

Sunday, December 19, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 161 The Translators at Work: Establishing A Work-In-Progress Timeline

Introduction

- The last three Lessons have been devoted to looking at Bancroft’s Rules as well as the translators and their companies.
 - The Rules to Be Observed in Translation ([Lesson 158](#))
 - The Rules to Be Observed in Translation, Part 2 (To What Extent Were the Rules Followed?) ([Lesson 159](#))
 - The Translators, Their Companies, & Personal Libraries ([Lesson 160](#))
- In this Lesson we want to use surviving primary source documents to establish a work-in-progress timeline for the entire project.

Work-In-Progress Timeline

- Following Hampton Court in January of 1604, it took about five months to draft the Rules, choose and organize the translators into their various companies, and commence work on the project. Dr. David Norton states the following regarding the matter in *A Textual History of the King James Bible*:
 - “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.” (Norton, 11)
- As one might expect, there was a fair amount of drama and jealousy over who was chosen to translate and who was not. Norton elaborates in footnote 11 on page 11:
 - “Evidence for this comes from two sources. From Thomas Bodley’s letter to the keep of his library, Thomas James, 26 and 31 October, and 17 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 Oxford 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 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 please 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 there employed, and was a chosen one; some

university men threat repining (it may be more able, yet more ambitious to have born [a] share in that service) disdainning, that it should be thought, they needed any help from the country' (as given in Allen, *Translating for King James* p. 139)." (Norton, 11)

- Also on page 11, Norton cites the following letter dated 30 June 1604 from Richard Bancroft, the chief overseer of the project, presumably to the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge:
 - "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." (Pollard, 48)
- In a letter dated 4 September 1604, Sir Thomas Bodley reported that the translators "are at it hard in Cambridge," thereby indicating that by at least late August 1604 the work can commence at Cambridge. (Bodley, 195) So intense was the work at Cambridge that many believe it hastened the death of Edward Lively, head of the First Cambridge Company, in May 1605. Regarding the early work at Oxford and Westminster, Professor Norton states the following:
 - "Bodley's letter perhaps implies that work at Oxford started a little more, slowly, but it was evidently demanding enough by January 1605 for one for the translators John Perin, to resign as Regius Professor of Greek. Work at Westminster also started early, though perhaps less diligently. In November 1604 Lancelot Andrewes director of the OT company there, noted a particular afternoon as "our translation time," but added that 'most of our company are negligent' (a statement that shows this company worked collectively rather than individually as the Apocrypha company seems to have done)." (Norton, 12)
- Norton estimates that the stage 1 company work took three to four years, commencing in 1604 and wrapping up in 1607 or 1608 depending on the company. Anthony Wood is the author of *The History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*. His account implies that the Oxford OT company's work was finished before the death of its head, John Rainolds, on 21 May 1607:
 - "The said Translators had recourse once a week to Dr. Raynolds at his Lodgings in Corpus Christi College, and there as it is said perfected the work, notwithstanding the said Doctor, who had the chief hand in it, was all the while sorely afflicted with the gout." (Wood, 283)
- Likewise, a letter dated 5 December 1608 from William Eyre from Emmanuel College, Cambridge to James Ussher, the Chancellor of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, confirms that plans were being drawn up for a review of the whole work by the end of 1608. (Allen, xvi) Dr. Norton suggests that the following letter also implies that the Cambridge OT company's work had been completed for some time. (Norton, 12-13)

- “In my absence from Cambridge there was an order taken from the King’s Majesty by the Archbishop of Canterbury that the translation of the Bible shall be finished and printed so soon as may be. Two of every company are chosen to revise and confer the whole at London. Hereupon I am earnestly requested to get again that copy of our part which I lent you for D. Daniel his use; for albeit there be two fair written copies out of it, yet there will be use of it because I noted in the margin by rashe tevoth [technical word] of the places which were doubted of. And this [Hebrew characters] [i.e., it wants consideration] is not in the others.” (Allen, *Epistles*, xvi)
- Ward Allen, author of *Translating the New Testament Epistles 1604-1611: A Manuscript From King James’s Westminster Company*, believes that as much as a year passed between the time the Cambridge Old Testament company completed its work and Eyre’s letter addressed to Ussher in December 1608. (Allen, *Epistles*, xvii)
 - “Because Eyre had noted with Hebrew characters questionable points in this part of the translation, his copy, it seems certain, came from the Old Testament company which Lively had originated at Cambridge. The phrase, “our part,” must refer to work assigned to the whole company, since translators of each company worked on all the books assigned to that company. Sometime before December 1608, the work of Lively’s company had advanced to a state finished enough to warrant preparation of copies. When were the copies prepared? Time must be allowed for the preparation of Eyre’s copy and the two fair copies out of it, for Eyre to have studied and marked it, for the posting to Daniel, for Daniel to have studied. Eyre’s copy was prepared then, long before December 1608. If the copying and study took a full year, as well it might, Cambridge company, like its sister company at Oxford, finished a stage of its work in 1607.” (Allen, *Epistles*, xvii)
- William Eyre’s letter dated 5 December 1608 serves another important function as well, to “confirm that ‘the general meeting, which is to be of the chief persons of each company, at the end of the work’ (rule 10) began its work in 1609, and was attended by a dozen of the translators.” (Norton, 13) This is also confirmed in the report that Samuel Ward made to the Synod of Dort in 1618 as recorded by Alfred W. Pollard in *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611*:
 - “After each section had finished its task, twelve delegates, chosen from them all, met together and reviewed and revised the whole work.” (Pollard, 338)
- So, from the pieces we can put together, it seems that by 1609 the work of each individual company had been completed at which time the “general meeting” commenced to look over the work of each company and finalize the text for printing.
- Before leaving a discussion of the Eyre’s letter, a few more scholarly comments and observations are in order regarding clues that can be derived from the letter as to how closely some of the other

Rules were followed. Ward Allen argues that all of the procedural rules were followed and takes this to include Rules 11 and 12.

- “The evidence which has survived supports in detail the translators’ faithfulness in following those instructions which outline the procedure of their work.” (Allen, *Epistles*, xxv)
- “The eleventh and twelfth rules set forth the [The exact wording of the underlined section is unclear because of a poor copy.] King James directed the translators to seek the observations and judgements of learned men throughout the land. Eyre’s copy was to this use.” (Allen, *Epistles*, xvii)
- Meanwhile, Professor Norton sees things a bit differently.
 - “. . . other inferences [than the ones made by Allen] may be more probable. Rule 11 specifies that letters should be sent ‘when any place of special obscurity is doubted of;’ Eyre’s manuscript would only loosely fit this purpose, for it contains the whole work, and evidently the places so marked are to be the business of the general meeting. It would be stretching rule 12 to think that it envisaged learned men reviewing drafts of the work; the most obvious sense is that the rule is a mechanism for obtaining comment on problems in the originals or in the extant English translations. Eyre’s manuscript seems more appropriate to rule 9, that individual books should be sent to the other companies for their comment, but still it does not fit exactly, again because it contains the whole work. Now, the only known manuscript that appears to have been prepared for consultation, Lambeth Palace MS 98, contains not one book but most of the text of all the Epistles, so the specification that ‘any one book’ in rule 9 may have to be treated loosely. Perhaps, therefore, Eyre’s manuscript was prepared for the serious and judicial consideration of the other companies, following the spirit but not the letter of rule 9. Presumably the ‘two fair written copies out of it’ were made for the same purpose, and it was expected that the copies would circulate in some way among the other five companies.” (Norton, 13-14)
- Professor Norton goes on to explore other implications that can be derived from the Eyre letter. First, who was Eyre, seeing that he was not known to have been one of the translators? Was he an unnamed translator or secretary to one of the translators? We may never know. Second, why is he writing to James Ussher in Dublin, Ireland? How did one of the documents related to the King James Bible end up in Ireland of all places? Dr. Norton offers the following plausible explanations:
 - “Dr. Daniel must be William Daniel D.D., translator of the New Testament and Prayer Book into Irish. He and Ussher had coincided at Trinity college, Dublin, and in 1608 both held positions at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Daniel as treasurer, Ussher as chancellor. Daniel had finished his NT and was working on his translation of the Prayer Book; he presumably wanted to see the translators’ work as an aid to this.

Eyre, then, seems to have lent his manuscript as a scholarly courtesy. If he remembered the business of consulting with the other companies when he did this, he must have considered the two fair copies sufficient for the purpose. It strains credibility to think that his manuscript was the company's master copy; therefore the master copy did not have the doubtful places marked. Nevertheless, when the King hastened the work, Eyre or the Cambridge company as a whole realized that the only copy of their work with the doubtful places marked was in Ireland, and it was these queries that the general meeting needed to deal with particularly. They needed this information in addition to the master copy.

If there is not a degree of carelessness in this whole situation, it seems that the king's order for the work to be 'finished and printed as soon as may be' caught the translators by surprise; they thought they had more time. Processes were cut short, and the envisaged consultations came to little." (Norton, 14-15)

- There is one surviving manuscript from the first stage work, Lambeth Palace MS 98. The manuscript was prepared by the Second Westminster Company that worked on the New Testament epistles i.e., the Pauline and Jewish epistles excluding Revelation. Access to this document was provided by Dr. Ward Allen in his 1977 publication *Translating The New Testament Epistles 1604-1611: A Manuscript from King James's Westminster Company*. We will look at this document individually in a future Lesson. For now, we will limit our comments on MS 98 to the following summative comments by Dr. Norton:
 - "If the evidence of MS 98 holds good for the work done by all the companies, the translation was half finished when around the end of 1608, the king hurried the translators to 'the end of the work,' 'the general meeting which is to be of the chief persons of each company' (rule 11). Eyre's letter implies that this meeting was imminent." (Norton, 17)
- Discerning exactly what happened between 1609 and 1611, during the second half of the process, is more difficult to discern. Professor Norton states the following regarding the matter:
 - "There are six pieces of evidence as to what happened in the next two to three years. Two of them are the most important evidence of all: the two 1611 printings of the KJV. These, and next most important is the 1602 Bishops Bible with annotation from the translators; though this involves some of the work done by the companies, it is also important evidence about the final form of the translators' work, and so it is best left on one side for the moment. One point needs noting from it immediately, though, that it suggests that the finished work of the companies may have supplied up to five sixths of the changes eventually made by the translators—considerably more than the half suggested by MS 98. The remaining three pieces of evidence concern us at this point: they are the report noted above to the Synod of Dort, the brief life of John Bois by Walker, and Bois's notes from the general meeting. Unfortunately, they are not entirely

consistent with each other, and they do not provide answers to the two main problems: what was the nature of the final copy given to the printers, and, what influence did the printers have on the text?” (Norton, 17)

- Please recall that Samuel Ward reported the following to the Synod of Dort in 1618:
 - “After each section had finished its task twelve delegates, chosen from them all, met together and reviewed and revised the whole work.

Lastly, the very Reverend the Bishop of Winchester, Bilson, together with Dr. Smith, now Bishop of Gloucester, a distinguished man, who had been deeply occupied in the whole work from the beginning, after all things had been maturely weighted and examined, put the finish touches to this version.” (Pollard, 338)

- Written with a first-hand quality, Ward’s report suggests that there were two final states that needed to be accounted for, “one involving a dozen men” and “one involving two.” In the interest of historical completeness and thoroughness, Norton compares the account of Ward at the Synod of Dort with Anthony Walker’s *Life of John Bois*. There is a discrepancy between the two accounts as to the number of men who were present at the general meeting. Walker puts the number at six, exactly half of Ward’s number of twelve. (Allen, 139-141) Norton offers two possible explanations for this discrepancy. First is that Walker’s *Life of John Bois* was written many years after the events and is therefore fuzzy on some of the details. And second is that each of the companies at the given universities sometimes acted as one unified company. (Norton, 18) Walker’s mention of three Bibles i.e., one from each location Cambridge, Oxford, Westminster lends some credibility to Norton’s second option for reconciling these differences.
 - “Another of Walker’s details fit with this, that three copies of the Bible were sent to London, that is, one from each place. If this is true, the pairs of companies put their work together. This may have been a simple matter of binding together the sheets of their master copies of the Bishops’ Bible, which would have been enough to give each pair of groups a single identity. In short, Walker’s understanding of what was meant by ‘company’ may not be as wrong as it appears.” (Norton, 18-19)
- The notes of Bois are consistent with the idea of nine months’ worth of work taking place in 1610.
 - “The notes contain page references to a volume of Chrysostom that appeared in 1610 but not a volume that appeared in 1611, showing that the notes were made in 1610 and so lending credibility to the nine months (*Translating for King James*, pp. 9-10). This is, I think beyond doubt. It raises a major question: what happened in 1609, the year that Eyre’s letter suggests is when the general meeting convened. If the meeting was not as general as has been previously supposed the answer could be this: that it did different parts of this work at different times and involved different people. This idea has the further attraction in that it would help us to account for puzzling features of Bois’s notes.

Bois's notes are remarkably incomplete if the general meeting involved all who attended it in working through the entire text and, in so doing, making at a minimum one sixth but possibly as much as half of textual changes that were still to be made. The notes cover discussion of the Epistles and Revelation only, forcing one to ask whether he was present only for this part on the work: either he took no notes on the bulk of the work or he was only involved with this part of it.

The second puzzling feature of Bois's notes is that they do not account for all the work that had to be done on the Epistles and Revelation. Much more work happened between the preparation of MS 98 and the print of the text than his notes account for. 2,974 changes were made independently of the preparation of MS 98, but Bois records just under 500 items of discussion, the majority of which concern the original rather than particulars of English translation. Even if each of these items of discussion led to a change in the text (which did not happen), they would account for less than a twelfth of the changes. It may be that he did not record all of the discussion he was present at, but somewhere there is significantly more work to be accounted for." (Norton, 19-20)

- The annotated edition of a 1602 Bishops Bible in the possession of the Bodleian Library (Bibl. Eng. 1602 b.1.) bridges the gap between MS 98 and the notes of John Bois. We will discuss this document in detail in future lessons. In a future lesson we will also look at the first printed editions of the King James Bible from 1611.
- The purpose of this lesson was to establish a work in progress timeline to capture the full scope of the translational process utilized by the various companies in transforming the 1602 Bishops Bible into the 1611 King James. Please consider the following summary of the information from the pen of Dr. David Norton presented in this lesson.
 - "Given the incompleteness of the evidence and the puzzles it contains, the best solution is to recognize that, while we now have more evidence than previous historians, just how the translators worked remains mysterious. We have illuminating glimpses of a complex process, but crucial pieces of the puzzle are still missing. Until now, historians of the making of the KJB have interpreted the available evidence as showing an orderly, collective process such as went into the making of the Revised Version. Various hints and gaps in the evidence, it seems to me, tend towards a more muddled picture wherein the KJV stands partway between the orderly committee work of the Revised Version and the individualism of the Bishops' Bible. Small groups and perhaps individual work contributed to the final product, and the rules for the work, from which an ordered picture is easily inferred, were not as literally and uniformly followed as has been imagined.

It is time to put best guesses on the evidence and possibilities. Six companies produced draft translations between 1604 and 1608. They sometimes subdivided their work and they went over it twice. MS 98 represents first-draft work; at this stage about half the eventual readings had been settled. Bod 1602's NT annotations represent work as it left

the hands of the companies, with in places five-sixths of the readings settled. The work was called in 1608, and the companies forwarded it to the general meeting in the form of annotations to the Bishop's Bible text. The general meeting had working copies made of some of the submitted work (Bod 1602's OT work is one of these). It worked over these in small groups in 1609 and 1610, two men worked over the whole text in co-operation with the printer, establishing the KJV as first printed in 1611. Whatever manuscripts there might have been, this, with the second, print, effectively became the master copy of the KJV." (Norton, 27-28)

Works Cited

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