

Sunday, February 4, 2024—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 224 The AV 1611: Early Sales (Understanding the Early 17th Century Bible Market)

Introduction

- In Lesson 222, I laid out that over the next couple of Lessons there were three topics that I wanted to discuss with respect to the AV when it was first published.
 - Early Reception
 - Early Criticism
 - Early Sales
- In Lessons [222](#) and [223](#) we discussed the “early reception” of the AV as well as its “early criticism,” most notably at the hands of Hugh Broughton. This leaves one more topic that I would like to discuss before moving on, “early sales.”
- Over the last two decades three important essays covering a host of topics related to the “early sales” have been written. These include the following:
 - 2005—“The Financing of the Authorized Version 1610-1612: Robert Barker And ‘Combining’ and ‘Sleeping’ Stationers ” by John Barnard
 - 2009—“The King’s Printers’ Bible and Book of Common Prayer Monopoly” by Graham Rees and Maria Wakely
 - This essay is an extract from a book published by Oxford University Press titled *Publishing, Politics, and Culture: The King’s Printers in the Reign of James I and VI*.
 - 2020—“The King James Bible: Crown, Church and People” by Kenneth Fincham
- Over the course of the next couple of Lessons we will be surveying these important essays with the goal of building an understanding of the early sales of the AV. This is a complicated topic with many factors to consider. Therefore, we will begin by seeking to understand the prevailing forces of the early 17th century Bible market in England. In future Lessons we will consider the sales that were generated by these market conditions as well as the overall value of the industry.
- To accomplish this task, the current Lesson will cover the following points:
 - Printing Capacity of the King’s Printer
 - Bible Production Before The AV

- Financing & Printing Rights

Understanding the Early 17th Century Bible Market

- In this Lesson we will be relying on the 2009 essay by Graham Rees and Maria Wakely titled “The King’s Printers’ Bible and Book of Common Prayer Monopoly” to frame our discussion of this topic.

Printing Capacity of the King’s Printer

- Rees and Wakely introduce their essay with the following sentiments:
 - “The Leviathan of London printing firms, the King's Printing House, was the only begetter of that Behemoth of books, the Bible in English. In fact, the production of vernacular Bibles, together with New Testaments and the Book of Common Prayer, was to a large degree the point and raison d'être of the King's Printers in the reign of James I. Monopoly production of editions of these texts made the King's Printers the mediators of artefacts which embodied the three inseparables: an official politics, the state religion, and an emergent national culture.

The King's Printers could supply the market with Bibles and Testaments only because they had the productive capacity, and unless we have a clear understanding of that we cannot understand either the King's Printers or their output. They were eagles amongst the quarrelsome magpies and crows who otherwise represented the London book trade in the reign of James I. Neglected by modern scholarship because they did not publish Shakespeare or Jonson, they exercised their monopoly right to print texts belonging to a quite different and vastly more influential canon—the Biblical and liturgical. Their business was, by London standards, enormous. If one measures productive capacity in terms of numbers of presses employed, the King's Printers soared above their contemporaries in the trade. All lesser shops were limited to a theoretical maximum of two presses, but before our period (1583) the Queen's Printer ran five presses, and after it (1668) the King's Printers ran six, while it is a fair guess that within our period they sometimes ran rather more. With this press capacity they were able to print many more editions and far more edition sheets in a year than any other printing house—not to speak of the fact that the editions themselves often had print runs far exceeding the 1,500 copies to which other printers were in theory restricted.” (Rees & Wakely, 1-2)

- The first topic that Rees & Wakely tackle in their essay is the matter of “print runs” i.e., how many copies of a given work were printed at one time. According to the authors, in 1627 there was a lawsuit adjudicated between the King’s printers that forced “deponents” [A person who makes a deposition or affidavit under oath.] to testify about these details. For the record, John Barnard’s piece from 2005 titled “The Financing of the Authorized Version 1610-1612: Robert

Barker And ‘Combining’ and ‘Sleeping Stationers’ deals with the nature of this litigation in great detail.

- “Let us take these points in reverse order, starting with print runs. In 1627 two deponents, called to give evidence upon interrogatories during protracted and ferocious Chancery suits fought between the King's Printers, testified unambiguously to the edition sizes which had been the norm over the preceding years. In 1627 John Bill declared that standard edition sizes ‘of the said office are 6000. 3000. & 1500: or thereabouts’. Another deponent in a position to know was Robert Constable, ‘Accomptant’ and nephew to the dispossessed King's Printer Robert Barker, and ‘employed in the said office by the plaintiff [i.e. Barker] for the space of Tenne years or thereabouts’. Constable said that the ‘vsuall impressions consisted of 3000 & 6000’ copies. These answers were to the 31st interrogatory which asked for edition sizes—‘have not the vsuall impressions consisted of 3000 & 6000 books as bibles or the like’? The phrase ‘bibles or the like’ is telling, suggesting that even very large books were printed in large editions. In short, the King's Printers not only had at least three times the productive capacity of other printers, they could, and did, produce editions up to four times larger than those allowed to the rest of the trade. And to this one must add a generous extra margin for ‘overplus’ copies which Constable reckoned to amount to at least 400 copies on top of a run of 6,000. These overplus copies may well have been many more than may have been needed to make up for poor impressions, and would certainly have included workers' perks, and a stock from which regular and bulk buyers might get free gifts. And even the size of the overplus allowed for by the King's Printers seems to have been proportionally much greater (at one fifteenth over the chosen print run) than other printers may have put out (at one fortieth over the print run).” (Rees & Wakely, 2)
- After establishing from court records that the King’s printers possessed a greater “productive capacity” when compared to other printers of their day, Rees & Wakely turn their attention to the number of “editions produced” each year.
 - “As for the number of editions produced, let us take one year as an example. The year 1620 was an *annus mirabilis* [a remarkable or auspicious year] for production and an *annus instabilis* [an unsteady, unstable, shaky inconstant year] for relations between the King's Printers. In that year the King's Printers produced seventy-two editions. Of course the King's Printer patent being what it was, twenty of these were proclamations which generally ran to no more than a maximum of three sheets, and probably no more than 1,000 to 1,300 copies. But the King's Printer patent also covered editions of the Bible, New Testament (NT), and Book of Common Prayer (BCP). In 1620 this part of the business included thumping editions of the Bible (including the massive folio Welsh Bible), a modest single edition of the NT, no fewer than seven editions of the BCP, as well as several mighty non-Biblical folios and a number of other works of substance.” (Rees & Wakely, 3)

- Turning next to “edition sheets” the authors can draw some comparisons between the productivity of the King’s Printer with other publishers of the era.
 - “Let us turn now to edition sheets, by which we mean a measure of productivity which begins with the number of sheets per exemplar of a particular edition. To this we add the number of edition sheets per single exemplar of each and every other edition produced by the King's Printers in a given year. This gives us a measure of output which does not depend on the size of the editions in question (which is usually unknown), and a measure which may be compared with the output of any other printer. Take for instance 1620. In that year the King's Printers produced approximately 1,800 edition sheets. Compare that with the output of another successful and highly productive printing house in the same year—William Stansby's. Stansby's output of edition sheets was relatively high at 722 but puny when set beside the King's Printers'. And to that fact one must add that Stansby's print-runs were half to a quarter less than the standard runs of the King's Printing House. When it comes to stocking books, this has implications: the nature of their staples (Bibles, NTs, and BCPs) and the size of their output means that the King's Printers had to maintain and finance much larger stocks and so sink larger amounts of capital into stock than any other Jacobean printing house.

Just to underline the points made so far we may ask how many perfected sheets⁹ in total the King's Printing House printed in our sample year. Even if we assume that the maximum edition size was 1,500 (a figure much lower than the norm) and multiply that by the number of edition sheets produced, 1,800, we arrive at the truly phenomenal sum of 2,700,000 perfected sheets in 1620, a sum equivalent to 5,625 reams. In other words we have a quantity which could only be produced if six presses were working at absolutely full stretch for 300 days, which—with due allowance for Sundays and holidays—means in effect a whole working year. In fact, given King's Printer edition sizes, 2,700,000 is no doubt an impossibly low total for a year unless we assume that some of the editions with a 1620 imprint were begun in 1619, or that the King's Printers had more than six presses, or they farmed out work to other printers. As yet we have found no evidence for the third possibility and have yet to examine the first, so in the meantime we tentatively assume the second. The King's Printing House was a business on a grand scale, and knowledge of that scale is a foundation of knowledge of all its operations, not least its production of Bibles and NTs.” (Rees & Wakely, 3-4)

Bible Production Before The AV

- In the next subsection, Rees & Wakely survey the production of the King’s Printer before the publication of the AV in 1611.
 - “So much for the capacity which enabled the King's Printers to produce Bibles and BCPs on the scale that they did. We now pass on to consider the products themselves. The King James Bible (KJB), first printed in 1611, and the greatest novelty in Bible production in our period, was but the latest comer of three versions of Holy Writ produced by the

King's Printers. Before 1611 and after it the Bishops' and Geneva Bibles and NTs were still current. The Bishops' Bible, a revision of the Great Bible undertaken by Matthew Parker (1504–75) assisted by the bishops and Biblical scholars, was first issued in folio by Richard Jugge in 1568. In the main it corrected the Great Bible by drawing on the Hebrew and Greek originals, and was influenced in its translation of the prophetic books by the Geneva Bible. In April 1571 the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury ordered every cathedral and, as far as possible, every church to acquire a copy, and ordered every ecclesiastical bigwig to display one in his house for the benefit of servants and guests. A second folio was issued in 1572 by Richard Jugge. In this edition the NT had undergone further careful revision which, arising from a memorandum by Giles Lawrence, was used in later editions of the Bishops' Bible while the rest of the text (OT and Apocrypha) remained as it was in the first folio.

By a nice irony of history Barker did not print any edition of the Bishops' Bible in James's reign but provided forty copies of his last folio printing (1602) for the translators who were to prepare the KJB, the text whose printing was to accelerate the decline of his fortunes. However, he did print two editions (1606 and 1608) of the Bishops' NT in 8° before 1611. These and earlier small format editions of the Bishops' NT were those known as 'Cheke' or 'Cheeke' NTs, a denomination under which at least one edition appeared in a King's Printer stock list of 1624/5.¹⁵

In the pre-KJB years the Geneva Bible's fortuna was markedly different from that of the Bishops' Bible. Popular from its first appearance in England soon after the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, no doubt because of its Calvinistic colouring and its many annotations, it had been translated by William Whittingham, Anthony Gilby, Thomas Sampson, and perhaps other exiles in Geneva. First printed by Rouland Hall in Geneva in 1560, its OT and Apocrypha were based mainly on the Great Bible corrected from the original Hebrew and Greek, and compared with the Latin versions of Leo Juda and others. Its NT, ascribed to Whittingham, was based on Tyndale's version compared with the Great Bible and influenced by Beza's Latin translation. The Geneva NT was further revised twice. Laurence Tomson (1539–1608) produced a rendering with alterations stemming from Beza's Latin version of 1565. This was first printed in 8° in 1576 by Christopher Barker, Robert's father. This became the final and popular form of the Geneva Testament, except for Revelation, which in Junius's version superseded Tomson's in some editions of the Geneva NT and Bible, beginning with the 1602 8° NT (STC 2902) printed by Robert Barker.

Given that not a single edition of the Bishops' Bible (as distinct from the Bishops' version of the NT) was issued by the King's Printers in the reign of James, Robert Barker's output of Geneva Bibles in the period was by comparison astonishing. From the accession of James to the appearance of the KJB in 1611, twenty-four editions of the Bible were produced, including fifteen editions in 4° in 8s; seven editions in octavo, and two folio editions. Of these twenty-four editions seventeen were the unrevised Geneva version; six were the Geneva–Tomson–Junius; and one the Geneva–Tomson. In the same period,

1603–11, Barker put out ten editions of the NT of which two were the Bishops' version in octavo and eight were Geneva versions mostly in the Tomson or Tomson and Junius form. Of the Geneva NTs, one was in octavo, two in 16°, and five in 24° in 12s. What we have here is a truly prodigious output with an annual average of over one edition of the NT, and a striking average of 22/3 Bible editions per annum. No other printer in the Jacobean period published repeat editions of such long works—the Bible runs to some 783,000 words—and no other printer had the capacity to do so. Yet for Robert Barker production on this scale was efficient, absolutely routine and quite relentless. When stock of an edition in one format, in english or in roman type, began to run out, another such edition would be churned out, and especially in the relatively large 4° in 8s format.” (Rees & Wakely, 4-5)

- According to Rees & Wakely, the advent of the King James Bible in 1611 made the life of Robert Barker the King’s printer a “misery.” In fact, they suggest that economic factors and financial woes forced Barker to yield exclusive printing rights in the AV to other London printers.
 - “The market for Bibles and NTs must have seemed insatiable, and the profits to be made from it unfailingly reliable. However, as Barker was going about his routine and lucrative business, proposals were adopted and implemented which would result in a new translation of the Bible, a translation which was to become the KJB or Authorized Version, and in the end make Barker's life a misery. The fact was that control of the Bible was an imperative of the early-modern British state, and no one was more alive to that than James I, and no one was more keen to use the press to propagate books, KJB among them, which encouraged the consolidation of an official national culture. Indeed, just a few months after his accession he convened the Hampton Court conference which set on foot the new translation. The translation, sent to the press in 1611, could not have had a more profound effect on the King's Printing House, for the KJB was one source of the financial woes which eventually helped betray Robert Barker into the hands of John Bill and Bonham Norton, gave the latter pair the King's Printer patent, and established them as a dominant force in London printing for a decade.” (Rees & Wakely, 5)

Financing & Printing Rights

- The story of the securing of the printing rights necessary to print the AV is a long and sordid tale with many twists and turns.
 - “Whatever the manuscript or marked-up text which Barker used as copy-text for the edition princeps of the KJB, he may have actually had to pay big money to secure his right to it. In a pamphlet of 1651 William Ball noted that Matthew Barker had the sole right to print Bibles and Testaments because his father had paid £3,500 for the amended or corrected translation ‘by reason whereof the Translated Copy did of right belong to him’. Is there any truth to this account? What if anything did Barker have to pay for the text of the KJB in whatever material form it took as an ancestor of printers' copy or as the

actual printer's copy? Common sense would suggest that even asking this question might amount to an act of supererogation [The act of supererogating; performance of more than duty or necessity requires.], for surely the king would not have expected Barker to pay for the privilege of printing a very costly edition at his own expense. However, we are not dealing with common sense but the politics of book production on behalf of the state, and so the question of payment must remain a serious consideration —not least because of a tantalizing new piece of evidence given in a 1619 Chancery deposition by Robert Constable:

he knoweth that synce the Assignement of the said Office made to [...] [Norton and Bill] [...] [Barker] hath yearely paied for Cheeks Testament tenn pounds vnto one Mr Dawson of whome as this deponent hath heard and taketh it [...] [Barker] bought the same [...] And saith that he doth knowe that the said [Barker] before the said Assignemen did without interrupc^{yn} only prynte the said Testament And did paie yearelie the said Annuytie to Dawson for the same. And for the newe translac^{yn} of the Wholle byble this deponent saith he can saye nowe other Than that he hath heard [Barker] saie that the same was gyven to my Lords Grace of Canterbury by the Kinge And that he [Barker] was fayne to buy the same and that it cost him [...] <vijs et modis> fower [four] thowsand pounds or to that effecte.

This appears to corroborate the 1651 statement and to go beyond it: Barker did have to pay for the right to the KJB, which James had given to the Archbishops of Canterbury, and, instead of the £3,500 mentioned in the 1651 source, had been obliged to pay £4,000. This was a very large sum and so it is no wonder that Barker may have been put to vijs et modis to find the money, and that he perhaps paid the sum not with ready money but by a combination of instalments, mortgages, or payment in kind, i.e. books. If Constable was right, Barker's shifts could not have relieved the financial pressure that intensified as he set about printing the KJB. But is Constable's testimony reliable? To this one can reply that he had a remarkably clear understanding of the affairs of the King's Printing House; that he was right about the deal between Dawson and Barker; and that the facts he gave regarding the KJB were independently verifiable at the time when he made them. But it is also true that no other deponent in the King's Printer Chancery cases mentioned the matter.

So Barker now had the rights to the text (in whatever form it came to him) of the KJB, but, if he had been obliged to pay £4,000 for the privilege, his first efforts to act on the privilege brought him more trouble. A seminal article by John Barnard on the financing of the KJB draws attention to an action brought in the Court of Exchequer in 1613 by Bonham Norton. This action was brought against individuals who had been erstwhile partners of Bonham's recently deceased cousin John. This partnership had bought a very large number of books—Bibles, NTs, and BCPs—from Barker in 1610–12. As John's executor, Bonham wanted to recover John's share of the profits from the surviving partners, profits gained from the sale of the purchases from Barker. The Exchequer case

was eventually settled out of court but there is reason to believe that some of the Bibles acquired by John Norton's syndicate were copies of one or both of the 1611 folio editions of the KJB. There is also reason to believe that in selling them wholesale to the syndicate (a syndicate which turned out to be, in effect, a front organization for the partnership of Bill and the two Nortons), Barker received a poor return on his capital, and that market power drained away from him and flowed with ever greater rapidity towards Bill and the Nortons.

In fact this was a pivotal moment in an ancient rivalry which divided the Barkers and Nortons. As John Barnard has shown, the rivalry dated back to the mid-1570s when William Norton (Bonham's father) and others banded together to publish with Richard Jugge, the then Queen's Printer, a five-part quarto Bishops' Bible (1575) to forestall a forthcoming folio edition of the Geneva Bible (1576) printed by Christopher Barker (Robert's father). The publication of the Geneva folio apparently put Christopher in a good position to succeed Jugge as Queen's Printer when the latter died in 1577, at which point Christopher gained exclusive rights to publish both the Geneva and the Bishops' Bible, and that shut William Norton out of the English Bible trade.

Not one to be denied, William Norton became involved in a partnerships which published Latin Bibles in the years from 1580 until his death in 1593. In the following year his son Bonham in partnership with John Harrison published a Beza Latin NT, while in 1601 John and Bonham Norton attacked Robert Barker's monopoly by supporting Isaac Canin's printing of the Bible in English at Dordrecht. Not long afterwards, in 1605, John Norton, again with Harrison, published another Beza Latin NT, and yet another on his own account in 1610, and lastly Bonham with Bill printed yet one more in 1614. But by then Bonham Norton and John Bill were already deeply implicated in the affairs of Robert Barker and, as we know, the rivalry, already forty years old, was about to take on a new intricacy and eventually a new ferocity.” (Rees & Wakely, 7-9)

- According to Eric Nye’s [“Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency,”](#) the value of £3,500 in 1611 equates to \$1,252,159.70 in 2024. Likewise, £4,000 would equal 1,431,039.65 in 2024. Regardless of which number is correct, the King’s Printer Robert Barker spent an enormous sum of money for the right to print the AV.
- In addition to the essay, we have been following by Rees & Wakely, John Barnard published a piece for *Publishing History* in 2005 titled “Financing Of The Authorized Version 1610-1612: Robert Barker and ‘Combining’ and ‘Sleeping’ Stationers.” Barnard’s essay is very thorough and covers more ground than we have time or space to discuss. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to some of the summative comments offered by Barnard in subsection V.
 - “The Authorized Version’s publication is perhaps best understood as an early-modern version of a private finance initiative – one that worked within the parameters of patronage and clientage, and in which the entrepreneur bore all the risks himself, unlike those of late-twentieth century or early-twenty-first-century Britain. The Authorized

Version, fulsomely dedicated to James I, was a national enterprise. While the King undoubtedly encouraged the translation, the intellectual work of the translation was undertaken by scholars from the Church and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

. . . The translation was both a group and national enterprise, involving the Church and Universities, with at least two Cambridge colleges providing support in kind for the translating work over a four year period. Similar support may well have come from other Oxford and Cambridge colleges. For its part, the Stationers' Company offered the book trade's corporate support by providing premises for the work's completion. However, the financial underpinning of its publication was provided by two different joint ventures – a trade syndicate of individuals from within the Stationers' Company (headed by John Norton), pursuing profit for its investors, and the financial muscle of the covert Norton/Bill co-partnership, with the similar aim of profit – which together provided the extra capital required by Robert Barker to manufacture the first editions of King James's Bible. The longer-term aim of the Norton/Bill co-partnership – that of getting the monopoly of the Bible trade into their own hands, based on the partners' knowledge of Barker's financial difficulties – was realized. This resulted in Robert Barker's downfall, but left Bonham Norton and John Bill with a business which was to cause both men, but especially the former, major problems in their turn.”
(Barnard, 31-32)

Conclusion

- In the next Lesson we will continue to unpack the nature of the early 17th century Bible market by considering the following :
 - Variety of Formats & Sizes
 - Market Structure: Monopoly & Book Sales

Works Cited

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