VULGATA IN DIALOGUE • 9 (2025) 94–96

Rezension • Book Review

A New Series of Latin Vulgate Readers

Reviewed by **Bernhard Lang**

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A FIRST LATIN VULGATE READER: SELECTED TEXTS FROM THE VULGATE. Edited by Timothy A. Lee, Samuel H. Wessels, and Ryan Kaufman. Cambridge, England: Timothy A. Lee Publishing, 2025. xxvii, 112 pp. – $19.99 (paperback), $27.99 (hardcover).

THE BOOK OF PSALMS: A LATIN READER WITH MACRONS. Edited by Timothy A. Lee, Samuel H. Wessels, and Ryan Kaufman. Cambridge, England: Timothy A. Lee Publishing, 2025. xxvii, 362 pp. – €24.60 (paperback), €33.16 (hardcover).

THE VULGATE NEW TESTAMENT: A LATIN READER WITH MACRONS. Edited by Timothy A. Lee, Samuel H. Wessels, and Ryan Kaufman. Cambridge, England: Timothy A. Lee Publishing, 2025. xxvii, 490 pp. – €60.98 (paperback), €74.89 (hardcover).

The books are available from Amazon. A full catalog of the publisher's titles – including a recently released annotated edition of Augustine's Confessiones – is available at the publisher's homepage.

When I began serious study of the Bible in the 1960s, one of the first books I purchased was Fritz Rienecker's *Sprachlicher Schlüssel zum griechischen Neuen Testament* (11th ed., Gießen: Brunnen Verlag, 1963). Of pocket size and printed on thin paper, it was – and remains – the ideal companion volume to any pocket edition of the Greek New Testament. An English translation is available as *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, translated, edited, and updated by Cleon L. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1998). When, shortly thereafter, I began reading the Latin Bible, I naturally assumed that a Latin equivalent to "Rienecker" must exist; but none did, and none has appeared since. When, in the summer of 2025, I happened upon the new "Latin Vulgate Readers" series, I was electrified. Could this be the resource I had hoped for over more than sixty years?

https://doi.org/10.25788/vidbor.v9i1.1529

Content and Scope

A First Latin Vulgate Reader offers a selection of Vulgate texts with linguistic annotations: Genesis 1–3, Ruth 1–4 (the complete book), Jonah 1–4 (complete), Psalms 1, 2, and 22 (the latter corresponding to Psalm 23 in Hebrew and English numbering), and Matthew 2–3 and 26–28. *The Book of Psalms* presents the entire Latin Psalter with annotations, and *The Vulgate New Testament* does the same for the New Testament, adding Jerome's letter *Novum opus facere me cogis* to Pope Damasus (pp. 1–4), also known from Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Latine* and from the de Gruyter *Vulgata* published in theTusculum series (vol. 5, Berlin 2018, pp. 14–22).

All three volumes present the text of the *Vulgata Clementina* (1592), without reference to the critically reconstructed Stuttgart Vulgate or the *Nova Vulgata* (1986). Each book contains the same introductory material: a concise history of the Latin Bible, instructions on using the reader, and notes on phonemic vowel length. At the back of each volume are Latin paradigms, a Latin–English glossary, and maps. The real "beef" lies in the linguistic notes printed as a two-column apparatus on each page, occupying between one third and one half of the space.

In what follows, I comment on two matters: the macronized Latin text, and the vocabulary and parsing apparatus, including the glossary.

The Macronized Latin Text

The Latin text is relatively conservative, as seen in the retention of "j" in *ejus* and *Jesus* (rather than *eius*, *Iesus*). This is largely a matter of taste and hardly objectionable. But the most striking feature is the consistent marking of long vowels with macrons:

> Iterum ergō locūtus est eīs Jēsūs, dīcēns: Ego sum lūx mundī: quī sequitur mē, nōn ambulat in tenebrīs, sed habēbit lūmen vītae. – John 8:12

This resembles what one obtains using the "Latin Macronizer," an online tool created by the Swedish computer linguist Johan Winge in 2015. The editors' version differs slightly (e.g., in the spelling of *Jesus*). While the macrons are elegantly set, they reflect the macronizer's tendency to mark all potentially long vowels – including many that standard grammars, dictionaries, and traditional pedagogy do not consider long. For example, I would prefer:

> Iterum ergō locūtus est eīs Jesus, dīcens …

The same issue appears in other verses:

> Puer autem crēscēbat, et cōnfortābātur plēnus sapientiā … — Luke 2:40

I would print:

> Puer autem crescēbat, et confortābātur plēnus sapientiā.

This is not to fault the editors: in most cases they have corrected the macronizer's occasional missteps (e.g., *ēgērunt* at Matt 12:41, instead of the macronizer's *ēgerunt*). The deeper problem is the absence of a comprehensive handbook treating vowel length in classical and post-classical prose – one that would supply paradigms, lists of standard words with long vowels, and

discussion of contested cases. Such a work would also need to explain the fact that the whole issue of vowel length in Latin, whether Classical or late, is more an invention of modern scholarship than an observable linguistic fact. After all, as Bernard Bertolussi notes, "la différence entre voyelles longues et brèves a disparu au cours du IVe siècle après J.-C." (*La grammaire du latin*, Paris: Hatier 1999, §7).

The Vocabulary and Parsing Apparatus

The apparatus is, to my mind, the most valuable feature of the series. A typical example is John 5:10:

> Dīcēbant ergō Jūdaeī illī quī sānātus[12] fuerat[G]: Sabbatum est, et nōn licet[13] tibi tollere grabātum[10] tuum.
>
> 10 *grabātus*, -ī, m. low bed, sick bed, pallet. (13)
> 12 *sānō*, -āre, -āvī, -ātum. to cure, heal. (89)
> 13 *licet*, -ēre, -cuit, -citum. it is allowed. (61)
> G *sum* plpf. act. ind. 3s

This is clear, useful, and easy to navigate. The numerical gap between notes 10 and 12 results from the fact that *grabātus* appeared earlier on the page and is given the number of its first occurrence. Bracketed numbers indicate the total frequency of the word in the Bible (both Testaments). The apparatus generally omits very common words (*dīcō*, *ergō*, *ille*, *quī*, etc.), which are instead found in the glossary at the end of the book. Virtually the entire vocabulary of the New Testament is thus accessible.

The glossary, however, suffers from some inconsistency. All three volumes state that they list "all the words that occur 90 or more times in the Bible and found in this book," yet the New Testament volume also includes rarities such as *libertus* (1). Additionally, a few minor errors appear, such as the mistaken and incomplete verb entry *intrō, -āre* (instead of the adverb *intrō*), placed immediately before *intrō, -āre*[2].

Despite these small issues, the apparatus and glossary are genuinely helpful tools. I must admit, however, that for *The Book of Psalms* and *The Vulgate New Testament*, I would personally have preferred slimmer volumes without the full biblical text – something closer to the compact "Rienecker" format mentioned above. Perhaps the editors will one day consider producing such companion volumes.

Conclusion

Are these books to be recommended? Indeed, very much so. The series fills a longstanding gap in the study and teaching of the Latin Bible. Its combination of annotated text, consistent parsing help, and full vocabulary access makes it a valuable resource not only for students but also for researchers who wish to read the Vulgate fluently and efficiently. One hopes that the promised further volumes will follow soon.