

Depicting Muhammad, Islam and the Qur'an in Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*

Florence Ninitte

Introduction

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Dominican friar Vincent de Beauvais compiled his *Speculum historiale* (*SH*) which included 29 chapters devoted to Islam, its laws and its prophet. To achieve this, he used, among other sources, an Arabic text (*Risālat al-Kindī*) translated into Latin a century earlier. He then provided quality information via a medium of dissemination that reached a wider audience, the encyclopaedia. In this respect, it differs from the strictly theological/polemical literature, which is reserved for a limited sphere of readers. Through its source, the *SH* renews the content of the Prophet's biography, but also offers the first history of Islam and the Qur'ān in a Latin historical encyclopaedia. A final innovation lies in the description of some of the rituals of Islam through large, unaltered quotations from the Qur'ān, giving a wide readership an insight into some aspects of this religion in terms close to the original text.

A significant addition

The chapters on Islam constitute one of the major additions to the revision of the *Speculum historiale*. One indication of the interest of the subject: the facts of Muhammad and his law prominently featured in Book XXIV, here presented according to the French translation made by Jean de Vignay in the early 1330's (picture 2):

Les choses contenues et les chapitres du XXIII livre du Mirouer hystorial

[...] Et entre ces autres choses il contient moult des fais de Mahomet et de sa loy

Aim and methods of the project

My research project is based on an in-depth analysis of three aspects of Vincent de Beauvais' work:

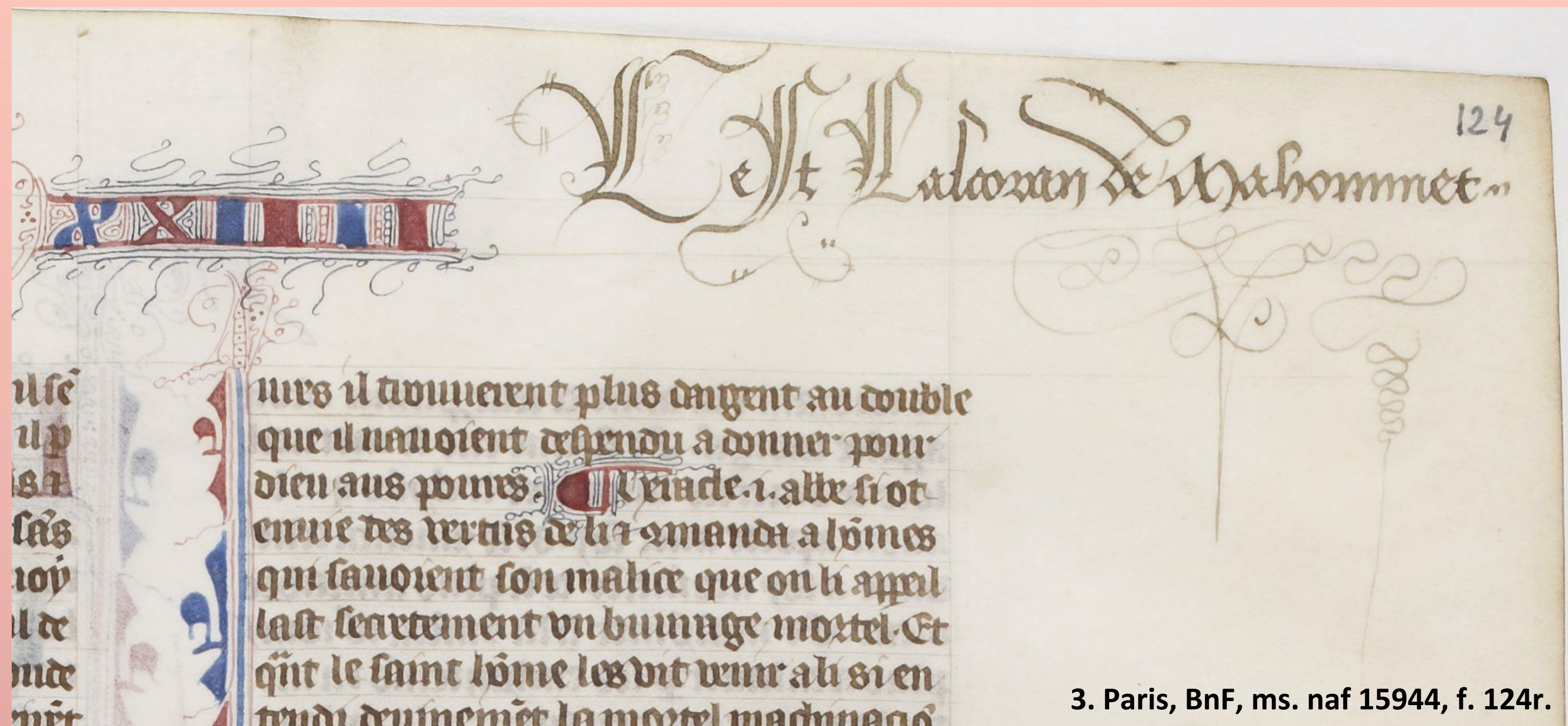
- Cultural-political context and compilation methods
- Text of the *SH*: the way in which Islam is integrated into the thread of Christian history; description created within the encyclopaedic discourse
- Posterity of the *SH* and its impact on later literature

The primary aim of this research is to analyze the section that the *Speculum* dedicates to Islam in the light of its production context, but also that of the literary context to which it belongs.

The first results of this analysis show that, far from being yet another polemical text as determined by previous scholars, the *SH* offers evidence of a more nuanced reflection and attitude towards Islam.



2. Paris, BnF, ms. naf 15944, f. 110r.



3. Paris, BnF, ms. naf 15944, f. 124r.

Posterity of the *Speculum historiale*

The *Speculum historiale* was widely read and distributed in over 250 manuscripts. It has also been adapted in different formats and translated into several vernacular languages. The various translations are among the first texts to transmit a significant number of Qur'anic verses in the vernacular.

The third part of my research will focus on the dissemination and influence of the *SH* about Islam.

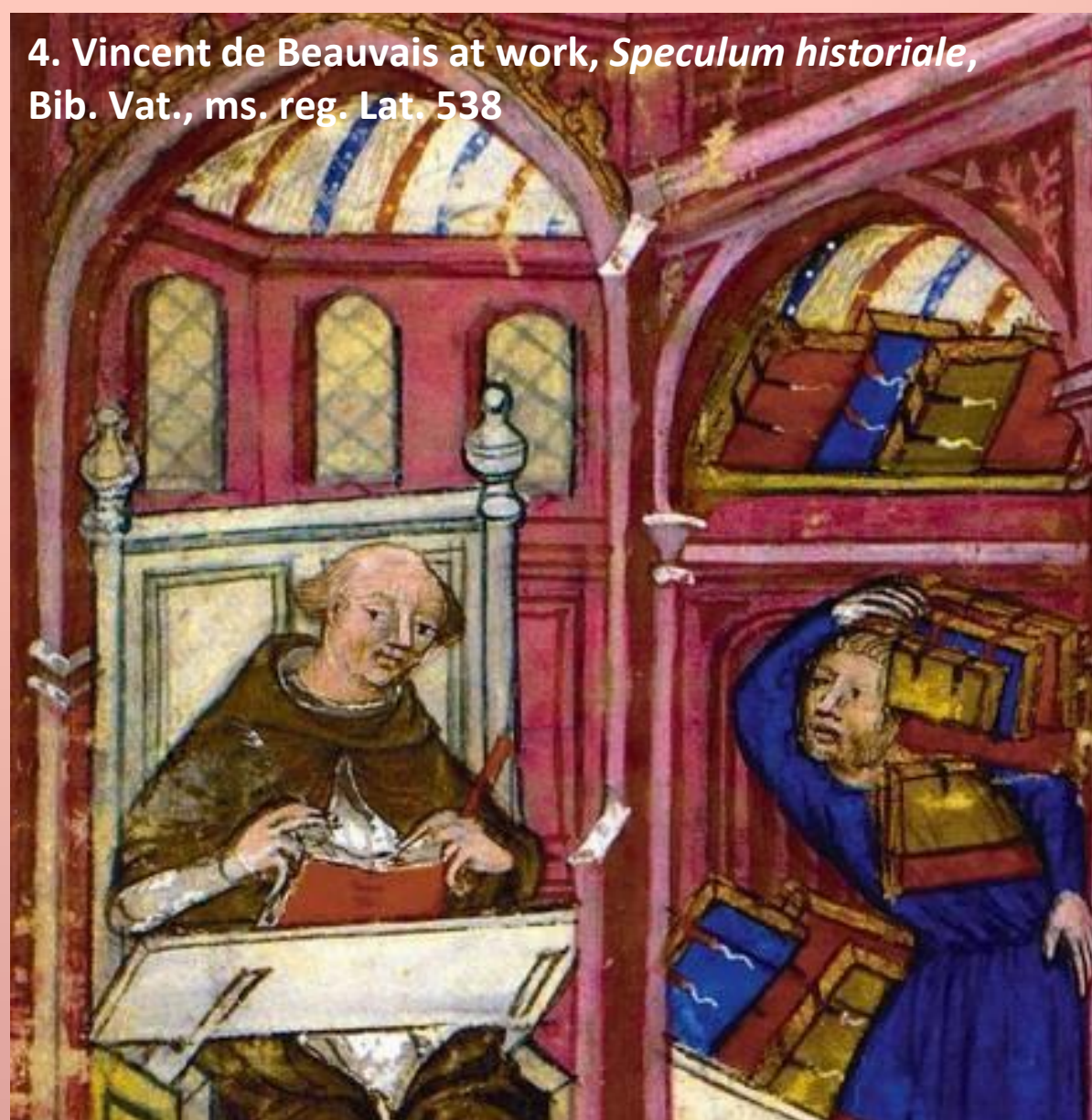
Cf. picture 3. Example of the exergue of the chapters on Islam in one of the manuscripts of the French translation by Jean de Vignay.

Selected bibliography

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- PAULMIER-FOUCART Monique, *Vincent de Beauvais et le Grand miroir du monde*, avec la collaboration de M.-C. Duchenne, Turnhout, Brepols, 2004, coll. Témoins de notre histoire 10.
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Perspectives

This multidisciplinary study will lead to new perspectives on a widely-read medieval text and on a key theme of cultural history.



4. Vincent de Beauvais at work, *Speculum historiale*, Bib. Vat., ms. reg. Lat. 538

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