When Beryl Smalley was just beginning her work on the tradition of medieval Bible commentary, her attention was caught by the work of a little-known commentator named Gilbert. At least, Gilbert is little known to modern students of the Middle Ages; one measure of this is the fact that his writings were not printed (at least under his name) in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, that amazing compendium of medieval ecclesiastical thought. In his own day, the early twelfth century, though, this Gilbert was so widely acclaimed as a polymath that he gained the title “Magister Gilbertus Universalis”, “The Universal Gilbert”. He was given this name (or perhaps took it for himself) around the year 1110, when he was about fifty years old and working as the master of the school at Saint-Etienne of Auxerre. Because of this sojourn, he is also known as Gilbert of Auxerre, but Gilbert actually had a rather diverse career. He probably came to Auxerre from studying biblical commentary with Anselm of Laon, but in the next decade he seems to have worked as a lawyer in the Roman Curia, where he was noticed by King Henry I of England. In 1128 he was consecrated Bishop of London, a position he held until his death in 1134.²

Smalley was the first to notice that Gilbert’s works, all glossed biblical commentaries, were extraordinarily important in the compilation of the *Glossa ordinaria*, that great compendium of medieval commentary that circulated widely from the twelfth century to the sixteenth.³ Working from manuscript sources, she traced Gilbert’s
influence in a series of articles, and later summarized her thoughts on Gilbert in her magisterial book, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Smalley attributes a rather long list of glosses to Gilbert, including those on the Pentateuch, the Major Prophets (for medieval Christians Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) and Lamentations, all done before he became Bishop of London in 1128. The very recent study of Alexander Andrée has suggested a slightly different scenario, according to which Gilbert is the compiler of the *Glossa ordinaria* on both the Major and the Minor Prophets, including Lamentations, and also contributed signed glosses to the *Glossa ordinaria* to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The attribution to Gilbert of signed glosses is an interesting point to which I will return later, since it may be a characteristic of his work.

It must be noted that, for the most part, Andrée’s argument is necessarily based on evidence from just a few manuscripts, since there are few extant manuscripts attributed to Gilbert. According to Stegmüller’s *Repertorium biblicum medii aevi*, for instance, Gilbert’s Gloss on Jeremiah is known in only one Cambridge manuscript. The exception to this paucity of witness is the Gilbert’s glossed commentary on Lamentations, for which there is a profusion of manuscript testimony. Stegmüller lists over forty known manuscripts of Gilbert’s commentary on Lamentations, and Andrée has found eighty-six, of which he used twenty-seven for his critical edition of the first chapter. Within the text itself, which like most medieval glosses is mostly taken from earlier sources, several of the glosses are actually attributed to Gilbert. What is truly striking about this number of manuscripts is the fact that Gilbert’s Lamentations commentary is the text found in the standardized *Glossa ordinaria* that was first printed by Adolph Rusch in Strassburg in
1480/1482, right down to the attributions to Gilbert\(^9\). One thing, then, that we can say with absolute confidence about the Universal Gilbert is that he compiled the *Glossa ordinaria* to Lamentations from earlier sources, and then added several signed glosses in his own name. Another notable fact is that this text was enormously popular, especially if we consider that the eighty-plus identified manuscripts include only those that circulated as Gilbert, not those that were part of some sort of *Glossa ordinaria* pandect. In order to begin to understand why this text, of all that Gilbert may have written, was so popular, let us begin with a consideration of the Book of Lamentations itself.

The Lamentations of Jeremiah, one of the most intense books of the Hebrew Bible, is made up of five poems about the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Although they are appended to the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, they are by another hand or hands, and probably from the century after the Babylonian conquest\(^10\). The format of Lamentations is unusual: the first four poems (that is, chapters 1-4) have an acrostic form. The first, second and fourth chapters follow the outline of the biblical book: each has 22 verses, and each verse begins with a different and sequential letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so that reading down the first letter of each poem is reciting the Hebrew alphabet, beginning with alpeh and ending with tau. There are further complications in the second, third, and fourth poems, which reverse the order of the letters ain (16) and phe (17); the third poem also repeats each letter three times, for a total of sixty-six verses. Chapter five, “The Prayer of Jeremiah”, does not include this acrostic form. It was, obviously, impossible to preserve the acrostics in just this fashion in Greek and Latin translations, but the Hebrew letters were kept as verse headings, even though
they have no obvious meaning in those languages. For example, the opening verses, Lamentations 1:1-2, are in the Vulgate version:

**ALEPH**

1:1 Quomodo sedet sola
Civitas plena populo!
Facta est quasi vidua
Domina gentium;
Princeps provinciarum
Facta est sub tributo.

**BETH**

1:2 Plorans ploravit in nocte,
Et lacrymae eius in maxillis eius;
Non est qui consoletur eam,
Ex omnibus charis eius;
Omnes amici eius spreverunt eam,
Et facti sunt et inimici.

How the city sits solitary
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was once ruler of the nations.
The princess of the provinces
Is placed under tribute.

Weeping, she weeps in the night,
And tears run down her jaw.
There is no one to comfort her
Among all who loved her.
All her friends have betrayed her,
And have become her enemies.

The preservation of these Hebrew letters was surely more than decorative, for Christian authors were well aware of the Jewish tradition of assigning meaning to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Jerome never wrote a commentary on Lamentations, but in one of his letters to his female disciple Paula, he discusses at some length the meaning of each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the possible Christian allegories these readings bring to the interpretation of Old Testament texts that feature such acrostics, such as Lamentations\(^{11}\). The Hebrew letters, then, add a world of possible interpretative meaning to the poems.

Given this proliferation of potential meaning, and the fact that the poems are used in the solemn “Tenebrae” services during the Matins of the Easter Triduum\(^{12}\), it is curious that Lamentations did not attract more attention in the tradition of Latin biblical exegesis. It is not until the ninth century that the Lamentations are systematically commented in Latin, first by Hrabanus Maurus as part of his commentary on Jeremiah, and then by
Paschasius Radbertus, who wrote the first Latin commentary on Lamentations alone, a treatise that makes full use of the four-fold system of exegesis, although in three interpretations for each verse, folding together the allegorical and analogical levels as two parts of the history of Christ and the Church. Both of these commentaries have a personal cast to them, as each equates the lament over the destruction of the Temple with particular personal problems, thus equating Lamentations with laments of the soul of the monk. Paschasius Radbertus in particular returns again and again to the tropological interpretation, underlining an intensely personal reading of Lamentations. But Hrabanus and Paschasius Radbertus did not start a trend; as Alexander Andrée has pointed out, it is not until the twelfth century that Lamentations really attracts the attention of commentators. In the golden age of monastic literature, Lamentations became the object of an exegetical “explosion”, a proliferation of commentary that includes extant expositions by such famous figures as Guibert de Nogent, Hugh of St. Victor, Peter the Chanter, and Rupert of Deutz, as well as, of course, the glossed commentary of the Universal Gilbert that became the *Glossa ordinaria* to Lamentations, and is the main topic of this essay.

It is clear that Gilbert’s commentary on Lamentations makes solid use of Radbertus. All of the manuscript witnesses, as well as the printed *Glossa ordinaria* editions beginning with that of Rusch, actually cite the Carolingian abbot by name, as “Paschasius”. Plate 1 shows how the various levels of Paschasius’s interpretation are clearly marked by rubrics in the Walters manuscript. But this is not just blind copying; Andrée shows in some detail how Gilbert actually takes Radbertus and turns him into his own interpretation rather than just summarizing him in the style of the great Carolingian
exegetes like Hrabanus Maurus. Gilbert’s own concerns are easily seen in the way he has changed the Lamentations commentary tradition into a compendium of rhetorical devices “according to the Ciceronian theory of embellished speech”, using in a very self-conscious way the “various forms of metrical *cursus* of the medieval *ars dictaminis*”. Indeed, Gilbert turns the focus on the function of tropes in Lamentations, as Mary Dove has pointed out, he shows how Lamentations expresses, as one might expect, *conquestio*, lament, and *indignatio*, righteous anger, but also as a rhetorical vehicle for *prosopopoiea*, as when Jerusalem speaks for the first time “as if having received some life-bringing spirit” (Lam. 1:11).

An excellent example of Gilbert’s concern with rhetoric can be seen in the first gloss attributed to him. Smalley also transcribed this passage, noting that it showed that Gilbert “likes a sentence with a swing; and he can quote Cicero”. Gilbert says:

*Rethoricorum colorum splendorem et sententiarum gravitatem et elocutionis ornamentem me tacente diligens lector non tacebit. Locorum quoque rethoricorum multitudo et dialecticorum raritatem et argumentorum subtilitatem gravis inveniet. Preterea rhetorice questionis humilitatem et interdum indignationis asperitatem vel utriusque commixtionem nullo docente docebit. Rudibus tamen satisfaciendo questionem et indignationem rhetoricam propius diffinitionibus ad medium deducere non gravabor.*

*Est enim, ut ait Tullius, ‘conquestio oratio auditorum misericordiam captans’, cuius primus locus est, per quem, quibus in bonis fuerimus et nunc quibus in malis simus, ostendimus, sicut hic: Quomodo sedet sola civitas &c. (Lam 1:1)*
‘Indignatio est oratio, per quam conficitur aut in hominem odium aut in rem offensio’ (Cicero, inv. 1, 100), cuius primus locus est ab auctoritate, cum dicitur, quante cure ea res fuerit diis immortabilis &c, sicut hic: Candidores Nazarei eius nive &c. (Lam 4:7)

In primo ergo alphabeto paucos indignationis et conquestionis locos assignando diligentiori et perspicatiori viam aperie lectori &c.

Albeit I say nothing, the careful reader will not pass in silence over the splendor of the rhetorical colours, the weight of the sentences and the adornment of speech. For nothing, he will also find the multitude of heads of rhetoric, the choice dialectic and the plainness of arguments. Moreover, he will teach, without instruction, the abjectness of the rhetorical complaint (conquestio), and occasionally the severity of disdain (indignatio), or the combination of both. To satisfy the unskilled, however, I shall not unwillingly explain the rhetorical complaint and disdain by their proper definitions.

‘Complaint,’ as Tully says, ‘is speech seeking to arouse the pity of the audience.’ Its first head is that by which we show what prosperity we once enjoyed and what misery we are in now, as it is here: How doth the city sit solitary &c.

‘Disdain is speech by which either hatred is aroused against some person or offence at some event’; the first head of which is from authority, when it is related of how much concern this event has been to the immortal gods &c. As it is said here: Her Nazarites were whiter than snow &c.
In the first alphabet I therefore show the more careful, penetrating reader the right way by denoting a few heads of complaint and disdain &c.\textsuperscript{20}

Gilbert’s own contributions to the interpretation of Lamentations, therefore, are thoroughly scholastic in nature, that is, they come from the world of the schools, where Cicero’s understanding of rhetorical figures can help the Christian reader to understand the very nature of the laments in the book of Lamentations. This is a far cry from the exegesis of Hrabanus Maurus or even the more literary style of Paschasius Radbertus, both the product of monastic exegetical contexts that did not place as high a value on learning for its own sake. It is true that Gilbert follows Radbertus in comparing the Lamentations of Lamentations to the Song of Songs\textsuperscript{21}, but even so his exegesis takes a very different turn. In Andrée’s comparisons of Gilbert and Paschasius Radbertus, for example, it is obvious that Gilbert updated the commentary on Lamentations 1:7 to add references to canons (as well as monks) and other “ministeriis”, while taking away Radbertus’s suggestion that God does not approve of “vanis studii”, study for its own sake\textsuperscript{22}. Gilbert was writing for a different world, a world of what we can recognize as more literary, or even more “humanistic” learning. This was not the world of Corbie or Fulda, although Gilbert’s approach does have echoes that trace back to the Carolingian school of Auxerre, where Haimo and especially Heiric were known for this type of rhetorical focus, even in exegesis\textsuperscript{23}. The fact that nearly every manuscript has a colophon reproducing Gilbert’s self-definition as “ego Gislebertus Autisiodorensis ecclesie diachonus” clearly links this treatise to the school of Auxerre\textsuperscript{24}. 
Another remarkable feature of Gilbert’s commentary is his elaborate system of glosses, which is quite beyond the system of marginal and interlinear glosses that have been the focus of so much discussion in the secondary literature, especially since the fateful early modern decision to ascribe these to different hands and centuries. As Dove points out, the marginal glosses to Lamentations are even more systematic and longer than those in the *Glossa ordinaria* to the Song of Songs, the text she edited. Plate 2 shows how elaborate Gilbert’s levels of interpretation are, so much so that the commentary actually spills over from the biblical text into *prothema* at the beginning of each chapter, often in the form of charts, that punctuate the manuscripts. These charts recall the canon tables at the beginning of medieval Gospel Books, like them they literally chart the way for the reader. The page from the Walters manuscript reproduced in Plate 2, for example, is found at the beginning of Book 3 of Gilbert’s commentary; it quotes Paschasius Radbertus *hystorice* and *allegorice* to lay out the interpretations at each level for the beginning of the chapter, and so orients the reader to the way the levels of scripture will be seen in this book of Lamentations. But it also includes one gloss from “Gysilbertus”, Gilbert, beginning (as might be expected) with a stylistic comment: “In graui stilo lamentationis esse compositas, manifestum est”. What is striking about this layout, what sets it apart from the normal format of the *Glossa ordinaria*, is the fact that the text of the biblical book under discussion is not found on the same page.

Andrée has added evidence for the conviction that has been growing among scholars of the *Glossa ordinaria* that there is not a much difference between marginal and interlinear glosses as had been thought, quite aside from the addition of the *prothema*. Not only does Andrée discuss a number of places in which the interlinear and marginal
glosses blend into one another\textsuperscript{29}, but he also suggests that there is a type of gloss in Gilbert that could best be called a “middle” gloss, comments of intermediate size that are not fixed on the page from manuscript to manuscript. His point, and it is an excellent one, is that the medieval glosses of any text must be seen as a whole, not as separate texts slapped onto the “Urtext”\textsuperscript{30}.

Andrée also discovered two extant versions of the text of Glossed Lamentations; the later one (which he suggests was standard only after about 1200) is the version transmitted first printed by Rusch edition of 1480/1. Dove has pointed out that this is parallel to the situation of the Glossed song of Songs, which has a pre-1170 and a post-1170 version, each, as here, with a different mise-en-page in the manuscripts\textsuperscript{31}. Andrée, decides to edit the first recension since it is based on what he judges to be the oldest manuscripts, although he points out that there seems to have been what he calls “an English reluctance toward the second recension”, so the two recensions are not only divided chronologically\textsuperscript{32}.

Andrée’s choice of manuscripts is interesting. His edition of the first recension is based on five manuscripts, including the oldest extant dated copy of any part of the \textit{Glossa ordinaria} in any form, Kassel Universitatsbibl. 2o Theol. 6, written in Riechenberg in 1131\textsuperscript{33}. This is an excellent, pedigree, of course, and goes some way to blunt the sharp edge of the difficulty of dealing fairly with over eighty exemplars. As Dove points out, the list of manuscripts here is also interesting because two of the best copies are English, and one almost certainly written in Hereford, where the base text for the \textit{Glossa ordinaria} to the Song of Songs was copied\textsuperscript{34}. This may be a clue that Hereford was a center of bible study in the twelfth century similar to the School of Auxerre. It is
certainly clear that there must have been more than a few centers of diffusion of the *Glossa ordinaria* in the twelfth century; no text copied in one area alone could have swept through all of the cultural centers of western Europe the way the Gloss did. The “Golden Triangle” between Laon-Troyes-Paris (and including, of course, Auxerre) may have been the locus for the development of much of the Gloss, but other monastic and school centers in England, Italy, Germany and Austria must also have been important to the story. Andrée’s lists of extant manuscripts of Gilbert’s work on Lamentations reads like a travel brochure for medieval Christian book culture: nearly every important center of scriptorial activity is included. Just Table 3, his list of twenty-one manuscripts he dates to the twelfth century, includes Italian copies from Como and Siena (2), and Austrian-German representatives from Admont, Kassel (the earliest and most important) and Zwettl\(^35\).

I would like to end by focusing a bit on the Austrian exempla of the Gloss to Lamentations. In Andrée’s next two lists, covering the late twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, there are two from Admont, two from Melk, two from Vienna, and five from the nearby monastic world of South Germany\(^36\). But this list cannot tell the complete story, because, in the face of such an overwhelming number of copies, Andrée has not been able to really consider, thoroughly, all of the extant evidence. My example for this is the manuscript at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, which I have had the opportunity to study and Andrée has obviously not investigated very seriously. In fact, this listing of this copy among the manuscripts gives it the wrong number and the wrong date, since it uses the de Ricci number rather than the Walters shelf-mark, and assigns a manuscript that has been firmly dated to the twelfth century to the thirteenth\(^37\).
Walters 30 is a fine copy of 53 folios, written in a monastic book hand in three columns, either the layout of the text of Lamentations with marginal glosses to the left and right (Plate 1), or, in the case of five folios, the two or three-columned format of the prothematata (Plate 2). There are line drawings with red and green wash and outline throughout the manuscript, and also three magnificent full-page miniatures. The first of these (f. 3r) shows King Nebuchadnezzar enthroned, surrounded by soldiers in the top register, and mounted soldiers taking Jerusalem and putting it to the torch on the bottom. The second (f. 3v) has three registers: at the top, King Nebuchadnezzar holds court while King Zedekiah is blinded, in the middle the blind king is taken to Babylon, accompanied by Jews wearing conical “Jew hats”, the third shows Jeremiah seated with two other Jews, lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. The text of Lamentations begins on f. 4r (Plate 1), so these miniatures are obviously meant to set the scene. The last miniature is at the end (f. 47v), where Jeremiah kneels in prayer before an altar with a crown hanging above his head. These miniatures have had a life of their own, as is obvious from the exhibition cards at the Walters, that show they have been used for exhibits on medieval warfare, medieval armor, medieval fortifications, but never, ironically, for an exhibit on the medieval Bible or medieval interpretation.

One of the peculiarities of this manuscript is that it attributes at least twice glosses of Gilbert to Gregory the Great. According to Andrée, this same error is found in two of the twelfth-century manuscripts he used for his edition, one French and one from Rochester Cathedral Priory in the South East of England. Andrée groups these two copies together as one textual family; this certainly makes sense for manuscripts from
Northern France and South East England, but how can we explain the existence of a basically contemporary copy from a monastery in Austria?

There are many mysteries to be solved before we can really understand how the medieval glossed Bible can to be such an important text. We have known since the days of Smalley (indeed, her earliest days) that the Lamentations commentary of Gilbert of Auxerre is an important chapter in the development of the *Glossa ordinaria*. Why was this excursus into rhetoric so beloved of scholars in monastic communities? What can this tell us about the boundaries between “monastic” and “scholastic” in the twelfth century? This latest step in the re-discovery of the once-universal Gilbert is a major accomplishment. It is only to be hoped that Alexander Andrée will continue this difficult work with a closer look at a broader spectrum of manuscripts. His contribution will be all the more important if he does.

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1 I would like to thank the Penn Humanities Forum for providing me the time to work on this topic in the spring of 2006, while I was a Senior Fellow.


5 SMALLEY, Study of the Bible, p. 60.

6 ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 49.

7 F. STEGMÜLLER, Repertorium biblicum mediæ ævi, Madrid, 1950-1980, 11 volumes, #2543; the manuscript is Cambridge, Pembroke College 7.

8 ANDRÉE, op. cit., pp. 87-148. I am fortunate to have been able to study one manuscript of Gilbert’s Commentaries on Lamentation, Baltimore, Walters Art Museum MS 30, a twelfth-century copy from Austria. I am grateful to and Lynn Ransom, Mellon Fellow in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, for her generosity in calling this manuscript to my attention, and to Ransom and William Noel, Curator of Manuscripts at the Walters, for greatly facilitating my access to the Walters collection.


10 In my description of Lamentations, I am following my article “The Lamentations Commentaries of Hrabanus Maurus and PaschADIUS Radbertus”, Traditio, 37 (1982), 137-163; see p. 138 notes 3 and 5 for bibliography about the book in its original Hebrew context and in the Latin Christian tradition.


12 Lamentations make up the three lessons of the Nocturn of Matins on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, cf. MATTER, op. cit., pp. 138-139 and note 7.


14 ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 56, see notes 23-28 for details about these commentaries and a few by lesser-known authors.

15 Ibidem, pp. 64-75 for a comparison of Paschasius Radbertus and Gilbert including several passages where, although many of the words are the same the meanings are entirely different.

16 Ibidem, p. 75. I am also indebted to the online review of Mary Dove (TMR 06.02.21) for some excellent insights into Gilbert’s treatise.

17 Ibidem, pp. 228-9, Dove (TMR 06.02.21).

18 Ibidem, p. 170. In the Walters manuscript, this passage is actually attributed to “Gregorius”, f. 2v. This is one of two places in this manuscript where “Gilbertus” or “Gylbertus” is read as “Gregorius”, the other is a gloss at the beginning of Chapter 3, f. 23v.


20 Latin text and English translation from ANDRÉE, op. cit., pp. 170-171. The quotations are from Cicero, inv. 1,100-106, and Rhet. Her 2 and 3, see notes of Andrée.

21 Glossa ordinaria to Lamentations, Prothema to Chapter 1, ed. ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 162; compare to PASCHADIUS RADBERTUS, In Threnos (ed. Paulus), p. 4.
Glossa ordinaria to Lamentations 1:7, ed. ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 210, lines 59-66; compare to PASCHASIIUS RADBERTUS, op. cit., p. 30, lines 781-784; discussed by ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 70.


ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 21, note 71.


Mary Dove (TMR 06.02.21); Glossa ordinaria in Canticum canticorum (ed. Mary Dove, Turnhout, Brepols, 1997 (CCCM, 170).

Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, MS 30, f. 37v. Since this is near the end of chapter 2, it is not included in the critical edition of Andrée.

The prothema were subject to some changes during the history of transmission: a number of manuscripts have additional prothema, see ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 120, and Appendix I, pp. 299-301.

An excellent example of this is found in Walters Art Museum Ms 30, f. 30v, where the marginal and interlinear glosses are virtually indistinguishable.

ANDRÉE, op. cit., pp. 58-60.

Ibidem, pp. 91-96 and Plates I and II.

Ibidem, p. 125.


Ibidem, pp. 88, 104-105; Dove (TMR 06.02.21).

Como, Seminario Vescovile, 16; Siena, Biblioteca Comunale, F IV 23 and F II 3; Admont, Stiftsbibliothek, 450; Kassel, Universitätsbibliothek, 2o Ms. Theol. 6; Zwettl, Stiftsbibliothek, 36; ANDRÉE, op. cit., p. 88.

Admont, Stiftsbibliothek, 130 and 415; Melk, Bibliothek des Benediktinerstifts, 207 and 295; Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1045 and 1287; München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm. 3803, 7785, 13085, 14453, 14454; ANDRÉE, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

The manuscript is Walters MS 30, from Austria, perhaps the Seitenstetten (near Linz), dated to the first half of the twelfth century. Again, I thank William Noel and Lynn Ransom for the opportunity to work with this codex. Andrée seems to be quoting the listing in Seymour de RICCI, Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada, New York, The H. W. Wilson Company, 1935-1940, 3 vol. and supplement (where it appears in vol. 1, p. 821, as #388 of his listing). De Ricci does date Walters MS 30 to the twelfth century, so why Andrée dates it a century later is a mystery.