The Road to the AV:

a survey of the New Testament[1] from the Apostle Paul to Miles Smith

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Part I

From Manuscript to Print

With mine own hand

Paul's letter to the Galatians is probably one of the earlier pieces of New Testament writing. In chapter 6 verse 11 he declares 'Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand'.[2] This reminds us of a basic fact to do with the unfolding history of the New Testament, a point so obvious that we easily forget it. For three-quarters of the time that the New Testament has existed it has only done so in copies made by hand, truly 'manu-scripts', two Latin words meaning hand-written.[3]

Palestine in Apostolic times was under Roman rule, but for about three hundred years before that it had been under the cultural dominion of Greece. Greek was the everyday language throughout the whole Mediterranean region, acceptable even in Rome. This was the language of 'the fulness of the times', and was the instrument used, under the Sovereign Spirit of God, for that written record which is the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Very quickly the burden of copying and translating these Scriptures was taken up by the churches. The practicalities of accurately multiplying and disseminating the written Word of God start us on the path to the present printed editions of our English Authorised Version.

Rolls and Papyrus

In New Testament times the Greeks and Romans used papyrus rolls for writing. Papyrus is the fibrous pith of a

The Papyrus Plant

water plant once plentiful in the Nile, but scarcely found there now. Two layers of fibres laid at right angles to each other, soaked, squeezed and glued, formed sheets of a material that could receive marks. The side with horizontal fibres was intended for writing (the 'Recto') but it was quite possible to use the reverse (the 'Verso'). Best quality sheets were those using the largest fibres, and such sheets were joined side-by-side to make rolls of any length. The longest roll known is 133 feet (40.5m), but the average length of Greek literary rolls was 35 feet (10m). Height was variable, the usual being 10 inches (254mm) although 19 inches (482mm) was not unknown, and there were 'pocket' scrolls of only 5 inches (127mm). On such papyrus rolls the writing was most often in columns 2½–3 inches (63.5–76mm) wide. There were margins between columns and at the top and bottom for annotations and the insertion of corrections, etc. Ordinarily, rolls were written only on one side but if material was scarce or there was a lot to be said, they could be written 'within and without' (Ezekiel 2.10) or 'within and on the backside' (Revelation 5.1). Sometimes the verso of an existing work was used for more writing—one early 4th century manuscript of Hebrews (P13) is on the back of a 3rd-century condensed edition of the Epitome of Livy.

Taking average figures as a guide, we can visualize the autographs of the New Testament books (that is, the first written forms made by John, Luke, etc.) being written in this manner. An epistle such as 2 Thessalonians would be contained on a 15-inch roll of five columns only. Romans would need 11½ feet, Revelation 15 feet, Mark 19 feet, Luke 32 feet! So long as the papyrus roll was the medium of literature, the various copies of the books of the New Testament almost certainly circulated separately. Each book has its own 'history'. Indeed, until the use of the printing press in the 15th century very few Christian communities, and even fewer individuals, possessed all the canonical books.

Imagine the difficulties of using scrolls. I can quote Revelation 5.1 and expect you easily to verify this reference in a Bible—but what if you had a

collection of scrolls to sort out, and no pages to turn or verse and chapter numbers! Remember, there are no 'reader aids' or 'editorial input'—Noseparationofwordspunctuationminimallatercorrectionsattopandbottomscarcelyanycapitalsorparagraphsandnochapterorversenumbersandthelinesdontalwaysrunthesameway. How difficult to find the exact verse—perhaps we should excuse those early Christian writers who quote 'freely' and sometimes quote the same verse slightly differently, or just say 'somewhere in Luke'.

Codices and Vellum

Christians were particularly concerned to improve on this. As early as the 2nd century AD 'codex' experiments were tried. A papyrus codex is made up of sheets of papyrus folded once into a 'quire' or gathering, like a gigantic scrap-book. It is in fact the basis of the book as we have it today, and it was the desire of the churches for 'user friendly' and portable Scriptures that helped establish this now universal system of book construction. Truly, in the providence of our mighty God the full record of His Word deserves even in this small but significant point to be called The Book. Quires were fastened by threads through the inner margin, like a modern stapling process, and sometimes monstrous fifty-sheet folds were used in a single cumbersome quire. One famous papyrus codex referred to in the cataloguing system for these documents as P46, called Chester Beatty II, was once a single quire codex of 104 leaves—only 86 are known to exist now.

A more usual format was quires of 8–12 leaves, joined as needful. The main advantage of this was that more material could be contained, and more easily consulted, without the volume becoming unmanageable. P46, referred to above, originally contained all the Pauline epistles except Timothy and Titus. As a scroll this would have needed one of 60 feet—or at least two 30-footers. The five separate scrolls needed for the Gospels and Acts are replaced in the 3rd century by one codex, P45 (Chester Beatty I).

Princeton University Library

Part of the Epistle of James on Papyrus[4]

Another step in the external form of New Testament material came with the establishment of Christianity under the reign of Emperor Constantine, in the 4th century. The status of the Christian documents changed abruptly, and the wholesale destruction of books that had accompanied earlier persecutions ceased (for a while). Demand began to grow instead throughout the empire as Christianity became respectable. Just at this point the book makers re-

introduced vellum as the writing material. It had been in use for some time in Pergamum from about 190 BC, but never on a large scale (and it is a form of the name of that town which gives us the name 'parchment' for vellum).

Vellum is made from the skins of cattle, sheep and goats, especially young ones. The hair is scraped off, the skins washed, rubbed with pumice, and dressed with chalk, giving an almost white sheet, durable and easy to write on in black or certain other colours. Once Christianity became an imperial religion, the physical appearance of the books took on an importance that had not been there before, and some of the vellum codices of Scripture are extremely beautiful things to look at, though not necessarily reliable or accurate because of that! For completeness I note that 'paper', a Chinese cloth-based refinement of the papyrus writing material, did appear in the West in the 12th century, but from the 4th–15th centuries vellum was the preferred material.

Title page of Matthew's Gospel on vellum from the Lindisfarne Gospels[5]

Translations

Scripture, existing in three languages, and offering translations within itself, (Matthew 1.23; Mark 5.41, 15.22, 34; John 1.38, 41, 42, 9.7; Acts 4.36, 9.36, 13.8) is inherently translatable, and response to the need for Scriptures in the vernacular, or common language of a people, is as old as the New Testament. Early translations of the New Testament from Greek into Latin began about 180 AD, and both Old and New Testaments were in fact translated from Greek (the Old Testament from the Septuagint). The early translation of the Old and New Testaments into Latin is referred to as the 'Old Latin'. Around 300 AD there was a translation of the New Testament into Syriac, the 'Old Syriac', and also four Coptic Versions, the language spoken in four dialects in Egypt. Other early translations of the Scriptures were in Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Slavic, and Gothic.

The most significant and influential translation was in 380 AD, when Jerome translated anew into Latin the Old

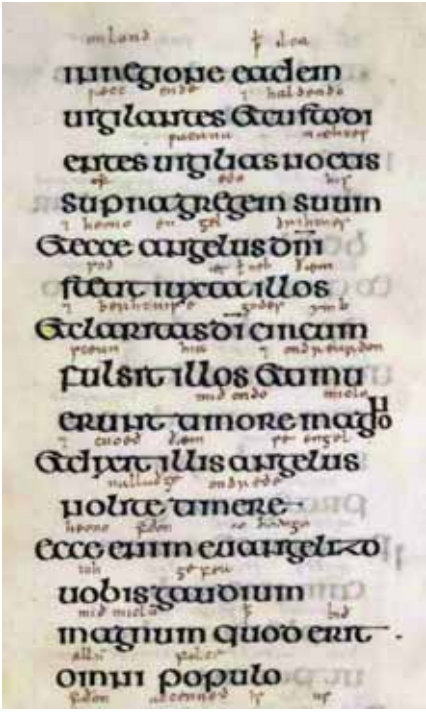
Testament from Hebrew and the New Testament from Greek. This return to Hebrew rather than Greek as the proper source for Old Testament translation, although beyond doubt the correct procedure, was strongly resisted and resented at the time. However, this Latin version, styled the 'Vulgate' because it was the vulgar, or common, language, became the Bible of the Western Church until the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s. Apart from the long, slow adulteration of the Vulgate text over 1000 years,[6] it generated problems of translation all through that time. From Augustine to Erasmus, Bible translation never escaped the incubus of Latin as the source text. This historical period, in very general terms, is that of the Byzantine Empire, centred in Byzantium (subsequently Constantinople, now Istanbul). Most Greek scholarship and literature, including many Biblical texts, were drawn there, and thus for a time lost to the Western world.

English Scriptures: Caedmon to Wycliffe

There were yearnings and strivings toward the provision of English-language Scripture all through the so-called Dark Ages, as the following brief list indicates:

440 Roman legions withdraw from Britain.
670 Caedmon composes poems in Old English derived from the Biblical narratives.
825 Vespasian Psalter—interlinear Old English translation of the earlier Latin text.
900 Paris Psalter—Old English version of the first fifty Psalms.
950 Aldred writes Old English between the lines of the Lindisfarne Gospels.[7]
970 First Old English version of the Gospel of Matthew, based upon Aldred's gloss.
The Rushworth Gospels.
1000 Aelfric translates abridged Pentateuch and several other portions of Scripture into Old English.
The 'Wessex Gospels' and first Old English version of all four Gospels.
1200 Orm's poetical paraphrase of Gospels and Acts in Middle English.
1300 Midland Psalter—metrical version of the Psalms in Middle English.
1320 Richard Rolle's Middle English Psalter.
1382 Wycliffe completes translation of the Bible.
1388 Wycliffe Bible corrected by John Purvey.

The chronicler William of Malmesbury, 1090-1143, assures us that King Alfred, 849-899, had memorised the New Testament and Psalms together with other Old Testament portions, and was engaged at the time of his death in a new translation of the Psalms. You must realise that the language used was quite



Part of Luke's Gospel from the Lindisfarne Gospels showing Aldred's translation into Old English written between the lines[8]

variable throughout the 'Kingdoms' in Britain. An 'English' document produced in Wessex would not necessarily be useful in Mercia or Strathclyde or Northumbria, and we would not find any of these older forms easy to the eye, ear or tongue now! Compare these renderings of Luke 2.7,11:

[11th century: Wessex] and heo cende hyre frumcennedan sunu. and hine mid cildclaþum bewand. and hine on binne alede. forþam þe hig næfdon rum on cumena huse…forþam todæg eow ys hælend acenned. se is drihten crist on dauides ceastre;

[14th century: Wycliffe] & she childide hir first goten sone, & wlappede hym in cloþis & putte hym in a cracche, for þer was not place to hym in þe comun stable…for a saueour is born to day to vs, þat is crist a lord in þe cite of dauid

and for contrast:-

[16th century: Tyndale] And she brought forth her fyrst begotten sonne and wrapped him in swadlynge cloothes and layed him in a manger because ther was no roume for them within in the ynne…for vnto you is borne this daye in the cite of David a saveoure which is Christ ye lorde.

Tyndale may strike us as quaint, but is quite comprehensible—one can read it aloud and hearers would understand; but without some familiarity with the sounds and orthography of Anglo-Saxon English it is none too easy to read Wessex or Wycliffe. Nevertheless, it is good to know that even around 1200 AD Orm had brought John 3.16 to the English of his day:

Thurrh thatt te Laferrd seggde thus
In that the Lord said thus
Till Nicodem withth worde
To Nicodemus with word
Swa lufede the Laferrd Godd
So loved the Lord God
The Werelld tatt he sennde
The world that he sent

His aghenn sune Allmahtig Godd
His own son Almighty God
To wurrthen mann on erthe
To become man on earth
To lesenn mannkinn thurrh hiss death
To release mankind through his death
Ut off the defless walde
Out of the devil's power
Thatt whase trowwenn shall on himm
That whosoever shall believe on him
Wel mughe wurrthenn borrghenn[9]
Surely may become saved

The greater problem however for the accuracy and authenticity of all these English manuscript versions was their textual provenance. These were all derived from the Latin Vulgate, not the Biblical language texts. Not only was the starting point wrong—a translation of a translation—but the corruptions in and variations between copies of the Vulgate were growing out of hand in the passage of time.[10] There was at this point in the history of the text of Scripture great need for a method of reproduction which would anchor the text in a stable and accurately repeatable form, and for a return to the awareness and use of the Biblical languages as the only authoritative basis for translation.[11]

Amongst those who used the Latin Bible and the Old English portions derived from it, there was some understanding of the problem of 'second-hand' translation. Savour this 11th century poetic Welsh rebuke of those who translated the Psalms from Greek:

This harp the holy Hebrew text
doth tender
Which, to their power, whilst everyone
doth render,
In Latin tongue with many
variations
He clouds the Hebrew rays with
his translations.
Thus liquors when twice shifted out
and poured
In a third vessel are both cooled
and soured;
But holy Jerome truth to light
did bring
Briefer and fuller, fetched from
the Hebrew spring.[12]

Printing

To contemplate the unfolding of history as in very truth the Living God dealing with His people and His Word in the midst of a careless and indifferent world, is a joyful source of refreshment and ground of praise for the believer. This is particularly true of the amazing confluence of events affecting the history of the Bible text in the 15th and 16th centuries. To meet the need just outlined we see that in Europe conditions were just ready for the large scale production of texts. The requirements for book-printing were available: paper was being produced and used in Europe,[13] artists had invented an oil-based ink which could be adapted for printing on paper and vellum, instead of insubstantial watery ink. There were presses in use for printing designs on textiles, adaptable for paper printing, and

Example of moveable type

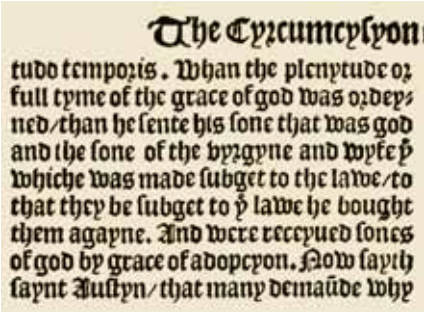
workers were already making metal plates to use for stamping the covers of manuscript books. The time was ripe for Johann Gutenberg's invention of printing with moveable type. Such was the impact of printing, and its use for the Bible and religious material generally, that a contemporary verse expressed his admiration of

the presse…

The worth whereof no tongue can well expresse
So much it doth, and workes so readily:
For which let's give unto the Lord all praise,
That thus hath bless'd us in these latter daies.[14]

Gutenberg, born in Mainz around 1397, was trained as a goldsmith. He set up a foundry with press in Mainz, and experimented with the concept of printing with moveable metal type. Finally, around 1453, he printed the *editio princeps*[15] of the Latin Bible. Unfortunately for him, he was heavily in debt and in 1455 his creditor and partner, Johannes Fust, closed on the loans. Gutenberg did finish printing the Bible, but lost his press equipment and metal fonts to Fust. After this he seems to have wandered to other cities, teaching the new technique of printing, and died in his native town in 1468.

The Englishman William Caxton (1422–91) acquired the technique of letterpress printing when he was in Cologne in 1471–2. In association with the Flemish calligrapher Colard Mansion, Caxton set up a press in Bruges, printing the first books in English there. Then, in 1476, he set up the press in Westminster and printed the first book in England[16] in 1477. Caxton was very cautious about



The Cyrcumcyyon
tudo temporis. Whan the plenytude or full tyme of the grace of god was ordeyned/than he sente his sone that was god and the sone of the vyrgyne and wyke ꝑ whiche was made subget to the lawe/to that they be subget to ꝑ lawe he bought them agayne. And were receyued sones of god by grace of adopcyon. Now sayth sayne Austyn/that many demaūde why

Caxton's Golden Legend quoting Galatians 4.4,5[17]

the political consequences of any attempt to print an English Bible, Lollardy and the Wycliffe Bible being seriously proscribed. However, in his first edition of Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*, 1483, he embedded large portions of Scripture material (the greater part of the Old Testament, in fact) which he had translated into English from the Latin and French sources of Voragine.

Book printing is now in place, and Bible production in multiple copies of the same text is possible. One more piece is needful to put the English Bible on track—the break with the Latin text as the basis of translation. There we will take up our journey on the road to the Authorised Version in part two of this article.

Endnotes

[1] Originally planned as covering the whole Bible, but the Old Testament and Hebrew scholarship must wait their own article.
[2] See also 1 Corinithians 16.21, 2 Thessalonians 3.17 and Philemon 19.
[3] Perhaps it could have been from Greek roots *cheiro-graphs*, meaning just the same thing!
[4] Collections of Papyri Frame 15. Manuscripts Division. Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Princeton University Library. By kind permission.
[5] By kind permission of The British Library (Cotton Nero D. IV, f27).
[6] The Vulgate of Jerome is scarcely to be recognised in the Vulgate of the Council of Trent.
[7] This is called 'glossing' and the addition of interlinear and marginal translation, comments and remarks is a feature of the handwritten Scripture versions.
[8] By kind permission of The British Library (Cotton Nero D. IV, f143v).
[9] The same passage would seem to be one of Tolkien's sources, as further on the expression 'middell ærd' (middle earth) appears as synonymous with 'thiss werelld'.
[10] Please see the *Quarterly Record* 565 article on Wycliffe for general information, and especially page 25 for opposition to the vernacular Scriptures.
[11] An interesting observation, using modern terminology—all before Wycliffe, although recognisably 'Bible based' reads like poetic paraphrase. Wycliffe, **in terms of the text before him**, approximated more nearly to a formal equivalence approach. Wycliffe, of course, had a thoroughgoing doctrine of Scripture driving him to such carefulness.
[12] *Rhygyfarch [Ricemarch], 1056-99, son of Sulien, Bishop of St. David's.* I realise that he could be read as saying 'stick to the Latin, it's closer to the original', but perhaps the 'Hebrew rays' and 'Hebrew spring' suggest a clearer view?
[13] There was a papermill in Strasbourg around 1430, just about the time that Gutenberg was there!
[14] From Harley mss., 5906b, no.134, a woodcut of a small, early London printing office; C. C. Ryrie, *Formatting the Word of God*, www.smu.edu/bridwell/publications/ryrie_catalog/intro.htm, (28 November 2005).
[15] The expression always used in bibliography for the very first one of its kind.
[16] *Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres*, translated from the French by the 2nd Earl Rivers.
[17] Picture courtesy of David C. Lachman, Antiquarian Theological Bookseller, www.davidclachman.com