

The Dr. Gene Scott Bible Collection

STATION 49: POLYGLOTS



Detail from Station

49

The general dissatisfaction of the church world with the Latin Vulgate, based on study of the influx of Greek, Aramaic and other manuscripts which began in the early 15th century, led to scholarly attempts to present the Latin version contrasted with versions in other ancient tongues. As scholarly works, they served a dual purpose: on one hand, they enabled students to learn the classic languages by comparing them to the Latin; on the other, they allowed those who

had mastered the languages to have at their disposal purer, older texts than the patchwork of revisions which comprised the official Bible of the established church. A polyglot Bible, to those who could read it, was by its nature a condemnation of the accretions and distortions of the Vulgate.

Origen's Hexapla (3rd century) had been a manuscript attempt (the oldest recorded) to compare the versions then in circulation in Hebrew and Greek with the Latin (which was corrupt even in his day). Jerome used Origen's manuscript in his work on the Vulgate, but the text itself perished during the Dark Ages. The first attempt at a polyglot text of the whole Bible - once printing from moveable type was possible - was the famous Complutensian Polyglot, begun at Alcala, Spain under the direction of Cardinal Ximenes at the turn of the 16th century, but not published in whole until 1522. Its publication was preceded by the Polyglot Psalter shown here, published in 1516.

Further polyglots followed during the 16th and 17th centuries, as scholarship expanded and the need to consult versions other than Latin or Greek underlay the attempts to produce accurate vernacular versions. Plantin's Royal Antwerp Polyglot of 1569-72, the Hamburg Polyglot of 1596, the Paris Polyglot of 1645 and Walton's London Polyglot of 1655-60 are among some dozen polyglots of this era. The term "polyglot" means, "many tongued;" similar works containing just two languages ("diglots") or three ("triglots") served the same purposes and often surpassed the larger works in accuracy. They are a "sub-set" of polyglots. Of these, the Greek-Latin diglot New Testament of Erasmus ([Station 12](#)), for example, forever undermined the authority of the Vulgate in the minds of those who consulted it.

Complete polyglot Bibles were major undertakings; that is why so few were prepared over the last 400 years. Individual books of the Bible, notably the Psalms, were prepared in polyglot form as well. This Station shows a variety of polyglots, from Psalms and Testaments to complete Bibles, in diglot to polyglot form. All of them are truly rare books, self-evident when one considers how prized they are by their very nature by the great libraries and institutions of learning world-wide.

As a matter of interest, the modern "26 Translations Bible," used by many who attend this Cathedral, is an example of a polyglot-like version (the difference being that all 26 versions are not shown complete). The polyglots shown at this Station include:

ORIGEN'S HEXAPLA

*Originally
Composed in 245*

A.D.

The oldest manuscripts of the complete Bible that have survived, the great Uncial Codices shown at [Station 48](#) (the *Sinaiticus*, *Vaticanus* and *Alexandrinus*) all date from the 4th and early 5th centuries. They vary from each other in places; repeated recopying of manuscript texts, coupled with the fragmentation of doctrine which occurred during the ferments of the early centuries of the church, led to a variety of versions in circulation. In the 3rd century, Origen wrote, "*Now it is clear that there has come a great difference in copies, either through the laziness of scribes or from the audacity of those who introduced corruptions as amendments, or of others who took away from or added to their new text such things as seemed good to them.*"

Jerome, set with the task of creating a definitive Latin version in the 4th century, also complained of the poor quality of the Greek and Latin texts he had to work with - though he also he worked with the original manuscript of Origen's Hexapla!

The importance of the earliest possible texts cannot be overestimated; from the time of Luther and Tyndale, the attempt to distill the pure Word of God from the muddled streams of varying versions became an obsession of scholars throughout Christendom, for both the Protestants and the Established Church. The surviving manuscripts of the early commentators and "Church Fathers" were full of quotations and references to a compilation of texts of the Old Testament made by Origen, contrasting the Hebrew text, given in both Hebrew and Greek characters, with four different Greek versions (the Septuagint, Theodosius,

Symmachus and Aquila), and consulting three others (especially for the Psalms). Origen took the Septuagint and the original Hebrew as definitive, and marked places where the other major versions then in circulation differed.

But Origen's masterpiece was, for all intents and purposes, irretrievably lost - or so it seemed in the 16th century. Finally, out of the flood of manuscripts that reached the West after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, scholars discovered a seemingly literal Syriac translation of Origen's Hexapla, made by Paul, bishop of Tella (in Mesopotamia), at Alexandria in 616-617 A.D. Syriac was a language of the Holy Land, and was akin to both Greek and Hebrew.

In the second half of the 17th century, a Benedictine monk from the congregation of St. Maurice, Bernard Montfaucon, undertook to reconstruct the essence of Origen's Hexapla as far as possible, basing his efforts on the scholarship of Flaminius Nobilius and Joannes Drusius. It was published in Paris in 1713 in two large folio volumes, with French Royal permission. Montfaucon gives only key words or phrases in Hebrew and at least one or more Greek versions in the left column; the criteria for selection was variance from the "received text" or having room for mis-interpretation. The right column gives Latin translations of the left column, and goes through the Old Testament book by book in verse order (though not every verse has an entry), and includes both Hebrew and Greek lexicons. At the end of each volume are extensive notes, some giving important marginal notations found in the actual manuscripts examined. The editors consulted many Greek manuscripts, including the *Vaticanus*, and others from various periods in the Royal French, Vatican and other libraries, as well as citations from the original Hexapla in the works of such church fathers as Eusebius. The entire production is lavish, carefully composed and handsomely bound and the set is a great rarity among Bibliophiles.

THE FIRST POLYGLOT EVER PUBLISHED - 1516

The "Psalms of David" in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Chaldee

Produced at Genoa (Italy) by Petrus Paulus Porrus, this book was published in September 1516. The official permission to publish this work was granted in 1506 and work began immediately (though not completed until a decade later). Among other distinctions, this is the **first book printed in Arabic** (another only began printing in 1514, when most of this one was already complete). The text contains

eight columns over two pages, giving the Psalms in Hebrew, a literal Latin version of the Hebrew, the Latin Vulgate text, the Greek Septuagint text, Arabic, Aramaic in Hebrew letters, a literal Latin version of the Aramaic, and the Scholia, an ancient commentary. It was edited by Agostino Giustiniani.

Prepared even while work on the Complutensian Polyglot was under way in Spain under Cardinal Ximenes, the publication of this work beat the Complutensian by four years. Thus, this work is the **first polyglot section of the Bible ever printed** anywhere in the world. Though printed under the watchful eye of the Roman church, this book for the first time collated in one volume the extant versions in the ancient languages of the Bible, making the source material available to scholars throughout Europe. Note that the complete Greek text of the Bible (namely the Aldine edition shown in the "Room of the Book" at [Station 4](#)) was not available until 1518, some two years after the publication of this book. While Hebrew Bibles had been printed in the late 15th century, no printed Aramaic texts were available until this book, and the Arabic (based on Syriac manuscripts, though no Syriac version was published until 1624) was equally unavailable.

The number of surviving examples of this book in libraries world-wide is estimated to be somewhere in the low teens; we know of no other example remaining in private hands. As a monument to the scholarship which underlay the translation of the Bible into the languages of the people world-wide, and as monument to the process which forever wrested the Word of God out of the exclusive domain of the Latin Vulgate (and the control of the Church of Rome), this book is remarkable. The forerunner of the great Polyglots of the 16th and 17th centuries, this book represents the first step in a long and difficult process which culminated in Walton's great London Polyglot (also shown at this Station).

The notes to Psalm XIX (placed above the polyglot texts) give a biographical note on Christopher Columbus, a "favorite son" of Genoa (where this book was produced).

PLANTIN'S 1584 POLYGLOT

One of the most important scholarly tools in studying the bases for vernacular translations, a *polyglot* gives the text of the Bible in two or more languages. The first polyglot of the entire Bible was the Complutensian, completed in 1522; it was preceded and followed by diglot (two-language) and polyglot (multi-language) printings of Books or parts of the Bible, notably the

Psalms in 1516 (which was also the first book printed with Arabic text).

The master printer of the "Low Countries" in the second half of the 16th century was Christopher Plantin. Like Robert Estienne ("Stephanus") of Paris, known far and wide as the "Protestant Pope" for the accuracy of his printed texts in classical languages, Plantin published Greek, Latin and other texts of the Bible or the New Testament in a variety of sizes. These were of exceptional craftsmanship and remarkable accuracy.

In 1584, Plantin published this polyglot in folio size. It consists of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as edited by Benedict Arias Montanus (given in the colophon as having been completed in 1571), presented in interlinear form with the Latin text of Pagninus (the same Latin text consulted by Martin Luther in preparing his German version). This section (as is usual where the Hebrew takes precedence) starts at the back of the volume. At the front, the Greek New Testament *Textus Receptus* as edited by Montanus is given with interlinear Latin text drawn from the Latin Vulgate version; this is followed by the Old Testament Apocryphal books given in Greek, with an interlinear Latin text from the Complutensian Polyglot.

This book has one direct connection with the history of the English Bible: Worthington used this edition in preparing the English Catholic Old Testament of 1610. Both sections of this polyglot were drawn from Plantin's Antwerp Polyglot of 1569-1572, which had included passages in Chaldee and Syriac as well. This magnificent folio edition is a great treasure of the Dr. Gene Scott Collection; a bookplate inside the front cover shows that this example comes from the library of Lord Napier.

Polyglot New Testament - 1584

Providing the text of the New Testament in Syriac, Greek and Latin, this work was edited by the eminent French orientalist, Guy la Fevre de la Boderie (1541-1598), who had been a scholar of Guillaume Postel. He in fact based the text of this volume on his previous work on Plantin's Polyglot of 1572. The Syriac text is printed in Hebrew characters with an interlinear Latin version; it and the Vulgate version are shown in parallel columns on the top of the pages, while across the bottom of each page is the Greek text. The finished work was printed by Etienne Presvosteau of Paris, for Joannes Benenatus, and is dated on the title page 1584 while the colophon gives 1583. The editor's dedication to King Henry III of France describes the signs and wonders that should precede the second coming of the

Son of Man. Listed by Darlow & Moule as #1423.

THE GOSPELS - Arabic-Latin Diglot, 1591

The first book printed in Arabic, shown nearby at this Station, was a polyglot Psalter published in 1516; the book of Galatians followed in 1583, and in 1590-1591 the Gospels were finally published by the *Typographia Medicea* of Rome, both in Arabic alone and in this magnificent diglot version, lavishly illustrated with 150 woodcuts (some 68 different), mostly by Antonio Tempesta and engraved by Leonardo Parasole (both of whose initials appear on some of the blocks).

The press was founded by Pope Gregory XIII (of the Medici family, thus the name) for the propagation of Christianity in the East. The Arabic type was cut by Robert Granjon of Paris, for Domenico Basa of Rome and was acquired by Giovanni Battista Raimondi for the *Typographia Medicea* in 1585.

This is the **first edition** of the Gospels in Arabic and Latin, with the Latin interlinear translation by Antonio Sionita. The book is unusual in that as published it did not contain a title page (a colophon at the back gave publication details). Listed by Darlow & Moule as #1637.

THE PSALMS OF DAVID - Arabic-Latin Diglot

Editions of 1614 & 1619

Contrasting the Latin version with an Arabic text translated from the Syriac *Peshitta* version, this book was dedicated to King Louis XII of France, though both editions were printed at Rome by Stephanus Paulinus for the *Typographia Savariana*. It was produced, as stated in Latin on the title page, under the patronage of Francis Savary de Breves, once French ambassador to Constantinople and then to Rome, who was one of the men responsible for the retrieval of ancient manuscripts in the east and their migration to the west. Savary's publishing house had been founded at Constantinople and moved to Rome when he was posted there.

The Arabic typeface, of an extraordinarily large size, was originally cut under

Savary de Breves' direction in Constantinople and completed in Paris by Le Be. It was subsequently used for Le Jay's Paris Polyglot, begun in 1615 but not completed until 1645. The Arabic text was translated and edited from the Syriac by Victor Scialach and by the famous Gabriel Sionita, a Maronite, renowned as the foremost Syriac and Arabic scholar of his day, who also collaborated on the Paris Polyglot.

As with any text of scripture printed under the nose of the Roman church, this book contains an *imprimatur* , or "permission to publish," given by Cardinal Bellarmine, stating that the text contains nothing "against the truth" of either the Latin Vulgate or the approved Greek and Hebrew versions. Both of these editions are so rare as to be almost unobtainable; only the 1619 second edition is listed by Darlow & Moule (#1644) and varies from the first edition in the use of red ink on the title page and the insertion of a leaf of *errata* .

CHALDEE LEXICON - 1639-40 1st Edition

Beginning in 1609, Johann Buxtorf, professor of Hebrew, assembled the definitive "Chaldee, Talmudic and Rabbinical Lexicon" of Chaldee and Hebrew words, phrases and idioms; though he died before it was completed, his son finished it in 1639.

Printed at Basel, Switzerland, by Ludwig Koenig in 1639-40, this volume became the basis for subsequent Christian rabbinical scholarship. The text, later reprinted in several editions over two centuries, is given in Hebrew and Latin. The title page declaims that this is not merely a "Common ('vulgar') Lexicon" but also a "Philological Thesaurus."

SAXON POLYGLOT - 1657

Published at Leipzig ("Lipsiae") by Christian Kirchner and printed by Johann Wittigau, this polyglot was authorized by the Elector of Saxony, who happened to be the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire at the time (of course, the empire was neither holy nor Roman, and not much of an empire!). The book consisted of a Hebrew Old Testament contrasted with the Latin text of Pagninus, together with the Greek New Testament contrasted with the Latin Vulgate text.

Both Testaments are collated and edited by Benedictus Arianus Montanus, whose scholarship was frequently incorporated in polyglot Bibles of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Remarkably for a book of such lavish production, it is **unrecorded** by Darlow & Moule, though it is a direct successor of Plantin's polyglot (shown elsewhere at this Station).

Walton's "LONDON POLYGLOT" - 1660

This celebrated "Cromwell" edition of the most influential English polyglot Bible ever printed was prepared under the direction of Canon Brian Walton (later Bishop of Chester) in London, beginning in 1653. It was first published in 1657, among the first books printed by subscription. This edition, in a canny political move, was dedicated to Oliver Cromwell, who allowed the paper for it to be imported free of customs duties.

The Bible text contrasts up to eight different languages per book; among the six volumes will be found Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic and Persian (all with Latin translations) as well as the Samaritan Pentateuch (discovered in 1616), various *Targums* (Aramaic versions of the Old Testament, made when Hebrew was no longer commonly spoken among the Jews), and selected readings from the *Codex Alexandrinus*.

This polyglot has never been surpassed, and it remains today a great resource for the study of some of the oldest versions to have survived. Book collectors recognize it as well as one of the great achievements of the printer's art, though few complete examples of it have survived in private hands.

Bagster's 1831 London Polyglot

The crowning achievement of Samuel Bagster & Son, paramount publishers of scholarly Bible-related works in the first half of the 19th century, this polyglot consists of eight languages plus (in Appendices) the Samaritan Pentateuch (the Kennicott edition) and the Syriac New Testament (based on the *Peshitta* version, edited by Widmanstad of Vienna in 1555).

The Hebrew Old Testament is that of Van der Hooght's 1705 version; a Hebrew

New Testament was prepared by William Greenfield. The Greek Septuagint herein is based on Cardinal Carafa's edited text of the *Codex Vaticanus*, while the Greek New Testament is that of the *Textus Receptus*. The Latin text is that of the official Vulgate version of 1592.

Modern languages include English (the King James Version), German (Luther's version), French (Ostervald's version), Italian (Diodati's version) and Spanish (Father Scio's version). Thus, this work is a mixture of both Catholic and Protestant texts, boldly laid out for comparison to the ancient version in the classic languages. Also included in the Appendices are variant readings from Grabe's scholarly edition of the Septuagint, and from Griesbach's Greek New Testament.

STATION LOCATION MAP

Below is a floor plan map of the Cathedral in 3 sections, one for each level. The first section is the Lower Level, the second is the Foyer Level, and the third is the Mezzanine Level. This station is located in the "Room of the Book" on the Lower Level at the red #49.



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