

Sunday, November 13, 2022— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 185 Richard Bancroft, Thomas Bilson, Miles Smith, & The Finishing Touches

Introduction

- Last week in [Lesson 184](#) we concluded our study of the primary work-in-progress documents by offering our final comments on the notes of John Bois and General Meeting. All told, we have devoted 23 Lessons to a consideration of these important, understudied, and underappreciated documents.
- In Lessons [162](#) and [163](#) we began analyzing the pre-1611 evidence for the text of the Authorized Version by looking at surviving primary work-in-progress documents that had been discovered in British libraries in the middle of the 20th century. These documents included:
 - MS 98—handwritten MS prepared by the 2nd Westminster Company that worked on the New Testament Epistles.
 - Bod 1602—complete 1602 Bishops Bible containing handwritten annotations for much of the Old Testament and the Gospels.
 - Notes of John Bois—handwritten notes of John Bois from the General Meeting covering the New Testament Epistles and the book of Revelation.
- In Lessons 162 and 163 I said that we would consider each of these documents in terms of the following three categories. The first of these categories was discussed in Lessons 162 and 163.
 - Scholarly Awareness & Published Access
 - Physical Description & Contents
 - Impact on the readings found in the King James Bible
- Then, in Lesson [164](#) and [165](#), we deviated from my original plan to talk about two additional primary work-in-progress documents that were unknown to me prior to January of this year (2022). These documents included the following:
 - MS Ward B—Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge
 - Samuel Ward’s personal draft work on I Esdras and Wisdom 3-4 from the Apocryphal section. This is the earliest known draft work on the KJB.
 - MS Burney 363—British Library
 - Three unpublished letters between Frenchman Isaac Casaubon and King James translator John Bois. These letters date from late 1610 or early 1611, i.e., very

late in the process utilized by the translators, possibly during the General Meeting itself.

- In [Lesson 166](#) we resumed our study of MS 98 by looking at its Physical Description & Contents. Then in Lessons [167](#), [168](#), [169](#), and [170](#) we discussed the impact of MS 98 upon King James readings by looking at Romans 1, I Corinthians 13, other miscellaneous passages, and the question of printer errors.
- Then in Lesson 171 we began our consideration of Bod 1602. All told, we studied the following regarding this important document.
 - Physical Description & Contents (Lesson [171](#))
 - Impact on King James Old Testament Readings (Lessons [172](#), [173](#), & [174](#))
 - Impact on King James New Testament Readings (Lessons [175](#), [176](#), & [177](#))
 - Final Thoughts on the Impact of Bod 1602 on the King James Bible (Lesson [178](#))
- Then, beginning with [Lesson 179](#) we began a six-part investigation of the notes of John Bois and the General Meeting. In this miniseries we considered the following:
 - A Brief History of Bois' Notes & Their Relation to the General Meeting (Lesson [180](#))
 - Extra Biblical References in Bois' Notes & The Influence of Theodore Beza (Lesson [181](#))
 - English Idiom, Style, and Register in the Notes of John Bois (Lesson [182](#))
 - Observations of Gerald Hammond in *The Making of the English Bible* (Lesson [183](#))
 - Dr. Edward Jacobs' On the Quantitative and Qualitative Work of General Meeting (Lesson [184](#))
- Despite having spent more than 23 hours on these topics we have only scratched the surface of what we could have looked at. My goal has been to dive deep but not too deep. Despite leaving a lot of information on the table, I feel that we have assembled a robust and much needed collection of heretofore unknown information. I am not aware of any other lessons that have covered these documents at the level of depth that we have endeavored to.
- The goal of the current Lesson is to begin looking at what happened to the text once the General Meeting was done with its work. Who saw the text through to the press in the print shop of the King's Printer Robert Barker.

Bancroft, Bilson, Smith & The Finishing Touches

- We do know from Samuel Ward's testimony at the Synod of Dort in 1618 that Thomas Bilson and Miles Smith saw the text through to the press.
 - "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 weighed and examined, put the finishing touches to this version." (Pollard, 339)
- Olga S. Opfell, author of *The King James Bible Translators*, states the following regarding Bilson and Smith providing the finishing touches to the project.
 - "When, in Samuel Ward's words, 'all things had been maturely weighted and examined at Stationers Hall,' Miles Smith of the Second Oxford Company and Thomas Bilson, bishop of Winchester, put the finishing touches to the new translation. So indefatigable a worker was Miles Smith that he is said to have labored over at least some of his pages while riding up to London. More than one historian has suggested that the flood of commas in the King James Version can be traced to Smith's matching his punctuation to his riding rhythms as in cleric garb and wide-brimmed hat he jogged over roads deep in mire. . .

Bilson was High Church; Smith had Puritan sympathies. But they seem to have worked well together. Between them they wrote a fulsome Dedication to King James as well as a long Preface ("The Translators to the Reader") and added fuller headings to the chapters... Bilson, who is generally credited with the headings, followed the Geneva Bible more closely than the Bishops' Bible. But sometimes he struck out on his own as in the heading for Genesis 36:

Geneva: The Genealogy of Esau.

Bishops: On the pedigree of Esau.

King James: The Dukes that descended of Esau.

Thomas Bilson had been at Hampton Court when the translation was proposed and had stood there as a "principal maintainer of the Church of England". He was already recognized—in Anthony à Wood's phrase—as being "as revered and learned a prelate as England ever afforded."

. . . How much polish Bilson and his fellow editor Miles Smith added will never be known. Their work may have overlapped that of the board of review, but in all

probability, they had a rather short time schedule. If polish was applied, it is generally believed that Smith made the improvements.

Open to speculation is the question whether Bilson and Smith resolved some of the choices offered in the Bois's notes. The general meeting in final session at Stationers' Hall may have done so." (Opfell, 104-106)

- Opfell also touches upon a perplexing yet unresolved question: what if any influence did Archbishop Richard Bancroft, the architect of the project, exert over the final product. Miles Smith, one of the final editors of the text, stated at some point not long after publication, that Bancroft had influenced as many as fourteen readings found in the 1611 text.
 - "As it happened, Bilson and Smith as editors did not have the last word. In the end Smith complained that Bishop Bancroft had introduced 14 more changes. No record of these changes survives." (Opfell, 106)
- Alister McGrath, author of *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*, also commented upon the late actions of Bishop Bancroft.
 - "Finally, the finishing touches would be applied to the work by the bishops of Winchester and Gloucester. Though Bancroft appears to have drawn no attention to the fact, he had reserved for himself the privilege of making revisions to what all had hitherto thought of as the final draft." (McGrath, 178)
 - "Having completed their recommendations for revision, the text was passed on to Miles Smith and Thomas Bilson, who were charged with adding the finishing touches. It is not clear whether their role was to review the overall text of the translation, or simply to comment on the specific changes proposed by the editorial committee that had met at Stationers Hall. Then in an apparently unscripted development, Richard Bancroft reviewed what had been hitherto regarded as the final version of the text. It would be one of his final acts, Bancroft died on November 2, 1610, and never lived to see the translation over which he had held so much sway. Smith complained loudly to anyone who would listen that Bancroft had introduced fourteen changes in the final text without consultation. Yet we remain unclear as to what those alleged changes might have been." (McGrath, 188)
- Dr. Kenneth Fincham also comments on this unsolved mystery in his 2020 essay for the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* titled "The King James Bible: Crown, Church and People."
 - "Bishops Bilson and Smith were entrusted with a final review of the new translation, but there is a tradition dating from the mid-century [17th century] that Bancroft was the last to approve it and made fourteen alterations in the New Testament before it was printed." (Fincham, 83)

- Alleged textual tampering by Bancroft is discussed by many of the relevant sources commenting on the late stages of the translation process. It seems that Miles Smith's allegation of tampering on the part of Bancroft originated from within ten years of the text first being printed in 1611. Despite these early rumors, the reality is that we simply do not know what readings, if any, Bancroft altered before he died in late 1610. That said, I do suspect that I Corinthians 12:28 could have been one of the passages Bancroft changed before he passed (This was discussed briefly in [Lesson 170](#)).

Publisher: Robert Barker The King's Printer

- Gordon Campbell, author of *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011*, presents some interesting history regarding Robert Barker, the publisher of the 1611 KJB.
 - “The first edition of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible was printed in 1611 by Robert Barker, the king's printer, who held the right to print all Bibles published in England in English translation (work in other languages published in England and royal books published in Scotland were separate rights). Barker was the son of the queen's printer, Christopher Barker, who had printed large numbers of Bibles as well as official publications such as statutes and proclamations during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. In 1599 Robert succeeded his father as queen's printer, and was subsequently confirmed as king's printer by King James, who succeeded Elizabeth in 1603. He was, therefore, the inevitable choice for the printing of the KJV; late in the century the university presses of Cambridge and Oxford were to exercise their right to print Bibles, but in 1611 Barker was the sole authorized printer. The printing house of the king's printer was Northumberland House, a large medieval palace in Aldersgate (on the site of the new Northumberland Alley) recently vacated by the earls of Northumberland for a new palace on the Strand; the old palace was refurbished as a workshop, and there the first edition of the KJV was printed.” (Campbell, 86)
- Despite all of our study of the primary work-in-progress documents, we do not know for sure what the translators gave to Robert Barker to execute the first printing. Some have speculated that it was a Bod 1602 type document i.e., a master 1602 Bishops Bible with the recorded changes of the translators noted interlineally and/or in the margins. Donald L. Brake, author of *A Visual History of the King James Bible*, identifies some of the possible options.
 - “The format of the manuscript copy placed in Robert Barker's hands as a template for the 1611 King James Version remains shrouded in mystery.

The first option is that the printer was given a handwritten manuscript of the complete text of the new translation. This possibility is supported by a 1660 pamphlet that circulated in London claiming that certain printers possessed a handwritten copy of the Holy Bible in English. If this was the case the manuscript copy of the King James Version disappeared—possibly destroyed in the great fire in 1666. The London fire

raged for several days, sweeping through London, engulfing hundreds of acres of land, destroying thousands of homes, nearly a hundred churches, and most of the business community. When it finally ran its course, little of London remained.

A second possibility is the King James translators delivered a fully annotated version of the Bishops Bible. Some scholars suggest a strong likelihood that Barker possessed printed pages or pre-set trays still in stock from the 1602 Bishops' Bible, which would have been similar to approximately 80 to 90 percent of the text of the King James Versions. In this case the printer's work would have been easier since he could replace words and phrases in the existing Bishop's Bible typeset with new changes rather than have to set entirely new print trays.

The translators' original manuscript may have been unusable because it was too messy. This is evidenced in a manuscript numbered Bishops' Bod 1602, which can be traced back to the translators and is sloppy and difficult to read. An indecipherable manuscript would have made it very difficult for the printer to typeset the manuscript correctly. And after the translators' careful attention to detail, the proofreaders' work would have been subjective—sometimes to the point of guesswork.

Biblical scholar David Norton suggests a third alternative: an original, completed manuscript in final form may have never existed. If an annotated Bishops' Bible, rather than a compilation of the translators' work, served as the manuscript provided to the printer, then the first copy that came off the press was the original King James Version printers copy and served as the template for all subsequent editions (i.e., 1613 folios and 1612 quartos and octavos). Translators Smith and Bilson may have added editorial comments along with the chapter headings and page summaries. This theory provides a possible accounting for the variances in the 1612 and 1613 editions, where both the "he" and "she" reading occurs in Ruth 3:15 [See page 63 of Dr. Norton's *A Textual History of the King James Bible* for more on this theory.].

Scholars still debate the various theories regarding the method by which the translators' manuscript was passed on to the printers. But no matter the theory or weight of evidence behind it, no manuscript has yet surfaced that represents the translators' fully revised text for the King James Version. Unless history one day reveals new documentation, scholars, historians, and Bible students searching for a clear picture of the printing process for the King James Version will be disappointed." (Brake, 165-166)

- For what is arguably the most famous book ever printed in English there are few records regarding its early publishing history. Dr. David Norton discusses this at the beginning of Chapter 3 of *A Textual History of The King James Bible*.
 - "The printing history of the KJB is plagued throughout by inadequate publishing records. Presumably because it was considered a revision rather than a new book, the first edition

was not entered on the Stationers' Registers, so we do not know when in 1611 it appeared." (Norton, 46)

- It's a bit shocking given everything we have studied about how the King James Bible was made that we cannot know for sure when the 1611 Bible was first published.
- In 2020, Kenneth Fincham of the University of Kent wrote an essay for the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* titled "The King James Bible: Crown, Church and People" in which he stated the following regarding the publication date of the KJB.
 - "While too much should not be built on negative evidence, it is striking how the new translation slipped into the public domain without any comment in newsletters or ambassadorial reports. No one has been able to establish its actual date of publication, although we can now propose the summer of 1611, since Worcester Cathedral purchased a copy at some point between September and November, while James Ussher requested a copy in a letter of 4 October 1611. It seems likely that James I's attention had switched to other, more pressing matters: first the Oath of Allegiance campaign from 1607 onwards, with the king writing two books, orchestrating a team of divines to support his position, and in May 1609 personally laying the foundation stone of Chelsea College, set up in order to rebut Roman error; and secondly, for a year from August 1611, a likely date of the Bible's publication, opposing Conrad Vorstius' appointment at Leiden, so that when Casaubon visited him in September 1611, James could talk about nothing else." (Fincham, 81-82)

Works Cited

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