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# Polyglot Bible: Psalter

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## Imprints and Impressions: Milestones in Human Progress

Highlights from the Rose Rare Book Collection, Sept. 29-Nov. 9, 2014

Roesch Library, University of Dayton

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### Polyglot Bible: Psalter

- 1516
- First edition in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Arabic

Origen (184/185–253/254) created the first polyglot Bible, which is called the Hexapla because it was in six columns. This presented the Old Testament in Hebrew, a word-by-word Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, and four Greek translations that included the Septuagint as revised by Origen. The only complete copy, said to have run to 6,000 pages, was kept in the library of the bishops of Caesarea. By 638 it had perished, and only fragments survive.

As the West moved from the monoglot Latinity of the Middle Ages to the new learning of the Renaissance, Greek and Hebrew studies flourished once more. This, along with the Reformation and the advent of printing led to a passionate alliance of philology and theology, as scholars tried to parse out the exact meaning of Scriptures for their doctrinal wars. One aspect of this was appearance of polyglot Bibles, many consciously taking Origen's Hexapla as their model. The great scholar-printer Aldus Manutius conceived a plan for a polyglot Bible in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin as early as 1497. The project never came to fruition,

although a specimen leaf survives in the Bibliothèque National de France.

The Genoa Psalter on display is possibly the first polyglot work of its type to be published, although some would give credit to Erasmus's trilingual edition of the Psalms in an appendix to the eighth volume of his Jerome (Basel, 1516). The Psalter's eight columns provide the Hebrew, a literal Latin translation, the Latin Vulgate, the Greek Septuagint, Arabic, an Aramaic paraphrase in Hebrew characters, a Latin translation of the Aramaic, and scholia (textual and exegetical notes).

Agostino Giustiniani (1470-1536), its editor, was a Dominican, the bishop of Nebbio in Corsica, and the first professor of Hebrew and Arabic in the University of Paris. Giustiniani had planned a complete polyglot Bible. He began work on the Psalter in 1514, published it at his own expense in 1516 and had prepared the New Testament for printing as well, although poor sales of the Psalter brought the project to an untimely end. Giustiniani himself came to an untimely end as well, dying in a storm while sailing from Genoa to Corsica.

Many polyglot Bibles followed, beginning with the great Complutensian Polyglot prepared by a group of scholars at Alcalá under the direction of Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (1436–1517). Much of the Complutensian Polyglot (1514–1517) was printed before the Genoa Psalter, but its actual publication was delayed until 1521/1522. Other notable polyglot Bibles

include those of Christopher Plantin (Antwerp, 1568–1573), the Paris Polyglot (Paris, 1642), and Bishop Brian Walton’s London Polyglot in nine languages (London, 1653–1657).

—Fred W. Jenkins, PhD, Professor and Associate Dean for Collections and Operations, University Libraries

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