

Sunday, February 11, 2024—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 225 The AV 1611: Early Sales (Variety of Formats & Market Structure)

Introduction

- In [Lesson 224](#) we began looking at the topic of “early sales” by considering the early 17th century Bible market. In doing so, we considered the following three points:
 - Printing Capacity of the King’s Printer
 - Bible Production Before The AV
 - Financing & Printing Rights
- When discussing point three, we learned that the King’s Printer Robert Barker paid a large sum of money to secure printing rights for the AV. Our very own Mike Erspamer has contributed the following research to calculate how much Robert Barker paid for the patent to print the AV. Using the [CPI Inflation Calculator](#) Mike was able to provide the following:
 - “Enter the amount (£3500) and the year (1760) and you will get the conversion in today’s value in pounds (£885,710.17), then convert to dollars (\$1,118,715.50) if desired. I tried entering 1650 and got the message that there was no inflation data prior to 1760. But you could do a calculation based on the average percent increase per year since 1760 and calculate back 110 years to 1650. That would give you an approximate value today. At any rate, £3500 in 1650 would be worth well over a million dollars today, maybe close to two million.” (Email dated 2/5/24)
- Then in a second email Mike stated:
 - “The average inflation rate since 1760 was 2.12% per year. But, what was it between 1650 and 1760? To make the calculation from 1650 to 1760 simpler, I used an average rate of 2% per year from 1650 to 1760. So, adding 2% of £3500 (£70) per year for the additional 110 years from 1650 to 1760 would add £7700 to the £3500 to get £11,200 by 1760, which would translate to £2,834,272.54 pounds today. That is a conservative number, since I just used a flat 2% of £3500 (£70), times 110 years to get £7700.

To do a "proper" calculation, you would have to add £70 the first year to get £11270, then take 2% of that (£225.4), add that to £11270 to get £11495.4, take 2% of that and add it, etc, etc. for 110 calculations, or let the computer do it for you.

However, we do not know what the inflation rate was from 1650 to 1760. We can only guess. It may well have been less than 2% per year. Maybe it was only 1% average per year. That would give you £7350 pounds by the year 1760, which would be £1,859,991.36 by 2024.

I think you could safely round that total to £2,000,000. So, I think £2,000,000 today would be a conservative estimate—in the ballpark anyway.” (Email dated 2/5/24)

- Recall that Graham Rees and Maria Wakely presented two different potential figures in their essay, “The King’s Printers’ Bible and Book of Common Prayer Monopoly,” £3,500 or £4,000. 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 - Mike Erspamer’s or Eric Nye’s, the King’s Printer Robert Barker spent an enormous sum of money for the right to print the AV. This hefty financial expenditure to secure printing rights proved detrimental to Barker’s enterprise and forced him to take on partners which ultimately proved devastating to his business fortunes.
- In this Lesson we want to continue looking at the early 17th century Bible market with the goal of understanding the “early sales” of the AV. In order to accomplish this task, we will consider the following points:
 - Variety of Formats & Sizes
 - Market Structure: Monopoly & Book Sales

Understanding the Early 17th Century Bible Market

- We will once again be following 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.

Variety of Formats & Sizes

- The entrance of the KJB into the Jacobean Bible market served to complicate an already confusing situation, according to Rees & Wakely. Graham Rees and Maria Wakely cover this point in their essay titled, “The King’s Printers’ Bible and Book of Common Prayer Monopoly.”
 - “The Bible market was a complex one which became no simpler with the advent of the KJB. Four main variables were involved in printing purely Biblical texts in the Jacobean period. Biblical texts came in different packages, versions, fonts, and formats. By packages we mean that the Jacobean reader could demand (i) the complete Bible—Old Testament, Apocrypha, and NT—as a single edition. Alternatively the reader could buy (ii) the NT by itself or (iii) *The third part of the Bible* (containing five consecutive books of the Old Testament canon, viz. Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon).

As for versions, fonts, and formats, a Jacobean reader might want (but not necessarily get) the Bishops' Bible, the Geneva (which, as we know, came in several sub-versions), and, from 1611, the KJB. These versions would have to cater to two separate markets: one wanting Biblical texts in roman type; the other wanting them in english (i.e. blackletter). The market would also demand a range of formats—everything from mighty folio editions right down through quarto, octavo, and duodecimo, and (in the case of the NT) down to 16° and little 24° in 12s. Of course, *whole* Bibles were printed in (and only in) the four largest formats: folio (larger and smaller), quarto, octavo, and duodecimo. NTs were not printed in folio at all, seldom printed in quarto, and only once in duodecimo. In fact the NT market was dominated by octavos (with fifteen Jacobean editions), and 24° in 12s (with fourteen). This is not just to do with cost, for an NT in folio would be improbably lean and a Bible in 24° impossibly fat.

The Bible market (or production) became at once simpler and more complex from 1611 onwards. In the matter of versions, it is not far from the truth to say that just as the Bishops' Bible (though not the Bishops' NT) died with Elizabeth, so the Geneva Bible as a King's Printer edition did not survive the reign of James. Of the phenomenal fifty-one editions of the Bible brought out from 1611 to the end of James's reign, only seven were versions of the Geneva Bible, compared with the twenty-four published from the beginning of the reign to 1610. In short, output of Geneva Bibles collapsed very swiftly after the birth of the KJB, with a final blaze of glory in 1615–16 with the printing of four Geneva Bibles, culminating in the last-gasp blackletter folio of 1616. It is no surprise that the discontinuing of Geneva editions coincided with the end of the three-way partnership of Bill, Norton, and Christopher Barker. Nor is it any surprise that it also coincided with the start of the period when Bill and Norton—who would have been happy to manipulate the market in the king's interests—became Barker's effective successors. After that the King's Printers produced no further editions of the Geneva Bible in the STC period.” (Rees & Wakely, 9-10)

- Rees & Wakely furnish their readers with impressive publication statistics to demonstrate the comparative demand for the AV and the Geneva Bible after 1610. These statistics challenge the long-held narrative that the AV was not well received by the English world of the early 17th century (For more on this topic see [Lesson 222](#) on the “early reception” of the AV.).
 - “The case with the KJB was otherwise: after 1611 it quickly superseded the Geneva Bible, the fall of the latter coinciding with the early and most intense phase of KJB production. In the period after 1610, Bible production rose sharply from the pre-KJB average of 22/3 editions per annum to 32/3 for the period 1611–25. This remarkable acceleration of production conceals a yet more remarkable statistic—that in the four-year period from 1612 to 1615 inclusive, 23 editions, or an astonishing 5 editions per annum, cascaded from the presses. It is difficult to interpret this bulge in production as anything other than strong demand for the KJB with continuing though much weaker demand for the Geneva. However, it would be sensible to add that, given the uncertainties of any new market, the King's Printing House may have underestimated demand or kept print runs

relatively small in order to maintain liquidity. Certainly a new edition in a given format and font would have been produced only when stocks of the previous edition in the same format and font began to run out. Only then would fresh capital and labour have been invested in the new. In fact, the printers may have been surprised and gratified by the speed with which editions sold out, and certainly editions in two of the most popular formats, 4° in 8s and 8°, sold like hot cakes, with ten editions of the former and seven of the latter in the four years of the bulge. Alternatively, the bulge may in part have been Barker's desperate attempt to offset lack of capital by following the ruinous course of producing stock which he then sold at a discount in a vain attempt to keep his creditors at bay.” (Rees & Wakely, 10)

- The sales success of the AV led to market innovation in 1617 when the Bible was first printed in duodecimo size by the King’s Printer.
 - “The establishing of the KJB in the market was soon accompanied by product innovation—if it can be so called. For most of James's reign no edition whatever of the Bible in any version had been produced in duodecimo. Then suddenly in 1617 one such edition appeared, and that was succeeded by others. This innovation went hand in hand with another phenomenon, for, while from 1617 octavo editions remained as popular as they had been before, the coming of the duodecimo KJB coincided with a corresponding decline in the number of quarto editions brought out by the King's Printers. It seems likely that the first of the duodecimo editions was, although it bore Barker's (shell?) imprint, Bill and Norton's doing. After all, they were in partnership with Christopher Barker as King's Printers in 1617, and by the end of the year they had become Robert Barker's deputies, and it was they who maintained duodecimo as a KJB format afterwards, bringing out no fewer than seven duodecimo editions from 1617 to 1625. This last fact suggests that Bill and Norton thought that the Bible market was more finely subdivided than Barker had believed, and that there was unsatisfied or latent demand at the cheapest end of the market. At any rate, the move to selling fewer (and more expensive) quarto editions and more of the cheaper duodecimo format was evidently a success, with—if we are to believe contemporary figures for print runs of King's Printer editions—somewhere between 9,000 (six editions of 1,500) and 36,000 (six editions of 6,000) copies sold in nine years.” (Rees & Wakely, 10-11)
- All the data we have seen thus far applies to the publication of complete Bibles i.e., Old and New Testaments as well as the Apocrypha early on. But, early on, there was also a robust market for King James New Testaments that cannot be overlooked.
 - “So much for the Bible from 1611, but what of the NT in the KJB period? The Bishops' NT continued to be produced after 1611, seeing seven editions—all in octavo—the final edition appearing in 1619. The Geneva NT fared less well with only five editions, the last appearing in 1616. However, four of these editions came out in the smallest formats, two in 24° in 12s and two in 16°, so perhaps filling a gap in the market for small-format non-KJB NTs. As with Bibles so with NTs—production of the KJB version leaves the Geneva

and Bishops' versions in the shade before driving them to extinction, with a total of sixteen editions of the KJB version in the years from 1611 to 1625, of which the majority were in the smallest King's Printer formats with eight editions in 24° in 12s, and two in 16°.” (Rees & Wakely, 10-11)

- While not popular in our day, “*the third part of the Bible*” was another format that the early AV was sold in.
 - “Having discussed aspects of production patterns for the Bible and NT, we should perhaps add a brief word about our third package of Biblical texts, The third part of the Bible. This, as we have said, contained five books of the OT canon, i.e. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. We do not know why this tranche of texts was adopted as a publishing proposition, but two Geneva versions had appeared in 1580 and 1583 perhaps to tap into a market where the buyers could afford a small-format NT and a small-format Third Part but not a whole Bible. However that may be, no other *Third Part* appeared for over thirty years until the 1616 edition in 24° in 12s (STC 2246), this time in the KJB version, and the only one to have been given out in the Jacobean period.” (Rees & Wakely, 11)

Market Structure: Monopoly & Book Sales

- Since the AV was produced under monopoly conditions, i.e., one printer, the King’s Printer had crown authority to publish the text, it impacted its early production. In the next section of their essay, Rees & Wakely apply William St. Clair’s theory of what happens to book sales when a given work is produced under monopoly conditions.
 - “Now Bible production and, by implication, the sale, distribution, and readership of Bibles, is the grand exception (as he recognizes) to William St Clair's otherwise persuasive theory of the political economy of book production under monopoly conditions. ‘The private monopoly ownership of all texts, from Bibles to ballads in perpetuity (as in England until 1744) [...] produced a stable and prosperous industry, in which authors, publishers, manufacturers and distributors were increasingly well rewarded; enabled substantial new works to be carried into print; but concentrated the benefits on the richer members of society, delaying and restricting access for others, and holding back the majority from access to modern knowledge.’ Why did that happen? Because, says St Clair, monopoly producers had every reason to place their wares as high on the ‘demand curve’ as they could, i.e. they would always be tempted to bring out an edition in a larger and more expensive format than a smaller and cheaper one. A publisher with exclusive copyright ‘will maximize his financial returns if he moves down the demand curve in a series of discrete tranches over time (that is the classic behaviour of the monopolist)’—for example, s/he will start by selling few folios at high unit cost and then progressively smaller formats in larger numbers and at lower prices.

This is precisely what did not happen with the production of the KJB: Barker's headlong plunge down the demand curve enlarged access at a spanking pace. The first folio edition appeared in 1611, in 1612 the first quarto and octavo, and then in 1617 came the first of the innovative duodecimo editions, a cheaper format which to a degree displaced the more expensive quartos. As for NTs in the KJB version, Barker and his cuckoo partners, rather than starting with larger formats and in the fullness of time going on to smaller, began, after a false start with the 1611 duodecimo, in 1615 with the very smallest format they used for NTs (24° in 12s); they went on to 16° (1619), and only in 1621 did they reach the vertiginous heights of octavo. In other words, far from skiing down the demand curve, they shot up it while taking good care almost annually to revisit the bottom to produce yet another edition in 24°—a clear case assuredly of demand-led production in which the public's insatiable appetite for cheap NTs drove the presses.

So to this extent the King's Printers buck the trend in what William St Clair regards as the natural behaviour of producers exercising monopoly rights. The reasons for this were probably managerial and political. Managerial factors may be as follows: we recall what William Taylor, Barker's land agent, said about his principal's disastrous business practices in the early KJB period. Taylor, answering Bonham Norton's Chancery petition in 1622, averred that Barker's shortage of money and poor management of his office before 1618 caused him to 'sell his books in the said office for present mony before they weare halfe printed and finished at halfe the prizes he might otherwise haue sold the same And haueinge in that manner sold all the books he had in the said office and therewith soe furnished and prouided the Stacōners that they needed not to buy any more books from the said office for a longe time after'. In a business where possession of stock and canny handling of it were of the essence—as Bill and Norton understood to perfection—a printer could simply not afford to sell him or herself short and then, under-capitalized, compound the problem by spending more money printing more editions, perhaps selling them at a discount, and consequently suffering still more acute problems of liquidity.

As for political factors, the King's Printers were under an obligation to carry on the king's business insofar as it related to book production, and of course that meant to a large extent producing all those Bibles. So seriously was this taken that obstacles to the printing of the Bible or anything else of interest to the king could lead to official interventions. That was hardly surprising as versions of the Bible were prime vehicles for conveying the ideology of the monarchical church—as for instance Cranmer's prologue to the Bishops' Bible, which asserted that 'the Kings Highnesse being supreme head next vnder Christ of this Church of England, hath approued with his royall assent the setting forth hereof', and for 'all true and obedient subiects' that should be sufficient reason for them to accept the vernacular Bible 'without further delay, reclamation, or resistance'. Much more of this was made in the preliminaries to the KJB, perhaps in part because one version of the Bible—the Geneva—made nothing of it at all. But then the KJB was, like so many of James's literary projects; an instrument for consolidating a distinctive 'official' national culture. The dedication to James and the translators' address to the reader have much to say about the special duty of kings to protect and promote the

church—as James had done as convenor of the Hampton Court conference, as ‘principal mover and author’ of the KJB, and as a monarch determined to tread a path between the ‘scrupulosity of the Puritans’, and the ‘obscurity of the Papists’. Above all the preliminaries to the KJB asserted the position of the Anglican Church as a monarchical church, and it elided obedience to king with obedience to God. Printing the KJB with these preliminaries was in effect printing a representation of cardinal data about James and the Jacobean State. Printing the KJB in the widest practicable number of formats to reach the greatest number of readers was then a political imperative which, even if economic motives had not been present, would have overwhelmed any tendency to restrict output to the most expensive editions.” (Ress & Wakely, 11-13)

Conclusion

- In the next Lesson we continue this discussion of the early 17th century Bible market by considering the following point:
 - Ecclesiastical & Private Sales

Works Cited

Erspamer, Mike. Personal Emails dated Monday, February 5, 2024.

Nye, Eric. [Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency](#). Department of English, University of Wyoming.

Ress, Graham & Maria Wakely. “The King’s Printers’ Bible and Book of Common Prayer Monopoly” in *Publishing, Politics, and Culture: The King’s Printers in the Reign of James I and VI*. Oxford University Press, 2009.