que non ad sensum sit sed ad verbum [... ]” (not through the translator’s fault, but rather because of the rules and demands of translation, at least of that kind of translation that is not sense for sense but word for word [... ]).<sup>21</sup>

Valla’s emphasis on the use of correct and elegant Latin in the *Annotationes* is in line with some of his comments on the relation between eloquence and theology in his other writings. For example, in the preface to Book III of the *Elegantiae*, he refers to the Latin language “[... ] sine qua

---

<sup>20</sup> Valla commented on the use of Graecisms e.g. in the *Annotationes* at Matthew 6:2.

<sup>21</sup> Valla 1970, 9.

caeca omnis doctrina est, et illiberalis” (without which all doctrine is blind and ignoble).<sup>22</sup> In the preface to Book IV, he argues that rhetoric is not only harmless, but even essential to theology: “At qui ignarus eloquentiae est, hunc indignum prorsus qui de theologia loquatur, existimo” (And someone who is ignorant of eloquence is altogether unworthy of discussing theology, in my view).<sup>23</sup> Because of his belief in the importance of rhetoric for all disciplines, Valla was critical of scholastic theology: his main objection to the practice of the scholastic theologians was that they had invented a new technical jargon that was alien to the classical sources and that obscured the pure and natural thinking of the ancients and the early Church.<sup>24</sup>

However, Valla’s objections to scholasticism do not inform his *Annotationes* as much as one would expect. Although scholars have looked for exegetical innovations or rejections of scholastic doctrine in the notes, these appear in only a handful of cases. For the most part, the notes are concerned with purely grammatical and philological issues. The theological significance of Valla’s *Annotationes* has been debated over the years, but it is questionable: generally speaking, Valla was concerned with grammar, not exegesis.<sup>25</sup>

### Bessarion and Trebizond

Around the same time when Valla was working on his *Annotationes*, other humanists connected to the Vatican court were discussing matters of Biblical criticism as well. Cardinal Bessarion was one of the main promoters of humanism in the Curia until he was sent as a legate to Bologna in early 1450. From there, he remained involved with the intellectual life at the Vatican. He recommended certain humanists to Nicholas’s favour – Theodore Gaza and Lorenzo Valla himself – and he assisted Nicholas with collecting books for the Vatican library.<sup>26</sup>

George of Trebizond had come to Rome under Eugenius IV, and would remain connected to the Vatican throughout his later years, even after he left it in 1452. He was apostolic secretary and lecturer at the Studio Romano,

---

<sup>22</sup> Valla 1962, vol. 1, 80.

<sup>23</sup> Valla 1962, vol. 1, 120.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Nauta 2009. For Valla’s *theologia rhetorica*, see e.g. (Camporeale 2014, 254–96; Trinkaus 1970, vol. 2, pp. 683–721).

<sup>25</sup> Monfasani summarizes this discussion, arguing that Valla was more concerned with grammar than theology in his notes and that the few exceptions to this are not very significant (Monfasani 2008, 23–26). See also Monfasani’s discussion of Valla’s position on some theological problems, with multiple references to earlier literature on Valla’s theology (Monfasani 2000). This study is based not on the *Annotationes*, but on Valla’s *Disputationes dialecticae*, *De libero arbitrio*, *De vero bono* and *De professione religiosorum*.

<sup>26</sup> On this episode in Bessarion’s life, see Mohler 1967, vol. 1, pp. 258–269.

and was very productive as a translator of Greek classics for Nicholas V. But he did not mix very well with the other humanists at the papal court. He did not belong to Bessarion's inner circle, and he lived in constant conflict with Valla, Theodore Gaza, and Poggio. A fight with the latter in May 1452 led to his departure from the Vatican.<sup>27</sup>

We know that discussions on Biblical criticism must have taken place in the early 1450s, because both George of Trebizond and Cardinal Bessarion wrote about a particular textual problem, defending opposing positions. The problem concerned a variant reading at John 21:22: "sic/si illum volo manere" (thus/if I want him to stay). Bessarion believed that the Vulgate reading *sic* (thus) was an error, and that it should be corrected into *si* (if). Apparently, Bessarion suggested that Valla comment on this reading in the *Annotationes*, as Valla himself informs us:

Nam Cardinalis Nicenus, uir de me optime meritus, et qui, ut Romam uenirem, mihi autor extitit, habet in opere meo partem: quippe qui illud, cuius supra feci mentionem: *Sic eum uolo manere, quid ad te?* quod ego non animaduerterem, ut adderem, admonuit. (Valla, *Secundum antidotum*)<sup>28</sup>

For Cardinalis Nicenus [i.e. Bessarion], a man who has treated me very well, and on whose advice I came to Rome, has a part in my work, for it was he who suggested that I would add what I referred to above, *Sic eum uolo manere, quid ad te?*, which I did not observe.

As Valla writes here, he had initially overlooked the reading – he makes no mention of it in the *Collatio*, the earlier redaction of his notes – but he followed Bessarion in the *Annotationes*.<sup>29</sup>

Valla does not write anything else about the debate on John 21:22. What we know about it derives mainly from other texts. In 1451, George of Trebizond wrote a treatise about John 21:22, addressed to Pietro da Monte, in which he gave his reasons for believing that *sic*, the traditional reading, was correct. Most of this treatise was repeated several years later in George's attack on Theodore Gaza's translations of Aristotle, which is the text I refer to here.<sup>30</sup> Bessarion wrote a treatise in reaction to George's, the dating of

---

<sup>27</sup> For George's time at the court of Nicholas V, see Monfasani 1976, 69–113.

<sup>28</sup> The *Secundum antidotum* is printed as *Antidotum iiii* in the *Opera omnia* edition of Valla's works: Valla 1962, vol. 1, 325–366, there 340.

<sup>29</sup> A reference in the *Annotationes* (at Acts 17:22–34) to a circle of learned Greeks at the Vatican probably also refers to Bessarion. The comment concerns the authorship of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus (Bentley 1983, 65–66).

<sup>30</sup> *Adversus Theodorum Gazam in perversionem problematum Aristotelis* (1453–1454). This work was published in Mohler 1967, vol. 3, 274–342. The discussion on John 21:22 is



which is uncertain.<sup>31</sup> Unlike Valla, George did not belong to Bessarion's inner circle.<sup>32</sup> The treatises written by George and Bessarion mostly concern philological arguments for one reading or the other, but they occasionally touch upon underlying assumptions and convictions with regard to the correct way to practice Biblical criticism.

The most important issue at hand is the authority of the Vulgate. Bessarion believed that it was possible to improve on existing translations of the Bible and that they should not be considered as final and infallible. Textual variety had existed from the beginning. Referring to Augustine, Bessarion describes how multiple translations of the Bible were made over time, first from the Hebrew into the Greek, then from the Greek into Latin. When Jerome produced his new Latin translation, he created something new out of what was already there, and corrected the mistakes of his predecessors, as he openly professed himself. This means that correcting existing translations is perfectly legitimate:

E quibus omnibus luce clarius apparet, liceatne, et pium an nefas sit sacram Scripturam ex alia translata lingua ad originalis linguae, unde traducta est, veritatem reducere (Bessarion, *In illud: sic eum volo manere*).<sup>33</sup>

From all this it is perfectly clear whether it is allowed, and whether it is duty or a crime to restore sacred Scripture, which is translated from another language, to the truth of the original language from which it was translated.

Bessarion does not question the inspiration of the Evangelists and Apostles, but he believes that translations based on their text can be erroneous, and that if they are, they ought to be corrected – statements to this effect are found in the works of Jerome and Augustine.<sup>34</sup>

Bessarion elaborates on this point further on in the text: the Greek Fathers are not less saintly or knowledgeable than the Latin ones, and the Greek original is more authoritative than the Latin translation. That some

---

on pp. 330–337. The text addressed to Pietro da Monte was discovered by Kristeller in a Parma manuscript (Monfasani 1976, 92, n. 102).

<sup>31</sup> The title of this work is *In illud: sic eum volo manere*. The Greek version of Bessarion's treatise was published in Mohler 1967, vol. 3, 70–87. The Latin version, to which I refer here, is in the *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 161, 623–640. Mohler dated this treatise to 1456, but Monfasani believes that it was written much later (Monfasani 1976, 94, n. 112). George addressed a treatise on the same subject to Sixtus IV (PG 161, 868–882).

<sup>32</sup> Monfasani 1976, 81.

<sup>33</sup> PG 161, 628A.

<sup>34</sup> PG 161, 629D–630D.

Latin Fathers (including Augustine) read *sic* here does not signify much, since the textual variety in the New Testament in general is considerable.<sup>35</sup> Some interpretations forwarded by the Doctors of the Church are simply wrong because they are based on faulty translations, and the multiple layers of meaning in Scripture complicate matters even further.<sup>36</sup> Again, Bessarion believes that it is perfectly legitimate to correct a faulty text, as Jerome did.<sup>37</sup>

These philological considerations correspond roughly to Valla's view on Biblical scholarship. However, other opinions for which Valla is famous – his rejection of scholastic terminology and his praise of rhetoric – are absent from Bessarion's treatise.<sup>38</sup>

Whereas Bessarion and Valla agree that the Latin translation may be corrected, George of Trebizond differs from both on this point. George did not have a problem with purging the text from corruptions, but he objected to tampering with the translation:<sup>39</sup>

[N]on sunt labefactanda fundamenta, non removendi fines, non quassandi termini, qui a patribus nostris iacti, constituti firmatique sunt. Unus apex aut unus iota si remotum ex evangelio fuerit, facile data licentia cetera diripientur. [...] Minimum aliquid ex evangelio remotum parva primum, deinde paulatim serpens maxima secum trahet. [...] Quas ob res nihil, o patres, removendum, nihil addendum, nihil mutandum in evangelio Christi catholicis est. (George of Trebizond, *Adversus Theodorum Gazam*, 35, 2)<sup>40</sup>

We must not weaken the foundations, remove the boundaries, or tamper with the limits that were laid down, established and fixed by our Fathers. If one apex or one iota were to be removed from the Gospel, everything else will be torn to pieces once this licence is granted. Once the smallest element is removed from the Gospel, it first drags along smaller matters, and eventually the most important ones. Which is why, O Fathers, nothing ought to be removed, nothing added, nothing changed in the Gospel of Christ by orthodox Christians.

---

<sup>35</sup> PG 161, 634A–B.

<sup>36</sup> PG 161, 635D–636A.

<sup>37</sup> PG 161, 636B–C. For a more in-depth discussion of Bessarion's position, see Linde 2012, 212–213.

<sup>38</sup> Bessarion was not at all averse to scholastic learning: see e.g. Monfasani 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Monfasani takes George's warnings against tampering with the Greek text as a sign of his disapproval of Valla's project (Monfasani 1976, 93–94).

<sup>40</sup> References are to numbers in Mohler's edition (see above, footnote 30).

George explains that the Latin translation deviates from the literal meaning of the Greek here only to make explicit what was implicit in the original. For him, the authority of the Church Fathers carries considerable weight: Augustine quoted the passage with *sic*, and Jerome, when producing the Vulgate translation, did not correct it. This is significant, because Jerome was not only knowledgeable (*doctissimus*), but also guided by the Holy Spirit (“*gratia spiritus sancti plenus*,” 35, 3). The authority of tradition, George writes, is much more important in matters of Scripture than in other fields such as grammar or mathematics (35,5). In this respect, George’s view on Biblical criticism differs fundamentally from Valla’s and Bessarion’s.

It should be noted, however, that George essentially subscribes to the same philological principles as Valla and Bessarion.<sup>41</sup> His respect for the authority of the Fathers is partly based on their linguistic skills (35, 3–4). George uses grammatical arguments and examples from ancient literature to make a case for the traditional reading, with numerous references to Cicero and Virgil (35, 6–7). He adds arguments based on the internal logic of the passage (35, 8–9) and on the nature of the Greek language (35, 10). All this is meant to prove that the Latin reading is accurate, and that the Fathers, interpreting the Greek correctly, rendered it in such a way that it would be unambiguous to future, more ignorant, generations (35, 11). In other words, George does not simply adopt the Latin reading because he takes the authority of Augustine and Jerome for granted. He believes they are right because the reading is supported by philological arguments.

### Manetti

The fourth humanist who engaged in Biblical scholarship at Nicholas’s court was Giannozzo Manetti. Manetti had made a career in the *studia humanitatis* in Florence, where he had been part of a circle of prominent humanists, including Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, and Tommaso Parentucelli – the future Nicholas V – himself. In the early 1450s Manetti’s position in Florence became very uncomfortable because of his political enemies, and he moved to the papal court in 1452 or early 1453.<sup>42</sup>

Manetti produced a new translation of the Psalter as well as the New Testament in the 1450s.<sup>43</sup> Both appear to be first instalments of a more ambi-

---

<sup>41</sup> Bessarion and Trebizond also disagreed because they came to different conclusions on exegetical grounds (Monfasani 1976, 97–99).

<sup>42</sup> On the circumstances of Manetti’s move to Rome, see Botley 2004. For Manetti’s biography of Nicholas V and his works on architecture, see Smith and O’Connor 2006.

<sup>43</sup> There are no studies on Manetti’s Psalter, and it has not yet appeared in print. For Manetti’s New Testament, see den Haan 2016; den Haan 2014.

tious project: a new Latin translation of the entire Bible. We can gather from Manetti's biography of Pope Nicholas V that he embarked on this project after coming to the Vatican in 1453, and he presents his new translation as part of Nicholas's cultural and literary programme.<sup>44</sup> It is uncertain if Manetti considered his New Testament translation as a finished work. He never wrote a preface to it, although he clearly intended to do so.<sup>45</sup> But he did author a preface to his new translation of the Psalter, and an additional text in defence of this translation, *Apologeticus*, which was written about a year after the Psalter was published.<sup>46</sup>

It seems likely that Manetti knew of the discussions on Biblical criticism that took place in Bessarion's circle, but there is no proof that he participated in them. We know that he admired Bessarion's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysica*, which he mentions as a positive example in *Apologeticus*.<sup>47</sup> But he does not refer to Bessarion's Biblical criticism, and it is unclear if he was influenced by it.<sup>48</sup>

The connection between Manetti and Valla, however, is quite another matter. Manetti never mentions Valla in connection with his own translation project, but his translation is clearly influenced by Valla. Some of his changes to the Vulgate result from following grammatical or stylistic rules set down by Valla in the *Elegantiae*.<sup>49</sup> More importantly, numerous translation decisions in Manetti's text are based directly on Valla's notes, especially in the Gospels. Manetti must have had access to an intermediate version of Valla's work, somewhere in between the *Collatio* and the *Annotationes*.<sup>50</sup> This is the only case in which, as far as we know, Valla's work on the New Testament influenced another Biblical scholar before the sixteenth century.

Manetti never presented the principles that informed his Biblical scholarship as clearly as the humanists discussed above, but he touched upon some relevant issues in his preface to the Psalter translation and in *Apologeticus*. His *modus operandi* can to some extent be reconstructed from the working

---

<sup>44</sup> Manetti, *De vita ac gestis Nicolai Quinti* II, 25 (Manetti 2005).

<sup>45</sup> As he announced in his biography of Nicholas (II, 25).

<sup>46</sup> The preface to the Psalter was published in Botley 2004, 178–181. The *Apologeticus* was published in critical edition by Alfonso De Petris (Manetti 1981) and discussed by Trinkaus (Trinkaus 1970, vol. 2, 583–601) and Botley (Botley 2004, 105–113). A new edition with facing English translation appeared recently (Manetti 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Manetti, *Apologeticus* V, 42.

<sup>48</sup> See den Haan 2016, 74–78.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. his use of *an* and *aut* (den Haan 2016, 48).

<sup>50</sup> Den Haan 2016, 48–57, 72–83.

copy of his translation, and from the sources he used for it, which were preserved among the manuscripts of his library.<sup>51</sup>

In his preface to the Psalter, Manetti briefly touches upon his reasons for making a new translation in addition to the existing versions. In this text, he gives an interesting reason for translating the Bible anew: that the common Latin translation lacked credibility among the enemies of the Faith.

Cum enim uere ac solide utriusque et prisce et moderne (ut ita dixerim) theologie fundamenta in cunctis ueteris ac noui testamenti codicibus tantum modo omnium doctorum hominum consensu iaciantur, atque ambo illa a ueris hebreorum ac grecorum fontibus in latinam linguam traducta ab ipsis a quibus ea suscepimus quotidie carpi lacerarique acciperem, pro uirili mea ulterius equo animo ferre ac tolerare non potui. Quocirca, hac precipua causa adductus, laborem noue amborum testamentorum traductionis non iniuria nuper assumpsi. (Manetti, Preface to his translation of the Psalter)<sup>52</sup>

For because the foundations of the true and sound theology, both ancient and modern, so to speak, are exclusively laid in all the books of the Old and New Testament, as all learned men agree, and because I heard them both, in their Latin translations from the Hebrew and Greek sources, criticized and lashed daily by the people we received them from [i.e. the Jews and the Greeks], I for my part could no longer bear and tolerate it with composure. And therefore, driven by this particular reason, I recently took up the task of translating both testaments anew, and rightly so.

Manetti does not explain why his own new version would satisfy the critics of the Vulgate, but he evidently believes that replacing it is justified.

The other source for Manetti's view on Biblical scholarship is *Apologeticus*, the treatise he wrote in defence of his new Psalter translation. The first four books of the work are dedicated to various problems concerning the existing Latin versions of the Psalter. In the fifth book, Manetti discusses correct translation in particular.

Like Valla, Manetti bases his view of Biblical scholarship on philological principles. Although he does not write about the importance of the Greek

---

<sup>51</sup> The text of the translation, with corrections in Manetti's handwriting, is in Pal.lat.45. The sources he used were Pal.lat.18, a copy of the Vulgate annotated by Manetti, and Pal.gr.171, Pal.gr.189 and Pal.gr.229 (den Haan 2016, 30–37). Manetti's library was sold to the German book-collector Ulrich Fugger in the early sixteenth century, and ended up among the Palatini in the Vatican a century later (Lehmann 1960; Cagni 1960).

<sup>52</sup> Botley 2004, 179.

tradition, or about his own textually critical considerations, he clearly believed that the source text is always more authoritative than any translation – including the Vulgate. He discusses the textual tradition of the Old Testament in great detail in *Apologeticus* I–II. In *Apologeticus* III–IV, he gives a long list of differences between the two existing Latin translations. One of these was based on the Hebrew text of the Psalter, the other on the Greek Septuagint.<sup>53</sup> The purpose of this comparison was to account for the differences between the existing Latin versions and additionally to justify Manetti's own new version, which is based on the Hebrew text. Although Manetti does not openly disqualify the Septuagint translation, he questions its authority indirectly by reporting the debate on its inspiration between Augustine and Jerome, and by choosing the Hebrew text as a basis for his own version. It is clear, therefore, that Manetti valued the source text more than the translation, regardless of the status of the translator.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, Manetti believed that the Bible should be read in good classical Latin. In *Apologeticus* V, he expounds his own theory of correct translation, which draws on patristic and humanist models: Jerome's letter 57 to Pammachius (also known as *De optimo genere interpretandi*) – traditionally referred to by Bible translators – and Bruni's treatise on correct translation, *De interpretatione recta*.<sup>55</sup> Like Bruni, Manetti rejected word-for-word translation, and he recommended a good linguistic training in both the source and the target language. The translator should be well versed in classical authors, and if he translates the Bible, he should be familiar with the writings of the Doctors of the Church.<sup>56</sup>

Manetti does not, however, touch upon some of the trickier aspects of Bible translating. Bruni, his model, had objected strongly to overly literal translation and to the use of Graecisms.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen above, similar points had been raised by Valla, who had criticized the use of Graecisms in the Vulgate and pointed out the consequences of literal translation choices and of translating Greek words inconsistently.<sup>58</sup> Manetti never mentions these issues in *Apologeticus*, and in his preface to the Psalter he simply

---

<sup>53</sup> The Roman and Gallican Psalter, both ascribed to Jerome, were based on the Greek Septuagint text of the Psalms. Jerome's translation from the Hebrew was known as the *Hebraica veritas* (Hebrew truth).

<sup>54</sup> As for Manetti's translation practice, a comparison of his translation with the Greek sources in his library shows that he followed the Greek carefully (den Haan 2016, 64–84; 153–190).

<sup>55</sup> Edited by Paolo Viti (Bruni 2004). For Bruni's translation theory, see Marianne Pade's paper in this volume.

<sup>56</sup> Manetti, *Apologeticus* V, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Bruni, *De interpretatione recta* 43–44 (Bruni 2004).

<sup>58</sup> See footnotes 15 and 20 above.

blames all misinterpretation on the enemies of the Faith. Furthermore, Manetti did not share Valla's ideas on the importance of rhetoric for philosophy and theology, or his criticism of the artificial language of the scholastics.<sup>59</sup>

### Conclusions

When Valla's Biblical scholarship is compared with that of other humanists working in the same environment, it turns out that there are considerable similarities between the principles informing their work. All the humanists discussed here – Valla, Bessarion, Trebizond and Manetti – agree that Biblical criticism is a philological matter. They are all convinced that the language of the Latin Bible ought to agree with classical usage; problematic readings are compared to the Greek text. In the metadiscourse regarding Biblical textual scholarship, these common principles are sometimes expressed explicitly, in other cases they are followed implicitly.

Within the common humanist framework, however, there is room for the author's own preferences and personality. The metadiscourse is flexible: each humanist applies it in his own way. Manetti is the least polemical of the four, subscribing to the same philological principles as the others, but without problematizing deviations from the standard. Paradoxically, he is also the most radical: he actually produced a new translation of the New Testament. The other humanists negotiated and debated the metadiscourse more explicitly among themselves. George of Trebizond (and Poggio Bracciolini) objected to changing the Vulgate translation. Valla is exceptional in his explicit rejection of authorities that do not meet his standards of linguistic competence.

In the early sixteenth century, it was Valla's rejection of scholastic theology, together with his belief that the grammarian was authorized to engage in Biblical criticism, that made him popular among Northern humanists and reformers, especially by way of his reception by Erasmus. But these features of Valla's Biblical scholarship were not universally shared in the fifteenth century. Ironically, those aspects of his thinking for which he would eventually become most famous are the least representative of his own work on the Bible, and of Biblical scholarship in the 1450s in general.

---

<sup>59</sup> On Manetti's conception of humanism as learning in general, including scholasticism, see Baker 2015, 90–132.

### Bibliography

- Baker, Patrick 2015, *Italian Renaissance Humanism in the Mirror*, Cambridge.
- Bentley, Jerry H. 1977, "Biblical Philology and Christian Humanism: Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus as Scholars of the Gospels", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 8, 2, 8–28.
- Bentley, Jerry H. 1983, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, Princeton.
- Botley, Paul 2004, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti and Desiderius Erasmus*, Cambridge.
- Bracciolini, Poggio 1964, *Opera omnia*, ed.: Riccardo Fubini, Turin.
- Bruni, Leonardo 2004, *Sulla perfetta traduzione*, ed.: Paolo Viti, Naples.
- Cagni, Giuseppe M. 1960, "I codici Vaticani Palatino-Latini appartenuti alla biblioteca di Giannozzo Manetti", *La bibliofilia* 62, 1, 1–43.
- Camporeale, Salvatore 1972, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia*, Florence.
- Camporeale, Salvatore 2014, *Christianity, Latinity, and Culture: Two Studies on Lorenzo Valla*, eds.: Patrick Baker & Christopher S. Celenza, Leiden.
- Celenza, Christopher S. 1994, "Renaissance Humanism and the New Testament: Lorenzo Valla's Annotations to the Vulgate", *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24, 33–52.
- Celenza, Christopher S. 2012, "Lorenzo Valla's Radical Philology: The 'Preface' to the Annotations to the New Testament in Context", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42, 2, 365–394.
- Cortesi, Mariarosa 1997, "Lorenzo Valla, Girolamo e la Vulgata", *Motivi letterari ed esegetici in Gerolamo: Atti del convegno a Trento il 5–7 dicembre 1995*, eds.: C. Moreschini & G. Menestrina, Brescia, 269–289.
- den Haan, Annet 2014, "Giannozzo Manetti's New Testament: New Evidence on Sources, Translation Process and the Use of Valla's *Annotationes*", *Renaissance Studies* 28, 5, 731–747.
- den Haan, Annet 2016, *Giannozzo Manetti's New Testament: Translation Theory and Practice in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Leiden.
- di Napoli, Giovanni 1971, *Lorenzo Valla: Filosofia e religione nell'umanesimo italiano*, Rome.
- Fois, Mario 1969, *Il pensiero cristiano di Lorenzo Valla nel quadro storico-culturale del suo ambiente*, Rome.
- Lehmann, Paul 1960, *Eine Geschichte der alten Fuggerbibliotheken*, Tübingen.



- Linde, Cornelia 2012, *How to Correct the Sacra Scriptura? Textual Criticism of the Latin Bible between the Twelfth and Fifteenth Century*, Oxford.
- Manetti, Giannozzo 1981, *Apologeticus*, ed.: Alfonso De Petris, Rome.
- Manetti, Giannozzo 2005, *De uita ac gestis Nicolai Quinti summi pontificis*, ed.: Anna Modigliani, Rome.
- Manetti, Giannozzo 2016, *A Translator's Defense*, eds.: Myron McShane & Mark Young, Cambridge (MA), London.
- Manfredi, Antonio 1992, "Nuove postille autografe di Lorenzo Valla alle epistole di S. Girolamo (Vaticano Lat. 355–356)", *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 35, 106–121.
- Manfredi, Antonio 2005, "Manoscritti biblici nelle biblioteche umanistiche tra Firenze e Roma", *Forme e modelli della tradizione manoscritta della Bibbia*, ed.: Paulo Cherubini, Città del Vaticano, 459–501.
- Mohler, Ludwig 1967, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist, und Staatsmann: Funde und Forschungen*, Aalen.
- Monfasani, John 1976, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic*, Leiden.
- Monfasani, John 2000, "The Theology of Lorenzo Valla", *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed.: Jill Kraye & Martin W. F. Stone, London, 1–23.
- Monfasani, John 2008, "Criticism of Biblical Humanists in Quattrocento Italy", *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed.: Erika Rummel, Leiden, 15–38.
- Monfasani, John 2011, *Bessarion Scholasticus: A Study of Cardinal Bessarion's Latin Library*, Turnhout.
- Nauta, Lodi 2009, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy*, Cambridge (MA), London.
- Smith, Christine, and Joseph O'Connor 2006, *Building the Kingdom. Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice*, Turnhout.
- Rice, Eugene F. 1985, *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance*, Baltimore, London.
- Trinkaus, Charles 1970, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, London.
- Valla, Lorenzo 1962, *Opera Omnia*, ed.: Eugenio Garin, Turin (reprint of the 1540 *Opera Omnia* edition).
- Valla, Lorenzo 1970, *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, ed.: Alessandro Perosa, Florence.
- Valla, Lorenzo 1978, *Antidotum primum: La prima Apologia contro Poggio Bracciolini*, ed.: Ari Wesseling, Assen.

