

Sunday, October 6, 2024—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 241 Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text (Politics Of Printing)

Introduction

- Since resuming class, we have been focusing on the printed history of the King James text during the 1630s. We have been focusing on the lesser Cambridge and London printings during the 1630s ([Lesson 237](#)) as well as the 1638 Cambridge folio edition (Lessons [238](#), [239](#), & [240](#)). In doing so we have concluded that there were three forms of the AV text available during the 1630s emanating from three different publishers: London, Cambridge, and Edinburgh. In [Lesson 240](#) we added a fourth by looking at a 1642 publication of the AV emanating from Amsterdam that included the Geneva Bible marginal notes.
- In this Lesson we want to continue looking at the printed history of the text by considering the politics and market conditions of the 17th century English Bible market after the publication of the 1638 Cambridge folio edition.

Politics Of Printing

- M.H. Black, in his book *Cambridge University Press 1584-1984*, reports the following story regarding the 1638 Cambridge folio edition:
 - “that Buck and Daniel in their pride [in the 1638 edition] put a notice on Great St Mary’s door offering a free Bible to anyone who could find an error.” (Quoted in Norton, 94)
- While this story is probably “apocryphal”, i.e., false, Professor Norton highlights the importance of the 1629 and 1638 folio editions to Cambridge University Press.
 - “The first two Cambridge folios were indeed remarkably well printed, quite outdoing the best efforts of the Kings’ Printer. This was in a real sense a commercial move. Black acknowledges that the story of Buck and Daniel’s offer is probably apocryphal, but adds that ‘Cambridge still had cause for pride, for it had inaugurated the tradition of care for the text which only the two universities maintained, and which was to be always the strongest argument for their exemption from the monopoly conferred by the Royal Printer’s Patent.’” (Norton, 94)
- According to Norton, royal permission to print the AV text became a reliable income stream for both Oxford and Cambridge thereby allowing them to publish other staples of English literature and culture.
 - “In due course Bible printing became a prime source of income for both Oxford and Cambridge University presses, subsidizing many unprofitable but important ventures without which English culture would have been the poorer.” (Norton, 94)

- Footnote 27 in Norton’s *A Textual History of the King James Bible* contains the following quote from David McKitterick’s *A History of Cambridge University Press*:
 - “By the mid-seventeenth century [the Bible] had become one of the [Cambridge] Press’s mainstays, and it has remained the most important single component of the Press’s list for most of the three and a half centuries since. Its importance as the generator of profits that could in turn be used to subsidize less widely popular books can hardly be over-estimated.” (McKitterick, 195).
- Professor Norton points out that if printing the Bible kept Oxford and Cambridge solvent the same would be true for other publishers. In his work *A History of Cambridge University Press* author David McKitterick references another piece by William Kilburne titled *Proposals humbly presented to publick consideration, but more particularly, the Right-honourable the Subcommittee of the Parliament for Religion, concerning the Future printing of Bibles in English*. In this piece Kilburn claimed that printers, “may gain by printing Bibles in all Volumes 10000.l. *per annum de claro*’ [for a year from the clear], an amount worth more than 2.4 million dollars in today’s money, according to Eric Nye’s [Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency](https://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/currency.htm) website. (McKitterick, 389)

Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency

by Eric Nye, Department of English, University of Wyoming

[Click here to read an explanation of the calculations.](#)

Enter source year: (1264-1983)
 Enter target year: (1913-2024)
 Enter old value in pounds: £

Value at beginning of target year in dollars: \$

The preceding table uses Java script.

Please cite as follows:

Eric W. Nye, *Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency*, accessed Thursday, September 26, 2024, <https://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/currency.htm>.

- Kilburne believed that, left unchecked, the prospect of profits would lead to production of Bibles that did not meet the standard set by Cambridge University Press. (Norton, 95) Norton cites McKitterick to present Kilburne’s case that “no group such as the Stationers’ Company should:” (Norton, 95)
 - “have any Interest, or Title in the Copy of the Bible, or any propriety in the printing thereof: For if they, or any of them, have liberty to manage any *Printery*, they will expose to sale no books, but of their own printing: And thereby (having the advantage of a powerful purse) will debilitate, and discourage all others, that print never so well. And in truth (if a book will but sell well (as Bibles are the most certain) let the printing be never so bad) they look no further. (McKitterick, 389–90)

- Norton summarizes Kilburne’s argument as follows:
 - “On the heels of poorly printed texts would come the demise of quality printers and a rise in cost to the public through monopoly pricing.” (Norton, 95)
- Archbishop George Abbott, who had been one of the original King James translators, complained about high prices and declining print quality.
 - “I knewe the tyme when greater care was had about printeing, the Bibles especiaillie, good compositors and the best correctors were gotten being grave and learned men, and the paper and letter rare and faire every way of the best; but now the paper is naught, the composers boyes, and the correctors unlearned: There is a farmer [monopolist] and he makes the benefitt, and careth for nothing about it. They heertofore spent their whole time in printeing, but these looke to gaine, gaine, gaine, nothing els.” (Norton, 95)
- In 1641 a London bookseller named Michael Sparke wrote a four-page tract titled *Scintilla* which sheds light on the inflated price of books during the early 1640s. A.S. Herbert reproduces this tract in its entirety in his *Historical Catalogue* along with some introductory commentary on pages 182-187. Herbert states the following in part regarding the tract:
 - “A scarce tract entitled *Scintilla*, printed in 1641, which throws a flood of light on the prices of Bibles and the general bookselling trade in the early seventeenth century, is here printed *in extenso* [in full]. Prof. Arber included it in his *Transcript of the Register of the Stationers Company* (vol. iv., 1877, pp. 35-38); but from its bearing on the history of the English Bible it comes a place in this Catalogue. Arber sums up the value of *Scintilla* as follows: “This tract is a remarkable testimony to the never-ending competition in the book trade; to the power of the King’s Printers, partly as patentees, and partly as capitalist only; to the vast extent (proportionately to other books) of the production of Bibles, etc., and school books under the early Stuarts; and, lastly, to their steady rise in price, despite the much larger editions than formerly, owing in some degree to the increased wealth of the country, but still more through monopolies and “rigging the market”.” It will be seen that *Scintilla* also gives interesting details as to the importation of English Scriptures printed in Holland.

The author was a London bookseller named *Michael Sparke*, a native of Eynsham, near Oxford, who died at Hampstead 29 Dec. 1653. . . More than once he infringed copyrights, and dared even to attack the Bible monopoly of Barker. “The print of Bibles and liturgies belong by patent to Robert Barker, the King’s printer and his assignees. In order to defeat this monopoly, Sparke imported large quantities of these books from Holland, and sold them at much cheaper rates than those printed in London. Barker obtained a warrant to search the ports and seize all the foreign printed Bibles he could find. Sparke retaliated by bringing an action for trespass against those who seized the books, and went on to import fresh supplies.

For theological reasons, Archbishop Laud actively hindered the introduction of Geneva Bibles printed abroad. . . In August 1645, Parliament prohibited the sale of imported Bibles, until these had been examined, and sanctioned as correct, by the Assembly of Divines.” (Herbert, 182)

- Sparke’s tract was divided into the following sections:
 - Bible for Churches new Translation large Folio
 - Cambridge Bible Folio
 - London Bible in Quarto
 - Scottish Bibles
- Time and space will not permit us to quote Sparke’s tract in its entirety in this Lesson. Consequently, I have selected the most important and pertinent parts for our consideration.
 - “In the year 1629, the want of these sorts of Folio Bibles caused Cambridge Printers to print it, and they sold it at 10^s in quires: upon which the then Kings Printers set six Printing-houses at work, and on an instant Printed one Folio Bible in the same manner, and sold with it 500. Quarto Roman Bibles, and 500. Quarto English, at 5^s a Book, to overthrow the Cambridge Printing, and so to keep all in their own hands. It were well if they would always sell at this price.” Appended to this paragraph is the following marginal note:
 - “This Folio would not have bin sold under 12 or 14sh. if it had not bin that Cambridge had Printed it: but, now they sold it at 5sh, which would have bin 12 sh at least, and the 4 to at 5sh, which was before 9sh.” (Spark)
- These quotes from the pen of Sparke speak to one of our previous discussions. London sought to economically undercut Cambridge by publishing a stock of Bibles in 1629 and selling them for less than half their normal price. This is objective evidence of a developing publishing rivalry between the two presses. In the next two paragraphs Sparke addresses how the King’s Printer in London sought to extend his monopoly to control the Bible market.
 - “In former times our Kings Printers did agree with Mr. *Andrew Hart*, and after with Mr. *John Hart* Book-sellers of *Edinburgh* to serve them *London* Bibles at lower rates than they sold them at here: so that they would not Print whereby they might keep all the priviledges to themselves, since which *Robert Young* and *Miles Flesher*, most cunningly combined with the Kings Printers here, and so sunke the Print|ing-house there, so that now *Scotland* is destitute; and by this means Books are rayed to greater rates here, and there likewise.

The Kings Printers and others here being interested in the Irish stock, sold Mr. *William Bladon* of Dublin their Stock there, and Patten, and have so Bound him, as he shall not Print but what they list of their priviledge, so that *Scotland* and *Ireland* must grind at their Mill. Observe in what a case these be: for Bibles, especially if the last Decree in Star-chamber had held, concerning Printing: for all must be bought at one place to serve three Kingdomes.” (Sparke)

- In the subsection titled “London Bibles In Quarto” Sparke states the following regarding the confiscation of important Bibles by the “Kings Printers:”
 - “There hath been at least 12000. of these Bibles Quarto with Notes Printed in *Holland*, and sold very reasonable: and many brought from thence hither, and they have been seized by the Kings Printers, and the parties that Imported them, not only lost them, but were put in *Purgatory*, and there glad to lose their Bibles and all cost to get off; and then the Monopolists sold them again, and so kept al others in awe.” (Sparke)
- After discussing the Scottish printings done in Edinburgh as well as various printings of the *Book of Common Prayer*, all of which had increased in price, Sparke turned his attention to secular works like law books.
 - “Observe I pray now, I come to the Law Books, I had need to break two lights into the Warehouse: but I perceive then this would rise too bigge. I will only nominate 3 Books in 3 severall Volumes, so by the 3 you may conceive the rest.

The Monopolists have not only gotten all the Gospel,* 3.16 but also the Law as followes.” (Sparke)

- In this category he mentions the following titles: *Poltons Statutes, Edward the 4th, Compleat Justice, Grammar of Oxford & Cambridge, Camdens Greek Grammer, Accedence*. Regarding these titles Sparke concludes:
 - “The Monopolists keep all others from Printing Concordances by their Patten, and these being Printed in another Volume beyond Sea, and brought over, and sold at half their prise, they seise and take them from others, and sel them again themselves, although theirs be not to be had here: So have they likewise seised other Books Printed beyond the Seas, when not any Printed here were to be had.” (Sparke)
- In his conclusion, among other things, Sparke appeals to Parliament “end these crying grievances” against the “poore pinshed subjects” of the Crown.
 - “But a touch of this: for it is too tart, and I verily believe picks the Subjects pockets, that eats brown bread to fill the *sleeping Stationers* belly with Venison and Sacke, and robs the Common-wealth in too still away; and when the Sellers by Retale get not a *bob*: these Monopolists get a shilling: for the Octavo *Geneologie*, and the twelve, of every *4li*. they

make 15*li.* and for the 12. what the Retailers give 4*li.* for, they will not of they were to be returned again give fix shillings for it.

I hope when the Honourable Assembly of Parliament sees this, as I shall be ready to make proof of all; they will put an end to these crying grievances, and help the calamities of the poore pinshed Subjects.” (Sparke)

- Sparke’s tract offers some insight into what we have only surmised in the past, namely, that there was an economic rivalry between those who were publishing the AV during the 1630s and later. Before Cambridge entered the market in 1629, Robert Barker the King’s Printer held monopolistic control over the marketplace. According to Sparke, Barker was willing to wield this power to his advantage thus impacting the Bible market.
- Before moving on, it is important to note that foreign publishers were willing to publish Bibles on the continent and smuggle them into England. Herbert reports that Sparke himself was involved in the importation of continental Bibles to undersell the King’s Printer in London. (Herbert, 182) On page 187 of his *Catalogue*, Herbert provides a “Note On English Bibles Printed Abroad” along with the listing of their numbers. His note reads as follows:
 - “It will be convenient to give here a list of all the editions of the English Bible, catalogued in this volume, between the dates 1599 and 1746, which are known, or conjectured, to have been printed in Holland, or elsewhere on the Continent. Many of these bear a false imprint, and some probably a false date. A few are well and correctly printed, but others abound in errors. Differences in typography and peculiarities of spelling afford the best criteria for distinguishing these Bibles from contemporary editions printed in England.” (Herbert, 187)

- Two examples from Herbert's list are entries H529 and H530 both of which purport to have been published at London in 1638 on their respective title pages.



- Herbert states the following regarding this edition in his *Catalogue*:
 - “Considered to be a spurious edition, printed in Holland, and published some years after the date given on the title.

Kilburne, in his tract *Dangerous Errors* . . . (1659), evidently refers to this issue when he says: ‘Moreover during the time of the late Parliament great numbers of Bibles in a large 12o volume, were imported from *Holland* in 1656 with the false Title (*Imprinted at London by Rob. Barker, &c. Anno 1638.*) wherein Mr. *Kiffin* and Mr. *Hills* cannot be excused, (if reports be true,) being contrary to the several Acts of Parliament of 20 Sep. 1649, and 7 Janu, 1652. for regulating of Printing. Wherein are so many notorious, *Erratas*, false English, Nonsense, and Corruptions, that in reading part of Genesis, I found 30 grand faults. . . The very Importation of the Books being an offence contrary to the said Statures, and ought deservedly to be suppressed; which notwithstanding are dispersed in the Country as aforesaid.’ (Herbert, 177-178)

- While not quoted by Herbert, Kilburne lists some these “grand faults” as follows:
 - “I found 30. grand faults, as Cap. 27.16. Mouth of his neck, for Smooth of his neck. Cap. 29.13. She. for He ran to meet him. Cap. 30.40. Put them unto. for Put them not unto Labans Cattle. And in reading Ecclesiastes, Canticles, and the first 27. Chapters of Isaiah, I found almost an hundred grosse faults, which I did specifie to the Parliament, and therefore omit them here;” (Kilburne)
- Consider the following screenshots from the volume mentioned by Kilburne (H529)

Genesis 27:16

16 And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the mouth of his neck.

“mount” instead of “smooth”

Genesis 29:13

13 And it came to passe, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sisters son, that she ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, & brought him to his house: and he told Laban all these things.

“she” instead of “he”

Genesis 30:40

40 And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the places of the flocks toward the ring-streaked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban: and he put his own flocks by themselves; and put them unto Labans cattell.

“not” is omitted

Conclusion

- The upshot of all this is that the 17th century English Bible was very lucrative and fraught with many challenges. Some of which include:
 - Inaccurate & Uneven Publication
 - Varied Quality
 - Price Gouging
 - Monopoly Power
 - Competition
 - Smuggling & Foreign Interference
- All of which impacted the Bible market, as it relates to the AV, for the common Englishman during the 17th century.

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<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A93604.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext#backDLPS5>