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PART 1



The history

1 | Making the text

Introduction

The text of the KJB is commonly thought to be the fixed and stable work of one collection of translators. This is not the case. First, as the translators recognised, it is a revision of earlier work. In the Preface, they declare:

Truly (good Christian Reader) wee neuer thought from the beginning, that we should neede to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall good one, not iustly to be excepted against; that hath bene our indeauour, that our marke.<sup>1</sup>

The KJB, first printed in 1611 by the King’s Printer Robert Barker, is the culmination of a sequence of work begun by William Tyndale and continued by Miles Coverdale, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Bishops’ Bible and the Rheims New Testament (to name only the chief predecessors). Second, the development of the text did not stop with the publication of the translators’ work in 1611. Changes – sometimes deliberate, sometimes accidental, some for the better, some not – were made in subsequent printings by the King’s Printer. From 1629 on, editorial work on the text began to be a major factor in creating the texts that we have today: the spelling was modernised, changes were made in the translation, and the punctuation was revised. Most of the changes were made by 1769, but work of this sort has never quite ceased. As a result, modern versions differ constantly from the 1611 text, though most of these differences are minor matters of spelling. Moreover, there are variations between currently available editions, especially between English and American editions.

As well as thinking of the KJB as the culmination of nearly a century of translation work, therefore, we should think of the text itself as continuing to develop, and as never quite settling either into one stable form or into the best form it might take. There are two stories here. The first, the story of the development of English translations through to the KJB, has been frequently told, and there are good studies of the indebtedness of the KJB to its predecessors, and of its particular characteristics as a translation. The

<sup>1</sup> ‘The translators to the reader’, fol. B1<sup>v</sup>.

second, the story of the history of the KJB text itself from 1611 on, has, until now, only once been studied and told, in F. H. A. Scrivener's *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible* (1884; originally the introduction to *The Cambridge Paragraph Bible*).

When the present edition of the KJB was first considered by Cambridge University Press, it seemed a good idea to reissue Scrivener's book with an additional chapter dealing with the new work. But, as work went on, it became clear that a new book was needed even though Scrivener's work still contained a great deal of real value. As a history of the text it has some significant errors, and some sections that can be usefully developed. Moreover, a good deal of it is directed towards *The Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, the text of which has had little influence on the text as it is generally available. Hence the present book. Though I am in places critical of Scrivener, I also draw freely on his material and frequently agree with his judgements on particular readings.

### The beginnings of the King James Bible

The surviving evidence about the making of the KJB is patchy and tantalising. Since some of it is also evidence for the text of the KJB, it is doubly important to weigh it up thoroughly: we need to know as much as possible of how the text was made in order to make the best possible judgements on editorial difficulties that it presents, and we need to have a clear sense of the status of the individual pieces of evidence as witnesses to the text. The evidence may not support the orderly and meticulous image we have of the work as much as has been generally thought; at the same time, some of it gives more insight into what the wording of the KJB was meant to be than has been recognised by previous editors.

Forty copies of the Bishops' Bible were prepared for the translators and only one – quite possibly a composite copy made up from several of the forty – is known to have survived. Individual companies of translators were supposed to send copies of their work as they finished it to the other companies, and again only one is known to have survived. Indeed, if they followed their rules exactly, there would have been hundreds of such copies, together with a significant number of letters about places of especial obscurity. Previous historians of the KJB have wondered about the survival of such things as John Bois's notes about the work, and now two copies have been found. There is, in short, more evidence than there used to be, and a reasonable chance that more is still to be found.

The evidence we do have tells a lot about the work but not enough to clear up all mysteries about how the work was done: speculation and guesswork will be unavoidable as we try to establish just how the text was created.

Though there had been earlier attempts to initiate a new translation,<sup>2</sup> the idea of making the KJB came from a conference held at Hampton Court in January 1604. James I, who had been on the throne for less than a year, had called the conference to try to establish a degree of religious uniformity in his kingdoms. In the midst of it, seemingly out of the blue, the Puritan leader John Reynolds suggested a new translation. At this time, though the older versions had not disappeared from circulation, there were two principal English versions of the Bible. The Bishops' Bible of 1568 was the official Bible of the Church, but had no great reputation for scholarship. It had last been printed in folio in 1602, and this was to be its final complete printing. Vastly more popular, and favoured by the Puritans, was the Geneva Bible of 1560. The work of protestant exiles at Geneva during the reign of Mary, it was of considerable scholarly merit and was chiefly characterised by its extensive annotations. Both were revisions of the pioneering work of Tyndale (NT 1526, revised NT 1534, Pentateuch 1530, Genesis to 2 Chronicles in the Matthew Bible, 1537), Coverdale (1535) and the first official Bible of the Church of England, the Great Bible (1539–40).

On the second day of the conference, Monday 16 January, Reynolds moved 'his Maiestie, that there might bee a newe *translation* of the *Bible*, because, those which were allowed in the raigns of *Henrie* the eight, and *Edward* the sixt, were corrupt and not aunswerable to the truth of the Originall'.<sup>3</sup> He gave three examples. In Gal. 4:25, *συστοιχεῖ* 'is not well translated, as now it is, *Bordreth*, neither expressing the force of the worde, nor the Apostles sense, nor the situation of the place'. Psalm 105:28 should read '*they were not disobedient*', rather than '*they were not obedient*', and Ps. 106:30 is wrong to read 'then stood up *Phinees* and *prayed*' because the Hebrew is '*executed iudgement*' (Barlow, p. 45). These are precisely the kind of things translators and editors of translations deal with. Yet the petition is odd. This was not one of the topics that Reynolds had said he would raise, and so appears almost as a casual interjection. The argument appears brief and weak: Reynolds has given three Great Bible readings, apparently ignoring the existence of the Bishops' Bible, which had corrected the sense in two of the readings.

<sup>2</sup> Pollard (pp. 138–9) gives an Elizabethan draft for an Act of Parliament for a new version that dates from the primacy of Whitgift (1583–1604). The Hebraist Hugh Broughton long agitated for a new translation. In a letter of 21 June 1593 he proposed making a revision with five other scholars; he claimed considerable support and later blamed Whitgift for the failure of his proposal (*Dictionary of National Biography*). He wrote in detail about the need for revision and the principles on which it should be undertaken in *An Epistle to the Learned Nobility of England Touching Translating the Bible* (Middleburgh, 1597). Notoriously intransigent, he was not asked to work on the KJB.

<sup>3</sup> Barlow, p. 45. The accuracy of Barlow's report is questionable. It was written at Bishop Bancroft's request, read by the King before publication and scorned by those who were not of the Church party (Babbage, p. 70).

Moreover, if the problem was simply a matter of a few such readings, they might easily have been dealt with in the next printing of the Bishops' Bible. Many such matters had already been dealt with, so many that the successive editions differ markedly from the 1568 original. It may be that Reynolds' intention was to push the conference into accepting the Geneva Bible as the official Bible of the Church, for it corrects where he demands correction, and the two revisions he suggests are exactly those of the Geneva Bible. If this was the intention, it failed instantly: James thought Geneva the worst of the translations because of the anti-monarchist tendencies of a few of the notes. Yet he took up the idea, hoping for a uniform translation, by which he meant one the whole Church would be bound to. His other particular interest, following his dislike of Geneva, was 'that no marginall notes should be added' (Barlow, pp. 46–7).

### Setting-up the work

Rather than quiet correction in the printing house, the work became revision on the grandest scale, as befitted the ambitions of a newly crowned scholar-king. Six companies of translators were created, two each at Westminster, Cambridge and Oxford, and forty-seven men named to these companies. The first Cambridge company worked from Chronicles to Ecclesiastes, the first Oxford company took the Prophets, and the second Oxford company the Gospels, Acts and Revelation.

When we come to the other three companies the first of the many mysteries about the making of the KJB arises, one that at first sight seems minor, but may prove to be important. The ten men of the first Westminster company dealt with Genesis to 2 Kings, but there are significant variations between the four lists of translators preserved in the British Library.<sup>4</sup> MS Harley 750, possibly the latest of these lists, divides the company in two, five men for the Pentateuch and five for 'the story from Joshua to the first book of the Chronicles excluded'. Giving further support to the possibility of subdivision of some of the committees is the fact that no copy of the list specifies simply Genesis to 2 Kings. One, MS Add. 28721, leaves out all mention of the Pentateuch, making it appear that the company started work from Joshua. The two other lists name the Pentateuch separately from the later books, implying that work on it may have been thought of as separate from work on the historical books. MS Harley 750 also suggests that the second Westminster company may have divided four and three, dealing with the Pauline epistles and the canonical epistles, and that the second

<sup>4</sup> MS Add. 28721, fol. 23<sup>r-v</sup>, MS Egerton 2884, fol. 5<sup>r-v</sup>, MS Add. 4254, fol. 105<sup>r</sup> and MS Harley 750, fol. 1<sup>r-v</sup>.

Cambridge company may have divided the work on the Apocrypha at the end of Bel and the Dragon, for all the lists describe its work not as the Apocrypha but as ‘the Prayer of Manasses and the rest of the Apocrypha’.

One other piece of evidence suggests that at least one company, the Cambridge Apocrypha company, subdivided things further and made individuals responsible for individual parts as had happened with the Bishops’ Bible.<sup>5</sup> John Bois was a member of this company; his biographer, Andrew Walker, states:

Sure I am, that part of the Apocrypha was allotted to him (for he hath shewed me the very copy he translated by) but, to my grief, I know not which part . . . When he had finished his own part, at the earnest request of him to whom it was assigned, he undertook a second.<sup>6</sup>

Walker’s account is not necessarily reliable (see below, p. 17), but, at face value, this shows that individual translators worked on individual parts of the Apocrypha, and that Bois, having finished a section of the Apocrypha, undertook another section.<sup>7</sup> If Walker indeed is misremembering what Bois told him, it still seems likely that some form of subdivision of the work is referred to. ‘The Prayer of Manasses and the rest of the Apocrypha’ may mean Manasses and both books of Maccabees, which is approximately one quarter of the Apocrypha. Seven men are named as making up this Cambridge company, so it is possible that they divided the work in quarters, and that they worked individually or in pairs.

Rules for the work were drawn up, specifying some principles of translation and how the work should proceed. Both aspects are of considerable importance: the principles of translation remain an important guide for editors of the text, and the procedural rules are crucial for understanding how the text was created.

1. The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops’ Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.
2. The names of the prophets, and the holy writers, with the other names in the text, to be retained, as near as may be, accordingly as they are vulgarly used.
3. The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, *viz.*: as the word ‘Church’ not to be translated ‘Congregation’ etc.

<sup>5</sup> Scrivener recognised the possibility that some of the evidence that follows ‘might lead to the supposition that the different Translators took to themselves separate books . . . as was really the case with the Bishops’ Bible’ (p. 12n).

<sup>6</sup> Walker’s ‘The Life of that famous Grecian Mr John Bois’ (date of composition unknown) is reprinted in Allen, *Translating*, pp. 127–52; p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> Allen probably stretches Walker too far in inferring that Bois ‘worked unofficially with another company’ (*Translating*, p. 5).

- 4. When a word hath diverse significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the Ancient Fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place, and the Analogy of Faith.
- 5. The division of the chapters to be altered either not at all, or as little as may be, if necessity so require.
- 6. No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, which cannot without some circumlocution so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.
- 7. Such quotations of places to be marginally set down as shall serve for fit reference of one Scripture to another.
- 8. Every particular man of each company to take the same chapter or chapters, and having translated or amended them severally by himself where he think good, all to meet together, confer what they have done, and agree for their part what shall stand.
- 9. As one company hath dispatched any one book in this manner, they shall send it to the rest to be considered of seriously and judiciously, for His Majesty is very careful for this point.
- 10. If any company, upon the review of the book so sent, shall doubt or differ upon any place, to send them word thereof, note the place and withal send their reasons, to which if they consent not, the difference to be compounded at the general meeting, which is to be of the chief persons of each company, at the end of the work.
- 11. When any place of especial obscurity is doubted of, letters to be directed by authority to send to any learned man in the land for his judgement of such a place.
- 12. Letters to be sent from every Bishop to the rest of his clergy, admonishing them of this translation in hand, and to move and charge as many as being skilful in the tongues have taken pains in that kind, to send his particular observations to the company, either at Westminster, Cambridge or Oxford.
- 13. The directors in each company to be the Deans of Westminster and Chester for that place, and the King's Professors in the Hebrew and Greek in each University.
- 14. These translations to be used where they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible, viz.:
  - Tyndale's.
  - Matthew's.
  - Coverdale's.
  - Whitchurch's.
  - Geneva.
- 15. Besides the said directors before mentioned, three or four of the most ancient and grave divines, in either of the universities not employed in the translating, to be assigned by the Vice-Chancellors, upon conference with the rest of the heads, to be overseers of the translations as well Hebrew as Greek, for the better observation of the fourth rule above specified.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Three manuscripts in the British Library give the instructions (a manuscript from the Cambridge University Library Archives is reproduced as the endpaper for Nicolson's *Power and Glory*). They vary in details of phrasing and spelling. I have modernised MS Add. 28721, fol. 24<sup>r</sup>. This and MS Harley 750 omit rule 15 (this suggests they are the older manuscripts, for rule 15 was a late addition – see next note); for this rule I follow MS Egerton 2884, fol. 6<sup>r</sup>. The version of the instructions given in Pollard is commonly followed, but does not correspond exactly with these manuscripts.

Most of these rules were followed, if not always to the letter. Rule 2, for instance, concerning names, was only partially followed. Though some of the names are conformed to vulgar usage, the translators paid more attention to the forms used in the originals and did not attempt to establish uniformity either of sound or spelling. So the major prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel also appear as Esai (2 Kgs 19:2), Esaías (NT), Esay (Apoc.), Ieremias (Apoc. and NT), Ieremie (Apoc. and NT), Ezechias (Apoc.) and Ezechiel (Apoc.). Some of this variety comes from differences between Hebrew and Greek spelling (differences of spelling in the same language are not usually registered), some from the period's lack of standardised English spelling. 'As near as may be' is therefore the crucial phrase in this rule. Rules 9–12 were probably not followed very closely, as I will show. Rule 14 seems to be exclusive, tacitly forbidding use of the Roman Catholic Rheims NT, but the translators drew on this as they drew upon all the resources available to them; they did not pass over a good rendering simply because it did not come from the specified translations.

The rules did not cover everything. Just as rule 15 was added later,<sup>9</sup> so various matters of practice were decided on while the work was in progress. Several English divines, including one of the translators, Samuel Ward, gave an account of the work to the Synod of Dort (20 November 1618). The account includes specimens of the rules, beginning with a paraphrase of rules 1, 2 and 6, and then, as if they were rules, moves on to the following matters of practice:

<sup>9</sup> It was made following doubts about rules 3 and 4; these doubts were referred by the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge to Bishop Bancroft, who replied:

To be suer, if he had not signified unto them already, it was his majesty's pleasure that, besides the learned persons employed with them for the Hebrewe and Greeke, there should be three or fower of the most eminent and grave divines of their university, assigned by the vice-chancellour uppon conference with the rest of the heads, to be overseers of the translations, as well Hebrew as Greek, for the better observation of the rules appointed by his Highness, and especially concerning the third and fourth rule: and that when they had agreed uppon the persons for that purpose, he prayed them send him word thereof. (As given in Mombert, p. 348)

There has been doubt as to whether this rule was followed, but we do know of one person who was appointed to this role: George Ryves, Warden of New College, Oxford, who was not one of the translators, is referred to as 'one of the overseers of that part of the New Testament that is being translated out of Greek' (Thomas Bilson to Thomas Lake, 19 April 1605; as given in Paine, p. 72). Anthony à Wood's evidence about the overseers should probably be discounted. He implies that they were appointed later in the process (the 'great work' seems to refer to the work of the Oxford NT company): 'which great work being finished, soon after, divers grave Divines in the University, not employed in translating, were assigned by the Vicechancellor (upon a conference had with the Heads of Houses) to be overseers of the Translations as well of Hebrew as of Greek' (Wood, II; p. 283). The identity of phrasing with rule 15 makes it probable that Wood took the rule for the deed.



10                      A Textual History of the King James Bible

Thirdly, where a Hebrew or Greek word admits two meanings of a suitable kind, the one was to be expressed in the text, the other in the margin. The same to be done where a different reading was found in good copies.

Fourthly, the more difficult Hebraisms and Graecisms were consigned to the margin.

Fifthly, in the translation of Tobit and Judith, when any great discrepancy is found between the Greek text and the old vulgate Latin they followed the Greek text by preference.

Sixthly, that words which it was anywhere necessary to insert into the text to complete the meaning were to be distinguished by another type, small roman.

Seventhly, that new arguments should be prefixed to every book, and new headings to every chapter.

Lastly, that a very perfect Genealogy and map of the Holy Land should be joined to the work. (Pollard, p. 142)

This describes what was done most of the time, but the translators did not always work consistently. Not all variant readings or ambiguities are noted, and this sometimes leads to problems for later editors, particularly in cases where the translators give a reading that differs from the received understanding of the text. If, for instance, the alternative reading ‘and she went into the city’ had been noted at Ruth 3:15, it would have been absolutely certain that the translators had rejected this reading in order to follow the Hebrew literally, ‘and he went into the city’. The use of small roman type for added words, a practice inherited from the Geneva Bible, is very rough and ready, and has caused enormous difficulties for subsequent editors.

There is one other important thing to be noted about this report. Just as it does not list all the rules, so it does not cover all questions of practice that the translators would have had to decide on. A full report would have saved much speculation.

The idea of translations being done by large groups of scholars using a careful process of review is now quite familiar, and this makes it easy to forget just how innovative the scheme for the work was. Previous English versions had been the work of individuals or of small groups, sometimes with single members assigned to particular books, as with the Bishops’ Bible. There was only one well-known precedent for using so many scholars and for having a review process of sorts: the Septuagint. Even though the story of that translation is legendary, it may have provided a model. Seventy translators, representative of the best scholarship of the people, following the orders of a king, each produced their own translation and then compared them publicly; each man’s version was verbally identical.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the KJB rules, clearly drawn up with care and consultation, including consultation

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the legend of the Septuagint, see my *History*, I, pp. 5–9.

with the King, envisage drawing on all the best scholars of the land. In addition to the men named to the companies, all the clergy are encouraged to contribute ‘particular observations’, experts on particular points are to be consulted, and, for the preservation of theological soundness, ‘ancient and grave divines’ of the universities are to be overseers. This is grandiose. As many as ten translators are individually to translate a single part, then to agree together on the translation. This work is then to be circulated among the other groups of translators, commented on and further considered by the original company. Then a general meeting is to deal with all remaining points of difference. In short every effort is made to include the whole country in the work and to ensure that every decision is made with the maximum of care and consensus. The KJB is to be a perfect work that will bring the whole kingdom together.

Companies at work

Within five months of the Hampton Court Conference translators had been selected, probably through a mixture of invitation and petition both by and on behalf of individuals.<sup>11</sup> Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, wrote thus (presumably to the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge) on 30 June:

His Majesty being made acquainted with the choice of all them to be employed in the translating of the Bible, in such sort as Mr Lively can inform you, doth greatly approve of the said choice. And for as much as his Highness is very anxious that the same so religious a work should admit of no delay, he has commanded me to signify unto you in his name that his pleasure is, you should with all possible speed meet together in your University and begin the same.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Evidence for this comes from two sources. From Thomas Bodley’s letters to the keeper of his library, Thomas James, 26 and 31 October, and 7 November 1604 (Wheeler, ed., pp. 113–16), it appears that James was one of the men chosen, but Bodley, anxious not to lose his services, interfered. James expostulated with his domineering master, who, appearing ignorant of James’s wish to be part of the work, gave him an account of his actions: ‘I took my journey purposely to Oxon upon it, to talk with the parties by whom you were chosen, to dismiss you from it . . . and Dr Rainolds upon my speeches, thought it also reason not to press you any further. Moreover, I have signified since unto you that unless of yourself you were willing, no man would enforce you, offering, if need were, to talk with the B. of London [Bancroft] in that behalf’ (p. 115). Walker writes of jealousy over the selection of John Bois as a translator: ‘when it pleased God to move King James to that excellent work, the translation of the Bible; when the translators were to be chosen for Cambridge, he was sent for thither by those therein employed, and was chosen one; some university men thereat repining (it may be not more able, yet more ambitious to have born [a] share in that service) disdaining, that it should be thought, they needed any help from the country’ (as given in Allen, *Translating for King James*, p. 139).

<sup>12</sup> Pollard, p. 27.