

Review: Allister McGrath, *In the Beginning, the Story of the King James Bible*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2001

Pages: 331

Detailed Work Void of Spiritual Fruit

This book contains a good deal of history of bible production technology, and the fascinating translation process used by the Authorized Version (AV) committees.

The motives of relevant political and religious personalities surrounding the various English translations leading up to and including the AV are touched on, although they can be largely discounted as speculation or opinion.

There are a few gems regarding details of the earliest editions of the AV and its translation, including the final editorial meeting from the John Bois Manuscript, one John Speed's influence over the intricate genealogies and illustrations, and a possibility that the original manuscript perished in the 1666 Great Fire of London.

However, the author runs into major problems when attempting any Biblical criticism:

- The AV has errors (e.g., in Jeremiah 7.13 and 29.19!).
- He references something called the "original Greek".
- Codex Sinaiticus is a reliable, ancient (4thC) Greek manuscript.
- All gospels were derived from a single source (the "Q" theory).

-The Tetragrammaton is pronounced “Yahweh” and not “Jehovah” in English. Also, that God the Father is “YHWH” (therefore the other members of the Godhead are not!).

Despite the above there is still value for those interested in what still is the greatest book in the world, the Authorized Version.

Preface (pp. ix-x)

In 1953, Elizabeth at her coronation as given a copy of the AV.

Introduction (pp. 1-4)

The AV did not follow literary trends, it established them.

I) Unknown to the Ancients: The New Technology (pp. 5-23)

Three inventions changed the world: gunpowder for warfare, the magnet for marine navigation, and printing for idea dissemination.

Woodblock were costly to produce and once cut were fit for only one purpose.

Gutenberg’s breakthrough was a movable metal type. He found that the screw to press the plat plate (platem) onto the paper caused ink smudges, blurring the impression. This was fixed by placing a wooden box between screw and platen. The new ink in those days was made of candle soot and varnish.

Rag and fibre-based paper can be traced back to 2ndC AD China. Arabs brought this technology to the west in the 8thC via their Chinese invasions.

The 1468 Gutenberg Bible was called the Thirty-Six-Line Bible and was 1,768 pages.

Each Bible was on average 340 folio sheets which required 170 animal hides at two sheets per hide.

Gutenberg also printed indulgences.

William Caxton (1422-91) was England's first printer. The first thing he printed were indulgences.

II) The Rise of English as a National Language (pp. 24-36)

English began to displace French in the 15thC.

In 1407, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Arundel proclaimed:

“...nobody from this day forth translate any text of Holy Scripture on his own authority into the English, or any other, language...”

Erasmus didn't speak English.

III) The Great Tumult: The Reformation (pp. 37-66)

The *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* (Erasmus, 1503) was a best-seller.

Martin Luther began writing German works in 1520.

Zurich perceived Catholicism as alien.

Catholics Thomas More and John Fisher were executed for refusing to recognise Henry VIII as head of the English Church. He died January, 1547, and his will made provision for prayers to be said for his soul.

IV) The First Printed English Bibles (pp. 67-98)

Tyndale's 1525 Bible followed Luther in doubting the authenticity of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. The printing included marginal notes.

The author believe Romans 7.7 is in error with the Greek *me genoito* ("God forbid").

Paper sizes are as follows:

Folio: 1 sheet X 1 fold = 2 leaves per sheet = 4 printed pages.

Quarto: 1 sheet X 2 folds = 4 leaves per sheet = 8 printed pages.

Octavo: 1 sheet X 3 folds == 8 leaves per sheet = 16 printed pages.

Duodecimo: 1 sheet X 4 folds = 12 leaves per sheet = 24 printed pages.

Sextodecimo: 1 sheet X 5 folds = 16 leaves per sheet = 32 printed pages.

An octavo edition was roughly 8 X 5 inches.

V) Explaining the "Hard Places": the Geneva Bible (pp. 99-129)

The greatest obstacle to the AV's supremacy was the Geneva Bible's popularity.

Geneva goes back to Roman times where it was at a main crossroads in Europe.

In 1535 it declared independence from Savoy and adopted principles of the Reformation. By 1560 it had a population of 21,400. The main translator was thought to be William Whittingham, although Miles Coverdale, John Knox, and Laurence Thomson were also involved.

In 1558, [Bloody] Mary Tudor died and across 1559 and 1560 Marian exiles returned to England.

Robert Estienne (Stephanus) published a Greek New Testament in 1551 which had numbered verses.

Elizabeth I issued the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion in 1563.

The Company of Stationers was the professional guild which controlled manuscript publishing.

VI) A Puritan King? The Accession of King James (pp. 130-148)

William of Orange was assassinated by Roman Catholics.

The Spanish Armada of 130 ships set sail on May, 1588.

The Puritans charged vestments as being “the restored relics of a new popery”.

As James was born in Scotland he was legally an alien and could not inherit the throne.

VII) The Decision to Translate: The Hampton Court Conference (pp. 149-171)

Gregory Martin translated the Douay-Rheims bible, published in 1582. The Roman Church insisted this was the only acceptable English translation.

Of the AV, James directed that it would “lastly be ratified by royal authority” so that “the whole church would be bound to it, and none other.”

James’ *A Counterblast to Tobacco*: “...a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs...”

In 1604, James left the state in debt by £600,000, which explains why he made no financial contribution to the translation of the AV.

Printer Robert Barker's monopoly was purchased, and John Speed bought a privilege in October 1610 to print various illustrations in the introduction.

James failed to support the beleaguered Protestant nations in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), and arranged for his son to marry the French Roman Catholic princess Henrietta Maria.

Dean John Overall of St Paul's Cathedral watched Jesuit Henry Garnett hanged, drawn, and quartered.

VIII) Translation: The Englishing of the Bible (pp. 172-196)

Twenty pounds was deemed sufficient remuneration for the translators.

Translation Rule 1 stipulated that the Bishops' Bible was to be as little altered as possible.

Rule 8 said every translator in each company would meet and agree on the work.

Rule 9 said each book from each company would be sent to the other two companies for checking.

Rule 10 said where companies differed in opinion, the matter was recorded and compounded at the general meeting.

Rule 11 said for special places of obscurity a search of all learned men in the land would be made.

Rule 12 said called for all skilled clergy to send their opinions to the relevant company.

Rule 14 said these translations were to be used when preferred over the Bishops' Bible: Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, and the Geneva.

Rule 15 placed three or four of the greatest divines at the university to act as overseers of the work.

There were six companies of translators; two each at Westminster Abbey, Oxford University, and Cambridge University.

The original number of fifty-four translators specified by James was not achieved. Most of the scholars were based in the south of England.

John Boys of the second Cambridge committee spent Sundays in his parish, devoting the rest of the week to translating the Apocrypha. Samuel

Ward was on the same committee and he presented an account of the translation to the Synod of Dort on November 20, 1618. This says that two persons per committee were present at the final editorial meeting in Stationers' Hall. This is the "Boys Manuscript", published in 1966.

After edits, the work passed to Miles Smith and Thomas Bilson, who wrote the "Epistle Dedicatory" and the "Translators to the Readers".

Bishop Bancroft dies November 2, 1610 and never saw the final product. He introduced fourteen changes without consultation.

It may be that the manuscript copy of the AV was destroyed in the Great Fire of London (1666).

IX) Production: The Early Printings of the King James Bible
(pp. 197-216)

Robert Barker's biblical support was directly proportional to their profitability. He originally invested £3,500 to cover production costs in a partnership. This fell over after five years and sold the patent to Bonham Norton in 1617. Barker regained it in 1629.

The first AV printing was in Barker's shop at Northumberland House, Aldersgate Street.

In the Gutenberg press, a relief pattern for each letter was cut into a copper matrix using a punch in mirror form. This was then fitted to the bottom of a metal-covered box of wood. The typesetter would handle the mould in his right hand and pour liquid in from the ladle with his left.

The mould was jerked up so the metal was forced into the mould. Notwithstanding wrist strain, an experienced typesetter could produce four thousand pieces per day.

Composition is page construction; text is laid out in two columns with fifty-nine lines each.

Type was assembled using a "composing stick" or a small very thin tray.

Renaissance printers checked their work via having the original copy read aloud while they read the proof text.

Ink was difficult to apply evenly, so they had to dampen the paper.

Early on, ten pricked holes were made in the margins so they would align with the pinpoints on the press.

Quarto and octavo AVs appeared in 1611, and a duodecimo in 1617.

Norton and Bill published a vicesimoquarto in 1620; forty-eight pages per sheet.

The blank page at front was to protect the text from wear, gradually the author and title was printed on it.

The four figures on the title page represent the four gospels.

Pelican imagery is used as she feeds her young with blood pecked from her own breast.

England had already lost possession of his only French possession, Calais, under Mary Tudor.

The AV is said to have been for ecclesiastical usage.

John Speed added the thirty-four pages of decorative genealogies.

The OT has 6,637 marginal notes.

Early printings had many errors despite the greatest effort being put into typesetting. Most presses had only one or two presses. There was constant pressure to reduce production costs.

There was the:

- Great He Bible of 1611; and

- Great She Bible of 1613 (both based on Ruth 3.15).

- 1631 Wicked Bible (Exodus 20.14)

The first Oxford Printing was 1675, then in 1682 (the “Vinegar Bible”)

X) Translators and Traitors: The Problems of Bible Translation
(pp. 217-252)

The Apocrypha was declared to be of use for “example of life and instruction of manners”. Under Charles II it regained popular status.

The British Foreign Bible Society was the first missionary society to cease its inclusion, in 1826.

Codex Alexandrinus of the 5thC was presented to King Charles I in 1627 by the patriarch of Alexandria.

XI) The Bible and the Shaping of Modern English (pp. 253-276)

The *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) states: “every language has a time of rudeness antecedent to perfection, as well as of false refinement and declension”.

The Italian language was guided by the *Accademia della Crusca* in 1582.

Elegance of the AV was not accidental.

The AV was a growing force in shaping the English language.

English is not a phonetic language.

XII) Triumph: The Final Acclamation of the King James Bible
(pp. 277-300)

Oxford Professor of Poetry Robert Lowth said the AV was “the noblest monument of English prose”.

In America the AV first had to be imported from England.

On September 10, 1782, the U.S. Congress approved Aitken's AV.

English authorities stopped printing of the Geneva in 1616.

Afterword (pp. 301-310)