

**SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME**

**“Ideas” Specific programme**

**European Research Council**

**Grant agreement for: Starting Grant**

*Annex I – “Description of Work”*

Project acronym: Holy and Lay  
Project full title: Holy Writ & Lay Readers. A Social History of Vernacular Bible  
Translations in the Late Middle Ages  
Grant agreement no: 209394

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**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Sabrina Corbellini  
**Host Institution:** University of Groningen

## CONTENTS

### **PART A: The Principal Investigator**

<b>i. CV</b>	3
<b>ii. Self Evaluation</b>	6
<b>iii. Funding ID</b>	6

### **PART B: The Research Project**

<b>i. State-of-the-art and objectives</b>	8
<b>ii. Methodology</b>	10
<b>iii. Resources</b>	16

### **PART C: The Research Environment**

<b>i. Transition to independence</b>	19
<b>ii. Host institution</b>	19
<b>iii.a Budget</b>	20
<b>iii.b Budget</b>	20

## **PART A: The Principal Investigator**

### **i. CV**

#### **Higher education**

- MA in Germanic Philology, Department of Germanic Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Bologna (Italy). Masters thesis ‘The diffusion of the *Visio Tnugdali* in Germanic literatures of the Middle Ages’ (*cum laude*, 19 November 1993).
- PhD in Middle Dutch Literature, Department of Dutch Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Leiden (the Netherlands). Supervisor: Prof. dr Frits van Oostrom. Thesis defended on 17 May 2000. Title: *Italiaanse deugden en ondeugden. Dirc Potters Blome der doechden en de Italiaanse Fiore di Virtù* (Italian Virtues and Vices. Dirc Potter’s Blome der doechden and the Italian Fiore di Virtù). This doctoral thesis offers a comparative study of the Middle Dutch text *Blome der doechden*, by the Middle Dutch writer Dirc Potter (1370–1428), and the Italian didactic treatise *Fiore di virtù*, written in Bologna in the first decades of the 14th century. The study attempts to define the relationship between the Middle Dutch and the Italian. The textual and philological analysis is completed by a detailed study of the life of Dirc Potter, who resided in Rome between 1411 and 1412, the first Middle Dutch writer to undertake such a journey.

#### **Work experience and research positions**

- Research Institute for Medieval Studies, University of Leiden (the Netherlands). Coordinator of research and teaching activities, 1 April 1999 to 1 September 1999.
- Department of Western Manuscripts of the Leiden University Library. Co-worker at the *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta*, an online catalogue of manuscripts from the medieval Low Countries, 1 September 1999 to 1 May 2000.

#### **Research positions**

- VU University Amsterdam, Department of Medieval History, Faculty of Arts (the Netherlands). Postdoctoral project *De derde orde van Sint-Franciscus in het bisdom Utrecht* (The Third Order of St. Francis in the diocese of Utrecht), directed by Prof. dr Koen Goudriaan, 1 April 2000 to 1 October 2003.

This NWO-funded (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) project aimed at reconstructing the diffusion of the Third Order of Saint Francis in the medieval diocese of Utrecht by way of a systematic study of all the communities (a *monasticon*) of female and male tertiaries. This systematic study involved research into the history, economy, material culture and religious activities. Data showed a close connection between religious communities that followed the third rule of Saint Francis, houses of Brethren and Sisters of Common Life and cloisters of Augustinian nuns. All these communities were under the influence of the spiritual reform movement known as Modern Devotion. However, in contrast to what conventional historiography suggests, the detailed investigation of cultural and religious life (manuscripts and inventories of libraries, as well as a newly discovered handbook for tertiaries) showed that a specific Third Order spirituality can be identified. My research comprised the reconstruction of the socio-economical situation, based on archival sources, with an innovative analysis of manuscripts and early printed books. It resulted in a fuller appreciation of this ‘forgotten’ and underestimated branch of the Modern Devotion, which is clearly typified by a unique combination of religious and lay elements. As a senior member of the research team, I co-supervised two PhD students involved in the project, working on two subjects closely related to the central theme of the research project, i.e. the development of a specific female religious

movement in medieval Dutch towns and an institutional history of the Third Order movement. The two PhD students defended their theses and received their PhDs in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

- VU University Amsterdam, Department of Medieval History, Faculty of Arts and Department of Church History, Faculty of Theology (the Netherlands). Postdoctoral project *The Italian Quattuor Unum. An analysis of the manuscripts* (part of *Quattuor Unum. Medieval Gospel Harmonies* led by Prof. dr August den Hollander), 1 February 2004 to 1 February 2007.

This NWO-funded (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) project aimed at describing the origin, dissemination and reception of Italian Gospel Harmonies (*Diatessaron*), i.e. texts where the story of the life of Jesus is given as a coherent narrative from birth to death and resurrection. In spite of their cultural relevance, these texts had so far been neglected by traditional research. Textual and paratextual (form and layout) features of the manuscripts were studied to investigate the patterns of the distribution of the translation. Research showed a specific regional and social pattern in the dissemination. Manuscripts of the Italian *Diatessaron* circulated in northern (Veneto) and central Italy (Tuscany) and were nearly always exclusively owned by members of the urban bourgeoisie often belonging to the city government. Moreover, the owners were members of confraternities linked to the Dominican communities. These confraternities, networks of lay people connected to religious communities, played a pivotal role in the translation process and in the diffusion of manuscripts. These findings contrast clearly with conventional research and views on the access of lay people to vernacular Bible translations and show how the laity in Tuscan and Venetian towns was actively involved in the production and circulation of vernacular religious texts. To complete my research on the Italian Gospel Harmonies, I was granted leave to stay at the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) from February to June 2006. A monograph containing the findings of this research project, *The Italian Quattuor Unum. An analysis of the manuscripts*, will be completed by January 2008.

### **Teaching positions**

- VU University Amsterdam, Department of Medieval History, Faculty of Arts (the Netherlands). Tenured lecturer in Medieval and Early Modern History (0.2 FTE), 1 January 2001 to date.

- UvA University of Amsterdam, Department of Medieval History, Faculty of Arts (the Netherlands). Fixed-term lecturer in Medieval History (0.4 FTE), 1 September 2007 to 31 August 2008.

- RUG Groningen, Department of Dutch Literature, Faculty of Arts (the Netherlands). Fixed-term lecturer in Medieval and Renaissance Dutch Literature (0.2 FTE), 1 September 2007 to 31 August 2008.

My teaching activities include lectures and seminars for bachelor's and master's students (Academic Skills for Historians; Research Skills for students of Dutch Literature; Introduction to the History of the Middle Ages; Analysis of Medieval Sources; seminars on 'Reading in the Middle Ages' and 'History of Dutch Literature', among others) and supervision and coaching of students (including bachelor's and master's theses). Moreover, in April 2004 and from October to November 2006, I was appointed lecturer at the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR). At the KNIR I organised and taught two courses on the medieval and early modern history of Rome and on the relations between Church and 'State' in medieval Rome.

### **International activities**

My international activities include participation in international research groups as well as the organisation of international seminars and congress sessions.

At the annual International Medieval Congress in Leeds (UK) I have organised several sessions and round tables ('Literary works by Albertanus of Brescia' (2000); 'Semi-religious Women in the Urban Environment' (2001); 'Female Spirituality in the Late Middle Ages' (2002); 'Nuns' Tales: Medieval Religious Women and their Books' (2004); and 'Modern Devotions. Vernacular Theology and Popular Religion in the Low Countries and the Rhineland, 1300–1500' (2006)). As an invited speaker, I have presented papers at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds (UK) and congresses in England, Germany, Belgium and the United States (International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo). In May 2008 I will present the findings of my research on Italian Gospel Harmonies at the annual congress of the Renaissance Society of America in a session organised by the Centre for Tuscan Studies (University of Leicester, UK). Since 2005, I have participated in two research groups sponsored by the Dutch Research School for Medieval Studies: a research group on 'Urban Devotion' (VU University Amsterdam, University of Leiden and University of Freiburg) and a research group on 'Modern Devotion: Balance and Regauging' (VU University Amsterdam, Radboud University Nijmegen and University of Münster). My research and international activities have culminated in publications (articles and monographic studies) in Italian, Dutch, German and English. Contributions have been published (or are awaiting publication) in, among others, *Ons geestelijk erf* (international refereed journal on the history of spirituality in the Low Countries) and in volumes in the series 'Brill's Studies in Intellectual History', 'Studies in European Urban History' (Brepols) and in the CISAM (Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo) in Spoleto (Italy).

### **Publications relevant to the proposal**

- Corbellini, S., *Monasticon Trajectense*, Internet publication:  
<http://www.let.vu.nl/project/monasticon/>
- Corbellini, S., 'Mannenregels voor een vrouwenwereld? De spirituele opvoeding van zusters in derde-ordegemeenschappen', *Trajecta* 14.2 (2005), 177–192. *De derde orde op orde*, volume of the journal *Trajecta* edited by S. Corbellini and H. van Engen.
- Corbellini, S., 'De Noordnederlandse vertaling van het Nieuwe Testament. Het paradijs in een kloostercel.' in A. den Hollander, E. Kwakkel & W. F. Scheepsma eds, *Middelnederlandse bijbelvertalingen* (Hilversum 2007) 131-145.  
Forthcoming:
- Corbellini, S., 'L'armonia della Parola: la tradizione del Diatessaron in volgare italiano nella Toscana medievale', to be published in *Beato Simone Fidati da Cascia OESA (1295–1348). Un Agostiniano Spirituale tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento* (in press).
- Corbellini, S., 'An oceanic translation movement: Bible translations in European perspective', to be published in *Queeste. Tijdschrift over middeleeuwse letterkunde in de Nederlanden* (to appear in January 2008).
- Corbellini, S., *The Italian Quattuor Unum. An analysis of the manuscripts* (to be completed by January 2008).

### **Other publications (selected)**

- Corbellini, S., *Italiaanse deugden en ondeugden. Dirc Potters Blome der doechden en de Italiaanse Fiore di Virtù* (Amsterdam 2000).
- Corbellini, S. & G. Verhoeven, 'A Sixteenth-Century Book Catalogue from Delft' in: G. Goudriaan, J. van Moolenbroek & A. Tervoort eds, *Education and Learning in the Netherlands, 1400–1600* (Leiden 2004) 253–276.

- Corbellini, S. & G. Verhoeven, 'Een Delftse boekcatalogus uit 1573', *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis* 11 (2004) 29–49 (<http://www.kb.nl/infolev/nbv/jaarboeken/BijlageCorbellini.pdf>).
- Corbellini, S., Koen Goudriaan, Hans Mol & Ad Tervoort eds, *Wonderen voor alledag. Elf opstellen over godsdienst en samenleving in de Middeleeuwen door Jaap van Moolenbroek opnieuw uitgegeven bij zijn afscheid van de Vrije Universiteit* (Hilversum 2006).

#### **Congress papers relevant to the proposal**

- International Medieval Congress, paper: *Lay authors/Religious Texts: Evidence from Italy and the Low Countries*, Leeds (UK), July 2006.
- Congress 'De Bono Communi. The discourse and the practice of Common Good in the European City', paper: *Striving for the 'Common Good' and the education of the citizen: evidence from Italy and the Low Countries (13th to 14th centuries)*, Ghent (Belgium), 15–16 September 2006.
- Congress 'Beato Simone Fidati da Cascia OESA (1295–1348). Un Agostiniano Spirituale tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento', paper: *L'armonia della Parola: la tradizione del Diatessaron in volgare italiano nella Toscana medievale*, Cascia (Italy), 27–30 September 2006.
- Congress 'Tweespraak. Het continuüm van Middelnederlandse literatuur en Latinitas', paper: *Een oceanische vertaalbeweging. Vertalingen van religieuze teksten in internationaal perspectief*, Ghent (Belgium), 23–24 March 2007.

Forthcoming:

- Renaissance Society of America (annual meeting, Chicago 2008), paper: *Holy Writ and Lay Readers: An Analysis of Tuscan Gospel Harmonies*, 3–5 April 2008.

#### **ii. Self-Evaluation**

My academic career and achievements show three elements which enable me to make the transition to independent research leadership: a) international experience and network; b) the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of my research activities (literature and philology; church and religious history; intellectual and social history); and c) the combination of international research and teaching activities, including co-supervision of PhD students. Extensive research and teaching experience at the departments of Middle Dutch Literature, Medieval and Early Modern History and Theology have contributed to broadening my vision on scientific research and my acquaintance with numerous research methods and techniques on religious, literary and social history. Moreover, thanks to my international and multidisciplinary approach to medieval and early medieval culture, I have built up and participated in an extended research network. My international and multidisciplinary background, as is clear from my education and my research activities, will allow me to further develop an international publication strategy (publications in English, Dutch and Italian) and to apply new research approaches combining several disciplines. This innovative multidisciplinary approach will bridge the gaps and differences between research conducted by philologists, theologians and historians, and between southern and northern Europe. The focus on the comparative component of my research activities will enable me to open up new horizons for scholarship, which could also be of great relevance to the development of international scholarly collaboration within a European context and to teaching and supervisory activities.

#### **iii. Funding ID**

I do not currently benefit from any research grants for work related to the ERC grant application. However, as 'research leader in my own right', I will develop a funding strategy which will offer

my new research group the opportunity to participate in international networks and to continue and develop research activities after completion of the envisaged research project. This strategy includes applying for NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) subsidies granted under 'Internationalisation in the Humanities', aimed at promoting cooperation between Dutch research groups and their foreign colleagues and stimulating the formation of international networks in the humanities (covering costs for exchange of researchers, scientific meetings and publishing of research findings).

## **PART B: The Research Project**

### **i. State-of-the-art and objectives**

#### INTRODUCTION

The European Late Middle Ages or, more precisely, the period between the appearance of the mendicant orders (13th century) and the Reformation (16th century), witnessed a cultural revolution. The ‘traditional’ dichotomy between the categories ‘religious’ and ‘lay’ and ‘Latin’ and ‘vernacular’ dissolved into a more diffuse situation and led to ‘lay emancipation’ with regard to active participation in religious life. This period is characterised by a dramatic increase in the production of vernacular religious texts, and more specifically by the production and the diffusion of vernacular Bibles. This development can be defined as a significant cultural transformation, as it shows a transformation in the attitude and mentality of non-Latinate, although generally literate, lay people. The process of translation and the direct access of lay people to Bible texts involved both linguistic and cultural challenges. It meant that the vernacular was ‘emancipated’ enough to render the Word of God. The language of the laity became a channel of transmission for the Holy Writ. The cultural hegemony of Latin, the language of the Church, was no longer indisputable.

The main objective of *Holy Writ and Lay Readers* is to map out this late medieval cultural revolution, before the Protestant Reformation divided Latin Christendom, and to reconstruct its social context by investigating the production, distribution and use of vernacular Bible translations. By exploring and analysing the cultural dynamics behind the connections between Holy Writ and lay readers, the research project will concentrate on one of the most critical and important moments in Europe’s cultural history and in the constitution of (early) modern identities.

#### STATE OF THE ART

Research into lay Bible reading and interpretation in the later Middle Ages has been biased until now by the assumption, based on ecclesiastical sources, that as a consequence of a ban imposed by ecclesiastical authorities, lay possession of vernacular texts of the Bible was severely limited. Conventional historiography suggests that this ban was removed in northern Europe (e.g. Germany and the Low Countries) by the Reformation and more strongly reinforced in southern Europe (e.g. Italy, France and Spain) by the Counter-Reformation (or Catholic Reformation) following the Council of Trent (1545–1563). This myopic view on Bible reading in the Middle Ages is the result of two misinterpretations:

1) The intervention in certain towns or regions of local ecclesiastical functionaries, such as bishops, against the diffusion of translations in cases of heresy has been interpreted as a general attack by the whole Church on vernacular Bibles. Preliminary research (focused on the diffusion of Italian Gospel Harmonies) has shown that the Church of Rome never prohibited the translation and reading of the Bible as such until the Council of Trent. Certain restrictions on the choice of biblical texts were merely recommended. Only in a few cases was ‘unofficial’ control of translations assigned to orthodox, that is, officially acknowledged, religious movements, such as the Dominicans in Italy. Besides, the ban on vernacular translation was a localised phenomenon and exclusively associated with the presence of heretical movements, such as the Waldensians (southern France and northern Italy) and the Lollards (England). The presence of papal or episcopal documents containing restrictive measures does not necessarily imply that the measures were effective or carried out at all. The question of the distribution of vernacular Bible translations should be addressed by way of investigation of the practice. It is clear that the large

number of existing manuscripts and early printed editions shows that vernacular Bible reading played an important role in the religious and spiritual life of the Late Middle Ages.

2) Protestant historiography argued, and still argues, that one of the main reasons for the Reformation's success and its penetration in Western Europe was the fact that Luther 'freed' the Bible by translating it into German. As Andrew Gow argued in a recent contribution, Protestant as well as Tridentine reformers in the Roman Church had a very different goal: 'Far from freeing scripture [...] they sought to bind the interpretation even closer to authorised norms and forms'. They were agents in a process Berndt Hamm named *normative Zentrierung* ('centering around norms'), which meant 'binding interpretation, behavior and believers' conscience even more closely to norms articulated by ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and enforcing these norms ever more stringently' (Gow 2005, 169). Instead, it can be argued that the success of the Reformation was due in part to the prior existence of medieval translations, which helped to create a demand for vernacular Bible texts.

These two biases, which are reiterated even in very recent publications (Kors 2007), have led to a very fragmentary knowledge of Bible translations from a socio-cultural and historical perspective. In-depth philological analyses of one single translation (e.g. Gambino & Brugnolo 2007) or detailed studies on one translator (e.g. the Dutch 'Bible translator of 1360', Kors 2007) have been published, but the findings have been seldom contextualised and placed in a broader perspective. In publications on vernacular Bible translations, the texts are examined under a theological or linguistic light, whereas the historical, social and cultural relevance is hardly ever emphasised.

As preliminary research has shown, this 'Protestant' paradigm can be challenged: vernacular Bibles were produced and circulated in Europe long before Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. However, the diffusion of Bible translations across Europe was not homogeneous. Translation activities, production and distribution were, for example, strictly forbidden at some point in (southern) France, Bohemia and England. The Constitutions of Oxford, issued by the aristocratic Archbishop Arundel in 1409, forbade anybody to make a written translation of a text of Scripture into English or even to own a copy of any such translation made since the time of the Lollards without diocesan permission (Watson 1995). On the other hand, a higher level of production and circulation can be detected in strongly urbanised European areas, such as Italy, the Low Countries and the Rhineland. This disparity was even noticed by the participants in the lengthy discussions on Bible translations held in 1546 during the first phases of the Council of Trent. According to the council fathers, in countries such as Spain and France an embargo had been placed on vernacular Bibles, while in others, e.g. Italy, lay people were active readers of the Holy Writ in their 'national' language.

#### OBJECTIVES

The detection of this patchwork distribution of vernacular Bibles raises questions about the *conditions* of this late medieval cultural revolution, of translation activities and the patterns of diffusion of vernacular Bibles. Why could vernacular Bibles be produced and distributed in these European regions, counting on lenience and sometimes even incentives from religious and worldly authorities? What were the 'cultural dynamics' behind this revolution?

As mentioned above, Italy, the Low Countries and the Rhineland were characterised by a high degree of urbanisation. In addition to this factor was the susceptibility to the influence of religious movements such as the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Modern Devotion. Religious and public life were so conflated in these late medieval societies that medieval towns have recently been defined as 'simultaneously religious and political entities' (Thompson 2005,

3). These religious movements played important ‘public’ roles (e.g. education) within late medieval urban societies and were often closely related to literate lay people. They could therefore be defined, in a sense, as cultural go-betweens, cultural brokers or as skilled negotiators between languages (Latin and the vernacular) and between socio-cultural groups (lay and religious).

Owing to their similarities and their longstanding tradition of intensive commercial contacts, these three abovementioned regions are traditionally the subject of comparative studies in economic and social history. The cultural and religious implications of urbanisation, including the production and diffusion of vernacular religious texts, have however been neglected by comparative studies. Historians have reconstructed the economic and social life in the urban environment. Church historians have concentrated on the wish of the Church to retain exclusive control over the distribution and interpretation of the Bible, while theologians and philologists have studied the texts of the vernacular Bibles. The central question of the interaction between these three elements, i.e. the high degree of urbanisation, the presence of religious movements and the presence of vernacular Bibles, and their contribution to the ‘cultural revolution’ has however been ignored until now. The focus on the relevance of medieval towns for the political history of medieval and early modern Europe has indeed obscured the significance of religion and religious movements in the urban environment and created an artificial fracture and opposition between clerical and lay realms.

Taking into consideration the previous lines of thought, it is clear that this research project aims to take a novel and unconventional approach, as well as to choose an interdisciplinary and innovative methodology. It will moreover adopt a new perspective, that of the generally literate readers, the addressees and the users of the translations, and it will not be written primarily from the point of view of the Church and clergy, as has been the case in previous research. It will address questions about the tension between the desire of the Church to control access to biblical texts and the hunger for direct access to these texts by generally literate lay people.

The project aims to write a *social* history of the vernacular Bible. In fact, as the Italian philologist Gianfranco Folena has shown, the process of *vulgarizzare*—the simultaneous process of translating, interpreting and popularising—is among the most social of literary activities and is the one that is most profoundly influenced by the interaction between translators and their audiences (Folena 1994). As Umberto Eco wrote: “Translation is always a shift not between two languages but between two cultures” (Eco 2003). Translating implies ‘negotiating’, a concept which should be applied not only to the world of trade and diplomacy but also to the exchange of ideas and the consequent modification of meaning, which illustrates the continuous search for a new balance in a changing social, political and cultural perspective (Burke 2007). The forging of new cultural and religious identities as a result of the late medieval cultural revolution was also supported by translations of texts which were traditionally controlled by an elite of spiritual ‘experts’ (Eire 2007).

## ii. Methodology

The reconstruction of the dynamics of the late medieval cultural revolution by means of the analysis of the translation process and the diffusion of vernacular Bibles will be based on the scrutiny of a) primary sources, b) secondary sources and c) on a contextualisation of findings. In fact, the analysis of the *social* aspects of translations implies that the research should not only concentrate on:

- a) What was translated?
- b) Who were the translators and what were their intentions?

but also on the questions:

- c) For whom were the translations made?
- d) Who were the readers and what were **their** strategies?

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

Primary sources will be manuscripts and early prints (until 1525) copied or printed in Italy, the Low Countries and Rhineland and containing vernacular Bible translations. The corpus will consist of:

- a) Complete Bibles and groups or compilations of several Bible books (Old Testament; New Testament; Pentateuch, Gospels, Pauline Letters, Catholic Epistles)
- b) Single Bible books (Revelation, Acts, single Old Testament books, Psalms, Penitential Psalms, Gospel of Luke, John, Matthew and Mark)
- c) Rearrangement of biblical material (Psalter; Gospel Harmonies; Lectionaries; Epistolaries; Evangelaries; biblical *florilegia*).

Deuterocanonical Bible books and the vernacular translations of the Pseudo-Bonaventura, *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, though widely circulating in medieval Europe, will not be included in the corpus. Their presence in manuscripts or early print will be signalled, as well as their combination with canonical Bible books (e.g. the presence at the end of Italian Gospel Harmonies of the vernacular translation of the so-called *Epistula Lentuli*). For the selection of manuscripts and early prints, the investigators will make use of recently compiled *repertoria* of Bible manuscripts (e.g. *Inventario dei manoscritti biblici italiani* and *Middel nederlandse bijbelhandschriften/Codices manuscripti sacrae scripturae Neerlandicae*). The starting point for the study of early prints will be *Printed Italian Vernacular Religious Books* (Jacobson 1983) and for the Low Countries *Incunabula Printed in the Low Countries* (Van Thienen & Goldfinch 1999) and *Nederlandsche bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540* (Nijhoff & Kronenberg 1923-1971).

On the basis of these inventories, eventually updated on the basis of recent publications, the investigators will strive towards an autopsic analysis of the manuscripts and early prints. The corpus of original manuscripts and early printed editions containing vernacular Bible translations—the primary sources—will undergo a codicological and palaeographical analysis. As Paul Grendler (1993) stated, form and function are in fact closely connected in medieval manuscripts and early prints. The physical appearance of books indicates purpose and intended readership. A combination of size, type and page layout offers visible signals informing the reader of the content before he begins to read a book. Books which look different *are* different, because they have different subject matters, purposes and readerships. ‘Formal’ and material aspects of manuscripts and early prints should be studied to understand the developments in use and interpretation of the texts they contain, creating an aesthetics of textual reception instead of an analysis of texts and of their carriers from a mere literary and artistic point of view.

Paratextual elements will receive special attention. The term ‘paratext’, coined in 1987 by Gerard Genette, is applicable to textual features such as titles, prefaces, chapter headings, tables of contents, translator notes or brief comments, which negotiate between the text and the reader. Indeed, texts are rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal and other productions. Paratextual elements thus frame the text, introduce it and present it to the reader. Presenting the text means to *make it present*, to ensure the text’s presence into the world and to make reception and consumption possible (Genette 1997, 1). A systematic analysis of paratextual elements therefore provides some knowledge of the use and function of manuscripts and early printed editions. For example, the adoption of word

separation at the end of the 13th century and the diffusion of this new way of writing to the vernacular had direct and unsettling effects on the lay readership. In fact, separated writing is strictly connected to silent reading, which permitted a more private and personal approach to religious and devotional texts (Saenger 1997).

This extensive codicological, palaeographical and bibliographical research is a prime requirement in the approach to the question of vernacular Bible translations. The more complete the overview, the clearer the patterns of diffusion and use of manuscripts and early prints, and the more solid the reconstruction of the cultural dynamics behind vernacular Bible translations.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

In the second instance, texts produced by or specifically for lay people (e.g. letters, official documents, speeches, chronicles, ego documents, sermons, didactic treatises) will be analysed for references to biblical images, phrases, stories and parables. Preliminary research of this considerable *corpus* has shown that in these texts everyday language was often interwoven with biblical references and imagery. The reconstruction of the degree of familiarity of generally literate ‘non-professional users’ with the Holy Writ will provide an insight into the vehicles of diffusion of biblical knowledge. As the Italian historian Gigliola Fragnito (1997) claimed, there is a lack of data to date on the different ways and levels of reading (i.e. active silent reading, reading aloud) and ‘assimilation’ (for example while listening to the reading of Bible pericopes or to sermons) of the Bible text (see also Ginzburg 1971).

Information about the diffusion of vernacular Bible translations and the degree of familiarity with the Holy Writ will also be gathered by the analysis of book lists, inventories and personal writings. Archival sources, for example the inventories of the Florentine *Magistrato dei Pupilli* (Archivio Storico di Firenze, relevant passages published by Bec, 1984) and the Ghent *Staten van goed* (Stadsarchief Gent, Belgium), which describe goods inherited by under-age orphans, will be included in the research on the basis of editions and descriptions, together with wills, inventories and donations. The awareness that these descriptions of ‘the worlds of goods’ can be very partial, sketchy and in some cases difficult to identify implies that data should be processed with the required caution. To achieve a proper evaluation of data the information will then be combined with information from egodocuments and private documents, for example family books (inventoried by the *Biblioteca Informatizzata dei Libri di Famiglia* sponsored by the Faculty of Arts of the University Tor Vergata, Rome), *libri di ricordanze* and letters (Ciappelli 1989; Böninger 2004; Giannottu 2007). These ego documents, for private or semi-private use, very often contain, next to precious information about private piety and religion, references to books. Purchases and loans of books were regularly registered, as well as references to reading activities.

Moreover, the registered data can be used for the reconstructions of the book trade and of networks which permitted the diffusion and the circulation of vernacular Bible translations. Active use of vernacular Bible translations will moreover be tested by the analysis of medieval texts written by lay authors. Citations from and references to the (vernacular) Bible will prove the knowledge and the ‘internalisation’ of the Holy Writ and its use outside the canonical spaces of Church and religious ritual.

## CONTEXTUALISATION

The outcomes of this study of the ‘world of readers’ to inform about the practice of vernacular Bible reading will first be contextualised by comparing the results with the treatises on Bible translations and on the lay use of the Bible which have been written in Italy, the Low Countries

and the Rhineland by exponents of the religious movements operating in urban environments, such as mendicants and the Modern Devotion (e.g. the modern devout Gerard Zerbold van Zutphen's *De libris teutonicalibus et precibus vernaculis* and the Dominican friar Jacopo Passavanti's *Specchio di vera penitenza*).

These tracts should be considered as clear evidence of the direct participation of exponents of urban religious movements in the debate on vernacular Bible translations and show the interaction between two of the agents in the late medieval cultural revolution: urban religious movements and the presence of vernacular Bibles. Besides a detailed analysis of these tracts to detect references to the use and abuse of the Bible and to the position of urban religious movements in the process of translation and diffusion of the vernacular Bible, the connections of these religious groups with the world of lay readers will be researched:

- 1) Were these tracts expressions of the intermediary role played by the Dominicans and Modern Devouts between the aspirations of the lay people they were spiritually leading or the utterance of the will of Church authorities to control the use and dissemination of vernacular Bible texts?
- 2) Did these tracts have a guiding function or were they a well-organised system of rules?
- 3) Were these texts a description of an existing situation or did they function as programmatic documents?

The evaluation of these factors will include a new interpretation of the interaction between clergy and laity. It was not simply a matter of an 'active' clergy proclaiming and interpreting the Holy Writ and 'passive' lay people listening to a text they could barely understand. The project will focus on cultural dynamics, i.e. on the reconstruction of an exchange of ideas and of terms of engagement between clerical (i.e. the urban religious movements) and lay parties. Lay readers will be examined in the role of 'doers', interacting with the translators and the translation, using their product, reading it in silence or aloud, annotating it, internalising it and finding in it instruction for their spiritual well-being. The (clerical) translators will be evaluated in terms of their guiding role.

Furthermore, the role of lay people as distributors will be investigated. Translations probably circulated within small groups and networks of lay people, such as confraternities, and moreover were reproduced in significant numbers. In fact, recent research into the diffusion and the use of manuscripts containing Italian gospel harmonies (texts containing a life of Christ based on the harmonisation of the four Gospels) has revealed that small groups, circles, networks or 'epistemological communities', such as confraternities and chambers of rhetoric, played a crucial role in both (the start of) the translation process from Latin into the vernacular and the diffusion of the manuscripts.

Confraternities, lay associations related to the Church, represented a connection between the lay and the religious and constituted a privileged vehicle of cultural transmission and education. Although they were probably not directly involved in the work of translation, they participated in the oral and written transmission of devotional texts and of biblical material, such as gospel harmonies, by organising religious activities for members of the community and, in particular, cycles of sermons during Lent (Dessi 1998, 86–87). Moreover, confraternities gave their members the opportunity to copy books belonging to the confraternity library. In some cases members of a confraternity were asked to hold a sermon on a religious subject once a year. The speeches delivered in the vernacular by the members show a profound knowledge of both the Bible and the rhetoric structure of sermons (Delcorno 2000; Zorzi Pugliese 1980). Moreover, searching for vernacular translations and the creation and care of libraries was one of the tasks of

some members of the confraternity. Books could be exchanged between members, sold, or donated to poor priests or friars. Thanks to these confraternities a semi-private commercial network developed, which stimulated an increasing number of meetings, exchanges and discussions, as well as the dissemination of vernacular translations of religious texts.

The reconstructions of the poetics, literary production and the social position of Chambers of Rhetoric in the Low Countries (local institutions grouping amateur writers and actors) demonstrated that rhetoricians were familiar with the preaching theories developed by mendicants (*artes praedicandi*) and with (vernacular) religious literature, in particular the Bible. Rhetoricians liked to cultivate a self-image as popular preachers, which was accepted by clergy and city magistrates because of their amazing knowledge of the vernacular Bible text and their ritual and dramatic expertise in helping to instruct the urban crowds (Moser 2001; Van Dixhoorn 2004; Van Bruaene 2006).

Lay people were thus 'living channels of communication' of religious knowledge in the vernacular, and were directly contributing to an emancipatory movement of religious acculturation. The networks created by these lay people, which could include lay and religious people, could become 'sacred networks' where subjects of faith, religion and interpretation of the Scriptures were combined with earthly preoccupations and civic responsibilities.

The findings will be evaluated and combined with the outcomes of existing research on social and economic aspects of urbanisation, in order to pinpoint the relationship between the specific urban environment and the religious emancipation of lay people. As a matter of fact, features of society and economy, political and cultural conditions, did affect the opportunities to concretise lay people's religious hopes. Two aspects of urbanisation will be highlighted, which in preliminary research have appeared to be directly connected to the other two agents in the process of religious emancipation of urban laity, i.e. the diffusion of vernacular religious texts and the presence of urban religious movements:

- a) the processes of democratisation and the later birth of a new urban aristocracy
- b) the relations of urban governments to religious institutions (settlements, presence and influence of 'new' religious orders such as the mendicants and the Modern Devouts), as well as the proliferations of new pious bodies and charitable institutions such as religious confraternities, hospitals and third-order communities, which permitted the laity to play roles that were once the exclusive preserve of monks and clerics.

The biographical data collected by the extensive analysis of primary sources, referring to owners, copyists, buyers, translators and circulation networks, will also be considered and compared to prosopographical studies on urban elites, confraternities and chambers of rhetoric in order to pinpoint the networks of circulation of manuscripts and the relations of these 'epistemological communities' to the urban environment.

#### EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

The research project *Holy Writ and Lay Readers* will combine a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach (from philological, historical and theological research points of view) with an international perspective. The research will focus on Italy, the Low Countries and the Rhineland. After completion of the analysis of primary and secondary sources and the contextualisation of research data for the three areas, results will be evaluated in a comparative perspective. The cultural dynamic processes reconstructed by the members of the research team for the Italian and Rheno-Flemish-Dutch areas will be collated to map and analyse similarities and discrepancies in the dynamics leading to the process of religious emancipation of the laity.

Successively, studies of other European regions showing a lower level of translation and distribution, such as France, England and Spain, will be included in the final evaluation of the analysed data to illustrate the dynamics of religion and culture in the Late Middle Ages and to fully understand the conditions of this late medieval cultural revolution, which resulted from the connection between the vernacular Bible texts and the urban environment. By the creation of a European research network and the organisation of two workshops and an international congress (see Resources), the research team will grow to become a centre of expertise on late medieval urban religion, with a strong emphasis on cultural dynamics, translations and transmission of ideas.

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### iii. Resources

A new research team will be set up for the proposed research project. Two researchers (Principal Investigator and a postdoctoral researcher) will be appointed for the duration of 48 months in total. The employment of a postdoctoral researcher is preferable to a PhD student, as the large amount of manuscript and early printed sources can only be studied and evaluated by an experienced researcher. Moreover, a thorough knowledge of social and religious history offers perfect conditions for a successful comparative research project.

After the formalisation of a research protocol, the applicant (PI) will work mainly on the reconstruction of the Italian situation and will have primary responsibility for the final evaluation of the analysed data. The postdoctoral researcher (to be appointed) will concentrate on the Low Countries and the Rhineland. The findings of the research project will be published in a series of articles on vernacular Bible reading in Italy, the Low Countries and the Rhineland (in English, Dutch, Italian and German). The main publication will be a final comparative study with a European perspective to be written by the members of the research team under the supervision of the PI, *Holy Writ and Lay Readers: A Social History of Vernacular Bible Translations in the Middle Ages*.

<i>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</i>		<i>POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER</i>	
<b>FIRST YEAR</b>	Primary Sources Italy	Primary Sources Low Countries and Rhineland	
	Organisation of first workshop on <i>Vernacular Bible manuscripts</i>		
<b>SECOND YEAR</b>	Secondary Sources Italy	Secondary Sources Low Countries and Rhineland	
<b>THIRD YEAR (FIRST HALF)</b>	Contextualisation Italy	Contextualisation Low Countries and Rhineland	
	Organisation of second workshop on <i>Vernacular Bibles in Urban Environment</i>		
<b>THIRD YEAR (SECOND HALF)</b>	Synthesis and comparative study Italy, Low Countries and Rhineland	Synthesis and comparative study Italy, Low Countries and Rhineland	
<b>FOURTH YEAR</b>	European Perspective	European Perspective	
	Organisation of International Congress <i>Vernacular Bible Translations in Medieval Europe</i>		
	<b>END-PUBLICATION</b> <i>HOLY WRIT AND LAY READERS: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF VERNACULAR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN THE MIDDLE AGES</i>		

As summarised in the above table, during the first year of the research project the PI and the postdoctoral researcher will travel to libraries in the Low Countries, Germany and Italy to study the original manuscripts. Manuscripts from other countries will be studied in reproduction (microfilm, photographs and/or CD-Rom). During her stay in Italy, the PI will make use of the libraries and facilities at the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) and of the Dutch Art History Institute in Florence (NIKI). Research in archives in Italy and the Low Countries and Germany will help corroborate data about ownership of manuscripts. During the second year a selection of secondary sources will be made. Treatises on Bible translations, didactic treatises, ego documents, sermons and sermon collections (e.g. *Repertorium Middelnederlandse preken* by the University of Antwerp and VU University Amsterdam), library catalogues, book lists, chronicles, statutes and inventories of confraternities will be searched for traces of biblical knowledge. The

applicant and the postdoctoral researcher will organise two international workshops on vernacular Bibles at the end of the first and during the third year, possibly in cooperation with the Istituto Franceschini in Florence and the École Française de Rome, organisers and sponsors of the project 'La Bibbia in italiano tra Medioevo e Rinascimento/La Bible italienne au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance'. Finally (fourth year), the results of the scrutiny of sources from Italy and the Low Countries will be compared and evaluated in a European perspective. To enhance the comparative study of medieval Bible translations, an international conference on *Vernacular Bible Translations in Medieval Europe* will be organised.

During the research project, the investigators will make extensive use of internet resources and databases, such as the CD-Rom Middelnederlands (collection of Middle Dutch texts), the BNM (Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta, [www.bnm.leidenuniv.nl](http://www.bnm.leidenuniv.nl)), the MMDC (Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections), the DBNL (Digitale Bibliotheek Nederlandse Letteren, [www.dbnl.nl](http://www.dbnl.nl)), the texts selected for the OVI (Opera del Vocabolario Italiano, [www.oivi.cnr.it/](http://www.oivi.cnr.it/)) and the digital editions on the site of the Biblioteca Italiana project ([www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/dlib/catalogo/](http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/dlib/catalogo/)). The use of electronic sources will allow the researchers to scrutinise a large number of published and unpublished secondary sources and to effectively search the texts for Biblical references.

The applicant and the postdoctoral researcher will collaborate with the researchers of the projects *Quattuor Unum* (VU University Amsterdam) and *Biblia Sacra* (University of Amsterdam, VU University Amsterdam and Catholic University of Leuven). Collaboration already exists with the projects *Men of Letters. Medieval Dutch Literature and Learning* and *The Gottesfreunde and the textual culture of vernacular mysticism in the Rhineland and the Low Countries (1300–1550)* led by Geert Warnar (University of Leiden), which focus on the emergence and the evolution of the intellectual tradition in Dutch (religious) literature of the 14th and the 15th centuries.

## **PART C: The Research Environment**

### **i. Transition to independence**

The project will enable me to set up a new research team and to conduct independent international and interdisciplinary research. The research experience I gained as a senior researcher and lecturer during my two postdoctoral projects and my teaching activities will be broadened by the responsibility of leading my own research project. The unique combination of an international background with specialisation in several disciplines (philology, history and theology) will enable me to break new ground for research crossing geographical and disciplinary borders. Moreover, the members of the research team will collaborate with research projects in the Netherlands and abroad and take part in international academic networks. Although PhD students are not included in the present ERC research proposal, the applicant and the other member of the research team will actively participate in teaching and supervisory activities for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

### **ii. Hosting institution**

The host institution for the project will be the Faculty of Arts at the University of Groningen. Research at the Faculty of Arts, and in particular in the History and Dutch Department, is focused on cultural history from the Late Middle Ages to the present day and it offers an outstanding context for the proposed research project. In recent years, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Groningen has moreover developed into a national and international centre of expertise on the field of Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Studies, which was recently evaluated very positively by an independent international visiting committee.

The Groningen Research Institute for the Study of Culture (ICOG), which coordinates research on the field of history and literature, is characterized by its interdisciplinary nature, which means that research groups are organised in such a way as to encourage links – both synchronic and diachronic – between them. The focus on the study of cultural processes and on their various manifestations will offer an excellent setting for my research project, which aims at reconstructing cultural dynamics in the European late Middle Ages. The ICOG is affiliated with various research schools, Dutch organizations which seek to coordinate scientific activity on a supra-faculty or even national, level: the Groningen Research School for the Study of the Humanities; the Netherlands Research School for Medieval Studies; the Netherlands research institute and research school for economic and social history; the Dutch National Graduate School in Classical Studies. The Faculty of Arts holds the secretary of two research schools: Groningen Research School for the Study of the Humanities (GRSSH) and the Netherlands Research School for Medieval Studies (NRSMS).

In addition to that, the University of Groningen coordinates the activities of the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR). This Institute stimulates scientific cooperation between Italy and the Low Countries on the field of History, Art History and Archaeology, offers to Dutch researcher the opportunity to organise international scientific meetings (with a stress on comparative studies of Dutch and Italian history and culture) as well a favourable scientific environment for the creation of international scientific networks.