


# Emergence of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition in English Bible translation

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**Dates:**

Received: 14 Apr. 2022

Accepted: 15 June 2022

Published: 13 Sept. 2022

**How to cite this article:**

Naudé, J.A., 2022,  
'Emergence of the Tyndale–  
King James Version tradition  
in English Bible translation',  
*HTS Theologiese Studies/  
Theological Studies* 78(1),  
a7649. [https://doi.  
org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7649](https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7649)

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In this essay, it is demonstrated that the inception of the English Bible tradition began with the oral–aural Bible in Old English translated from Latin incipient texts and emerged through a continuous tradition of revision and retranslation in interaction with contemporary social reality. Each subsequent translation achieved a more complex state by adapting to the emergence of incipient text knowledge (rediscovery of Hebrew and Greek texts), emergence of the (meaning-making) knowledge of the incipient languages (Latin, Hebrew and Greek), language change (Old, Middle and Modern English), mode of communication (hearing-dominant and text-dominant), style (literal or word-for-word) and products (oral-aural Bible, handwritten manuscript Bible and printed Bible). Historical sources indicate that there were translations of portions of the English Bible since 700 CE as handwritten manuscript Bibles in Old and Middle English and in print in Modern English – even before the retranslation associated with Tyndale (1526) and despite ecclesiastical opposition since 1408. This version and its revisions (1530–1531, 1534) are followed by subsequent revisions (Coverdale Bible, Matthew's Bible, Great Bible, Geneva Bible and Bishop's Bible). The next revision was the King James Version (1611), which replaced all its predecessors, and which was never replaced for the next four centuries – not even by its revisions.

**Contribution:** Contrary to the fragmentation caused by ordering individual English Bibles either by period (e.g. 20th century) or according to their features (e.g. literal), it is demonstrated that the history of English Bible translation emerged rather as a translation complex, and its history must be understood in this way.

**Keywords:** King James Version; Tyndale Bible; Geneva Bible; Bishops' Bible; Great Bible; Matthew's Bible; Coverdale Bible; American Standard Version.

## Introduction

### Translation as a complex interaction of texts and other systems

In line with Marais (2014, 2019a), it is assumed that a translation emerges from a complex interaction of texts and other systems (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2019a, 2019b). Translation is not the means of transferring a fixed meaning from an incipient text (or source text) to a subsequent text (or target text) across linguistic, cultural and semiotic barriers, but rather it is the entire process of meaning-making and meaning-taking, as signs are interpreted and reinterpreted beyond interlingual translation. In this way, translation plays a role in the emergence of social reality. Complex systems are adaptive, dynamic (constantly changing) and emergent (having the tendency to self-organise to reach a subsequently higher state), following particular trajectories because of the influence of attractors.

The translation process has traditionally been understood in a reductionist manner as involving simply a *source text* and a *target text*. Working within a complexity approach to translation, Marais (2019a) proposes instead the terms *incipient sign systems* and *subsequent sign systems*, respectively, to conceptualise translation as semiotic processes – incipient sign systems, 'according to various conventions, act as initiating semiotic systems from which the subsequent sign systems are constructed' (Marais 2019a:53; see also Marais 2019a:72, 74–75, 123–125). In this essay *incipient text(s)* is used instead of *source texts* to refer to all of the multifaceted, complex and emergent features that provide input into the translation process and *subsequent text(s)* instead of *target text* to include all of the texts that emerge out of the translation process. Critically, the use of these terms means that a particular biblical version may function both as an incipient text (for the creation of subsequent texts) and as a subsequent text within the semiotic meaning-making processes of translation.

**Note:** Special Collection: Septuagint and Textual Studies, sub-edited by Johann Cook (Stellenbosch University).

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The natural tendency of complex systems for disorder (entropy) is constrained by the process of translation itself, which implies the need for regular revision and retranslation. In this essay, the term 'revision' refers to the process of editing, correcting and modernisation of an existing translation for republication, while the term 'retranslation' refers to a next translation of an incipient text into the same language (see also Koskinen & Paloposki 2010; Mossop 2011). Both revision and retranslation may lead to the replacement of a previous version if its incorporation is adequate in the process of emergence. Both revision and retranslation are complex processes involving a network approach that identifies historical and synchronic relations between texts, institutions or contexts and agents (Albachten & Gürçağlar 2019). The new forms and new meanings keep the Bible, as well as the specific tradition, alive.

### The Tyndale–King James Version tradition as a case study

Our approach to translation goes far beyond the realm of a written text and applies to hearing-dominant communication (before book printing in the 15th century CE in the West) as well as text-dominant communication (since book printing) (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016). The history of English Bible translation spans both and its continuing tradition of revising and retranslation over centuries is ideal to demonstrate the complex nature of the translation process. In particular, this essay provides a narrative frame analysis of English Bible translations that emerged in the King James Version (or Authorised Version) of 1611 and its revisions up to the American Standard Version (ASV) of 1901. The origin of this tradition is traditionally associated with the Bible translation of William Tyndale (ca. 1494–1536) and colleagues. However, in this essay it is argued that the prehistory out of which the Tyndale–King James Version tradition emerged (see also the historical overview of Long 2009), which was previously neglected (e.g. Alter 2019), forms part of this translation complex (eds. D'hulst & Gambier 2018; Marais 2019b). The focus is to narrate the sociohistorical and translational context of this tradition, the incipient texts, the translation process and strategies employed (especially to establish the nature and style of the language of the translations), the nature of the translation (in terms of form and meaning) and content (in terms of doctrine and academia), its reception and the contribution of the revisions. In Miller-Naudé and Naudé (2022) and Naudé and Miller-Naudé (2022), attention is given to the revisions and retranslations within the Tyndale–King James Version tradition since the second half of the 20th century, which represents the next great age in Bible translation but which must be viewed as an inherent part of this translation complex and not separately, as is done by most scholars.

### Exposition of the argument

The essay is organised as follows: firstly, the conceptualisation of the incipient texts is described in the context of oral–aural and written communication and the emergence of the

oral–aural Bible in Old English as well as of the handwritten manuscript Bibles in Old and Middle English. This description narrates the prehistory out of which the Tyndale–King James Version tradition emerged. Secondly, the move to text-dominant communication is described, followed by an exposition of the early printed Bibles in Modern English before and after the translation of the New Testament of 1526, associated with William Tyndale. Thirdly, the translation process of the King James Version is described, followed by its revisions for accuracy as well as for language modernisation. Fourthly, conclusions follow in light of the description of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition and its prehistory as a translation complex.

### Hearing-dominant communication

The incipient texts (Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and Greek New Testament as well as the deuterocanonical books [or Apocrypha]) are conceptualised in the context of hearing-dominant communication, which implies that texts are internalised but also written down by scribes for archives and libraries to serve as reference points for recitation and memorisation of the tradition (Naudé 2021a:191; Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016). In oral–aural and written communication, typified as verbal interpretive culture, the scribes were capable of reading and writing with the implication that there was no need for common people or elites to become literate to function. Manuscripts were often not written by the hand of the author but were dictated by the author to the scribe. Therefore, most people would have experienced biblical texts as oral–aural.

The age from the 3rd century BCE until the 3rd–4th century CE concerns the translation of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament within a Jewish setting (Alexandria and Western Asia) into Greek (Septuagint) and Aramaic (Targums). Evidence of revising and retranslation exist for both the Greek and Aramaic translation traditions (Barton 2019:437–444). From the end of the 1st century CE to the 4th century, translations (as well as revisions and retranslations) followed in languages such as Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic and Latin. The age from the 3rd–4th century CE until the development of book printing in the 15th century was Roman Catholic (Naudé 2005a:3). The Latin Vulgate, associated with Jerome (Eusebius Hieronymus) (340–420), emerged as the dominant translation through revision and retranslation of, *inter alia*, the Septuagint, Old Latin and Hebrew incipient texts. This process gave the Bible its definite form and served as an incipient text in medieval Christianity. This was also the age of illuminated Bible manuscripts, including the magnificent picture Bibles towards the end of this age, of which the Book of Kells is a surviving exemplar (De Hamel 2001:140–165; Sullivan [1920] 1986).

### Oral–aural Bible in Old English

There is evidence that Christianity already existed in Britain in the 2nd century CE, but it became firmly established in the next centuries with the arrival of missionaries in 597 CE,

sent out by Pope Gregory (Bede 731, [Book 1, Chapters 4–11, 23–34], 42–50, 66–93). The central concepts of Christianity were conveyed by the vast vocabulary of Latin (Bede 731, [Book 1, Chapter 1], 38). Missionary work proceeded almost entirely by means of the spoken word, that is, through oral-aural communication. Any translation of the Bible was a free rendering of the Latin text into the vernacular speech, that is, the oral-aural Bible (Bede 731, [Book 3, Chapter 6], 150). The earliest portions of the Bible in Old English were songs of Bible portions (e.g. the creation and narratives in Genesis, departure out of Egypt, the incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ) set to verse in a highly complicated vernacular meter by Caedmon (ca. 680), a poet and herder, at a Yorkshire monastery (Bede 731, [Book 4, Chapter 24], 250–253). According to Bede, the interpretive translation of the Bible by Caedmon has the same authority as the incipient text because, like the authors of the incipient biblical texts, he possessed God's gift of poetry – the divinely inspired disclosure of secret wisdom (Shepherd 1969:366).

### Handwritten manuscript Bibles in Old English

As there was demand for the Bible in the new emerging vernacular, handwritten manuscript communication in Old English (Anglo-Saxon) began to appear as follows (Herbert 1968:xxvi–xxviii). The first known translation of the biblical text in Old English was the Psalms by Aldhelm (640–709), bishop of Sherborne, at the beginning of the 8th century CE. The translation work of Aldhelm was continued by Bede (673–735), historian ('the Father of English History') and Benedictine monk, who was working on a translation of the Gospel of John at the time of his death. It was intended for teaching purposes and not as a readable vernacular version (Shepherd 1969:372). Alfred (849–901), King of Wessex, studied Latin and translated, *inter alia*, the Ten Commandments, as well as excerpts from Exodus and Acts for priests and laypersons who knew only the vernacular.

Interlinear Bible translations began to appear in the 9th and 10th centuries CE. The earliest surviving copies are the Lindisfarne Gospels, a Latin manuscript (now in the British Library) copied by Bishop Eadfrith between 698 and 721 with an interlinear word-by-word or glossing handwritten translation in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English, made by Aldred between 946 and 968 CE, which influenced later Bible translations. The Rushworth Gospels (in the Bodleian Library) are a copy of the Lindisfarne Gospels, except for Matthew, which is an independent translation in literal prose by a priest named Farman. A copy of the gospels in West Saxon orthography (dated 1050 CE) associated with the cathedral at Exeter is housed at Cambridge University Library. Glossing was an instrument of instruction of Old English pedagogy through oral teaching in the vernacular (Shepherd 1969:371).

Aelfric (950–1020), the Old English prose writer of Winchester, made partial translations in the form of homilies and paraphrases of some of the narrative books of the Old

Testament (Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Kings, Job, Esther and the Maccabees) and set the stage for the translation of the Wessex Gospels. His primary contribution is his translation of biblical concepts (Shepherd 1969:374–378).

The Norman Conquest in 1066 CE ended Bible translation into Old English and the further development of Anglo-Saxon as a language. However, no complete Bible translation in English existed at this stage. Even the complete Bible as incipient text was rare, very expensive and only available for the elite – the clergy used single biblical books and extracts and seldom saw the Bible as a whole. This lack of the complete Bible as a physical sign of the limits of the canon made it impossible to understand the flow, content and meaning of the Bible (Shepherd 1969:364). This fragmentation of Bible texts led the medieval church into strange doctrines. However, a Bible exclusively reserved for the clergy and elite was about to end.

In the course of time, there were translations from the Latin Vulgate into Anglo-Norman in a very literal form, for example, that of Richard Rolle (1295–1349), who produced an Anglo-Norman translation of the Psalms in 1340 (Shepherd 1969:385–387). The fact that the text of the Apocalypse in Anglo-Norman appears in a commentary of which 80 manuscripts are known led Herbert (1968:xxviii) to conclude that there was possibly a complete Bible in Anglo-Norman before 1360.

### Handwritten manuscript Bibles in Middle English

In the 14th century (ca. 1340–1350), English translation of Bible portions (from the Latin Vulgate) began to appear in Middle English. For example, an English translation of the Anglo-Norman Apocalypse survived in 16 Middle English manuscripts (Herbert 1968:xxviii–xix).

About 1384, the complete Bible became available in Middle English. There is no identification of the translators nor of the place of origin or date, although it was previously the practice to provide names on the translations of the Bible, for example, in the case of Rolle. Although this translation is attributed to John Wyclif (1320–1384), there is no convincing evidence that any translating was done by Wyclif himself. At least the names of two associates are known, namely John Purvey and Nicholas of Hereford. Metatexts (or paratexts) in one of the manuscripts suggest that it was corporate work consisting of four stages, namely establishing the Latin incipient text, studying the Latin text, elucidating textual difficulties and translating and correcting the translation (Daniell 2003:85). Although there were processes of revision and retranslation, the so-called Wyclif ('Lollard') Bible translations as literal handwritten translations, which have the tendency to follow the Latin constructions and word order, can be divided into two groups according to the translation method, namely the early versions (1380–1384) (influenced by Rolle) and the later versions (probably 1388) (eds. Forshall & Madden

1850). In the earlier versions, the interference of the Latin incipient texts is so strong that the English translation cannot be understood without comparing it to the incipient text. However, the later versions are more idiomatic and understandable. The Wycliffite was well received (about 180 copies survived) and influenced the development of English as a language. Simple phrases and short sentences of Old English would eventually find their way through Middle English into the Modern English retranslation (Herbert 1968:2).

At the beginning of the 15th century, violent ecclesiastical opposition to these Bible translations and to Bible translation in general arose (Daniell 2003:75). The reason was their association with the pre-Reformation theology movement associated with John Wyclif (1320–1384) and his followers, the Lollards (Poor Preachers), who claimed that all people are directly responsible to God, that the Bible must be obeyed and not canon law and that the Bible must be available in the vernacular for laypersons to read (Daniell 2003:68–70, 74–76).

## Move to text-dominant communication

The development of book printing with moveable type since 1439 by Johannes Gutenberg (1396–1468) in the Western world (which had already been invented in China in 1040) led to the move from hearing-dominant to text-dominant communication, that is, from memorisation of a text to the (silent) reading of a printed text (see Man 2002 for how printing changed the course of history). Print communication, typified as typographic interpretive culture, made quick dissemination of knowledge possible through widespread literacy (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016:2–3). Newfound interest in literacy led to the rise of entrepreneurs and a subsequent shift in wealth and economic power away from a feudal system of a few governing families to a flourishing middle class (Graham 1971). Latin as an aristocratic language fell out of favour – the Western world was ready for texts to be printed in their vernaculars (Pettegree 2015). The result was a rise in the translations of the Bible into various European languages in the decades before the Reformation, which promoted the Reformation. The Bible occupied a prominent role in the Reformation, and it also introduced the next great age of the translation of the Bible (ca. 1500–1950) (Naudé 2005a:3).

Using the Greek New Testament (*Novum instrumentum*) of Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), published in 1516, as incipient text, Martin Luther (1483–1546) completed the rendering of the New Testament into German in 1522 with the assistance of his close associate, Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), and the Old Testament in 1534 with the help of various colleagues. Before 1522, the Bible was translated from the Latin into various dialects of German – there were 14 versions since 1466 (Bragg 2017:24–25). The achievement of Luther was to forge the various dialects into a style of German which could be understood by most German readers. Furthermore, the recovery of the Greek text of the New

Testament – after its official suppression for a 1000 years – brought a renewed awareness of the meanings of Greek words. This new information, which was not fully available through the Latin Vulgate translation, led to a new biblical interpretation concerning salvation through faith in Christ (Romans 1:17) instead of doing good works to earn salvation (Barton 2019:389–398). Kings and clergy believed that the choice of English words for the Hebrew and Greek terms challenged their authority, which led to the continued ban on Bible translation in England (Barton 2019:449). The Bible in Modern English originated in a context of persecution.

## Early printed Bibles in Modern English

### New translations in print before 1526

New translations in print of portions of the Bible in Modern English were made before the translation of the New Testament of 1526, associated with William Tyndale and which is traditionally considered the first translation in Modern English. To circumvent ecclesiastical opposition, these biblical translations were inserted into other books. For example, the *Golden Legend* (1477) inserted 14 narratives of Old Testament figures, *The Cyte of Ladys* (1521) included a paraphrase of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, whereas a translation of the Ten Commandments in condensed form, the Lord's Prayer in alternating Latin and English sentences and seven of the Beatitudes formed part of *The Myrroure of the Chyrche* (Herbert 1968:xxx–xxxi).

### The New Testament (1526)

William Tyndale believed the Bible should be available in the vernacular: 'I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of scripture than thou dost' (The New Testament, Introduction, 8). Although forbidden by the Church to translate the Bible into English, Tyndale used Luther's translation of the New Testament, Erasmus' Greek New Testament with its parallel Latin version and the Vulgate as incipient texts to produce in Europe (in hiding) with the assistance of colleagues an English New Testament by 1525 (either 3000 or 6000 copies were printed in 1526 in the Lutheran city of Worms) (The New Testament, Introduction, 8). It was smuggled into England and Scotland, where it was very popular, amidst growing anti-Lutheranism. By 1534, it is calculated that over 30000 copies were circulating in England (The New Testament, Introduction, 9). Forty-one editions were published between 1525 and 1566, of which only three copies survived into the 21st century (The New Testament, Introduction, 9–10).

In the Tyndale translation, a simple style was employed so that when it was read aloud everyone could learn the Bible message. Contentious words were rendered in a Protestant way, for example, the Latin *paenitentia* becomes 'penitence' instead of 'penance', the Latin *cultus* 'worship', the Greek *ekklesia* 'congregation' instead of 'Church' and the Greek *presbyteros* 'elder' instead of 'priest' (Matthew's Bible,

Introduction, ix). As acclaimed by authors, commentators and readers, the translation itself is a product of the highest literary achievement, constructed with mastery by making a new language from and for the common people of England during the initial phases of the Modern English Period (1500 to present day) (Bragg 2017:88–97). As a basis for the King James Version, Tyndale's renderings accounted for over 80% of its utterances (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, ix). Not all the innovations in the Tyndale tradition became part of English. For example, 'then said the serpent unto the woman, tush, you shall not die' (Gn 3:4) – still part of the Matthew's Bible (see below) – became 'Ye shall not surely die'. According to Bragg (2017:61), 'tush' is a sad loss for English.

Although it has been claimed that the Tyndale translation does not include metatexts (The Geneva Bible, Introduction, 3), an examination of the facsimile indicates that metatexts in the Tyndale New Testament are emergent. They include Instructions 'To the Reder' placed after Revelations, book titles, roman numerals to indicate chapters, colopha to indicate the ends of individual books and of the New Testament, illuminated letters (as found in earlier biblical manuscripts) to delimit sections and judicious, sparse marginal notations throughout.

### Coverdale Bible (1535)

With his assistant, Myles Coverdale (ca. 1488–1569), Tyndale then translated the Pentateuch from the Hebrew, which was finished in 1530, followed by the Book of Jonah in 1531 (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, viii). Tyndale also revised the New Testament, which was published in 1534, and translated the historical books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles from Hebrew with the help of what was published of Luther's Old Testament. John Rogers, a colleague and friend, helped him with the last-mentioned translation at the English House in Antwerp (Bragg 2017:81). When they were halfway through the translation of the Old Testament, Tyndale was arrested and imprisoned in May in 1535, and in 1536 he was executed.

In the meantime, knowing neither Hebrew nor Greek, Coverdale consulted Latin (Vulgate and Pagninus' Latin version of 1528), English (translations associated with Tyndale), German (Luther's translation) and Swiss (Zurich Bible of 1531 and 1534) sources to guide him on those portions of the Old Testament that Tyndale had not finished (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, ix) and to adapt those portions of the Old Testament that Tyndale had finished as well as the Tyndale New Testament of 1526. It was published in London in 1535 as the Coverdale Bible, the first (though unauthorised) complete Bible in English, which was followed by many Tyndale-dependent versions. It included the deuterocanonical books at the end of the Old Testament – as in all revisions to follow, except the ASV (1901) – and chapter summaries throughout.

Coverdale coined various terms, for example, 'lovingkindness' (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, ix). Coverdale's translation of the Psalms was used with minor modifications in the Great

Bible (1539) and in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, ix). A second authorised edition was published in 1537. There were seven editions of the Coverdale Bible until 1553.

### Matthew's Bible (1537)

When Tyndale was arrested, Rogers took Tyndale's translated manuscripts and his notes for further work and continued translating, possibly at Wittenberg. For example, the Prayer of Manasseh and various metatexts were added to the translation (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, ix). Rogers combined the Tyndale Bible translation (for the New Testament the 1534 Tyndale revision) with the Coverdale translation (where there were gaps in the Tyndale Bible text) to create a volume as indicated on the title page attributed to Thomas Matthew – an invented neutral name, perhaps inspired by two of the disciples in the New Testament. The Matthew's Bible was published in 1537 and licensed by King Henry VIII scarcely a year after the execution of Tyndale (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, ix–x). According to Bragg (2017:80), Thomas Matthew was the politic pen name of Rogers. However, this was a strategy to distinguish it from the previous translations. None of the Bibles within the Tyndale–King James Version tradition bears the name of a translator or official on its title page other than that it is the *Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testament*, etc. The popular names used to refer to these translations are for convenience's sake.

Metatexts included a church calendar, an exhortation to study the Bible, a summary of the chief doctrines of the Bible, a concordance and notes to help in understanding the Bible taken from Tyndale, Lefèvre's French Bible (1534) and Olivetan's French Bible (1535). Thomas Cromwell, vice-regent for church affairs of Henry VIII, subsequently encouraged bishops to read the Matthew's Bible in their churches (Matthew's Bible, Introduction, x). There followed six editions of the Matthew's Bible until 1566.

The Taverner's Bible edited by Richard Taverner and published in 1539 is a minor revision of Matthew's Bible but introduced, *inter alia*, new terms, for example, 'parable' for Tyndale's 'similitude' (Daniell 2003:219–220).

### Great Bible (1539)

By the end of 1537, King Henry had licensed both the Coverdale Bible and Matthew's Bible, which ignited the battle over an official standard Bible: Coverdale's reliance on the Latin, German and Swiss rather than Hebrew and Greek on the one side and the (antipapal) notes of the Matthew's Bible as well as its association with Tyndale on the other side made neither translation totally satisfactory (Brake 2011:57).

Although Coverdale had been chosen by Cromwell to undertake the revision project, which was published in 1539 as the Great Bible (so-called because of its size), it was a revision of the Matthew's Bible of 1537, rather than his

Coverdale Bible of 1535 (Brake 2011:60). The New Testament in the Great Bible is a slight revision of Tyndale's New Testament based on Erasmus's Latin texts; for the Old Testament, Munster's annotated Hebrew-Latin Bible of 1535 was used (Brake 2011:60). It was printed without the metatextual notes of the Matthew's Bible. It drew the support of religious authorities who once stood divided. Twenty-one editions of the Great Bible were published until 1569.

### Geneva Bible (1560)

Mary I, a zealous Catholic, ascended the throne in 1553 and forbade personal or private reading and possession of the Bible, which prompted a migration of Protestants from England to Geneva (The Geneva Bible, Introduction, 4–5). Exiles included, *inter alia*, the theologians William Whittingham, brother-in-law of John Calvin, and the primary translator, Miles Coverdale, as well as linguists and scholars Anthony Gilby and Thomas Sampson, engaged in the translation of the Geneva New Testament of 1557 and the complete Bible of 1560 with its many theological and exegetical notes (The Geneva Bible, Introduction, 7–10). The Stephanus Greek New Testament (1550) and Beza's Latin translation (1556) and notes provided new translation tools for their work (The Geneva Bible, Introduction, 10–12). It was the first time that all Old Testament portions left untranslated by Tyndale were translated from the Hebrew. Elizabeth I, who ascended the throne in 1558, supported the public reading of the Bible. Until its ban in 1644, 140 editions of the Geneva Bible were published.

### Bishop's Bible (1568)

Despite the popularity of the Protestant Geneva Bible, it was not accepted universally. Anglican church leaders considered the Calvinistic notes offensive. The Anglican church bishops suggested in 1563 to undertake an official translation under Archbishop Parker as chief editor with a team of at least 13 bishops and scholars to complete the task previously given to Coverdale (Brake 2011:74). The translators used Stephanus's Greek New Testament (1550), Pagninus's Latin (1528) and Munster's Hebrew (1535) (Brake 2011:75). Some of the notes were from the Geneva Bible, but offensive ones were omitted. The Bishop's Bible fell short of the Geneva Bible in quality and simplicity (Brake 2011:75). Although 19 editions were published until 1617, it did not get the support that was hoped for – the revision of the English Bible that would fascinate the world for centuries was still to be conceptualised.

### King James Version of 1611

In 1603, when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England, the variety of English translations was a source of division among religious groups in England (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 33). To reconcile the differences, the King called for a conference to be held in 1604 in Hampton Court (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 33). Both Anglican

bishops and Puritan clergy were invited to consult together about religious tolerance. After much debate about the imperfections of the current English Bibles, it was proposed that a new translation or at least a revised translation be made (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 33). King James, who had a personal interest in Bible study and translation, endorsed the idea.

In July 1604, a translation committee of 50 scholars was formed, consisting of six panels – three for the Old Testament, two for the New Testament and one for the deuterocanonical books. Two panels met at Oxford, two at Cambridge and two at Westminster (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 36–38, 40–42; Brake, 2011:93–110). They were provided with a list of procedures and rules (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 39; Brake 2011:116–122). One of the rules specified that the Bishops' Bible was to be followed, but that certain other translations should be used where they agreed better with the Hebrew or Greek, namely Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthew's, Great Bible and Geneva. Another rule stated that marginal notes should not be used except for explanations of Hebrew or Greek words – 9000 such marginal notes were eventually included.

The first edition of the King James Version in 1611 was very similar in appearance to the Bishops' Bible (1568). The black letter type and the chapter and verse divisions were essentially the same. Running titles and introductory chapter summaries were included, many reflecting the influence of the Geneva Bible (1560). There were several tables and charts. The deuterocanonical books were included as a separate section between the Old Testament and the New Testament (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 43; Naudé 2013:157–194).

The King James Version was a subsequent revision in a process of the emergence of English Bible translation. The idiom and vocabulary can be ascribed to the Tyndale translation, the melody and harmony to Coverdale and the scholarship and accuracy to the Geneva Bible (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 43). One must acknowledge that the final product was certainly the best English Bible that had been produced up to that time. Its English style is widely recognised as superb for that time. In fact, Robert Alter (2019:3–11, 17, 29, 48–49, 64, 70–71, 83–85, 89, 91–92, 110, 113, 116, 120) sees the King James Version's continued influence, despite the steep competition, as evidence that readers seek art as much as doctrine in their Bibles. In terms of its reception, Hamlin and Jones (2010:1) view the King James Version as 'the single most influential book in the English language and arguably the greatest work ever produced by a committee'.

The basic weakness of the King James Version is that when it was translated, there were no standard incipient texts of the Hebrew Masoretic text for the Old Testament nor for the Greek New Testament. The second Rabbinic Bible of Jacob ben Chayyim, published by Daniel Bomberg in 1524–1525, was the most probable incipient Hebrew text. The 1598 Beza Greek text (similar in nature to the 1522 Erasmus, the 1550

Stephanus and the 1565 and 1588–89 Beza Greek texts), also known as the Textus Receptus or Byzantine text, was probably used for the New Testament (Brake 2011:139). Another weakness is that there were many typographical errors – at least one in every 10 pages.

With the publication of the King James Version, the controversy over English Bible translations ended. Initial dissatisfaction gave way to increasing approval so that eventually it superseded its predecessors and rivals. Another reason for its primary status was its production under the patronage of the British government, which meant that it not only achieved prominence domestically but also worldwide through colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries, becoming the standard in the English-speaking world and the incipient text for many missionary translations of the Bible (Naudé 2005b:71).

There were subsequently four further folio editions of the King James Version, namely, in 1611–1613, 1617, 1634 and 1639–1640. The same text and format of the 1611 were used, but corrections and spelling updates were incorporated. The fifth folio edition was considered the finest of the five folio editions (Brake 2011:203–210). After 1640, revisions followed in two phases. The first phase consisted of revisions for accuracy. The second phase consisted of revisions for language modernisation.

## Revisions for accuracy

Since 1640, the public demand for Bibles caused printers to shortcut proofreading procedures, which resulted in errors, but it took more than a century before another attempt at revision was made. No version successfully eliminated all the errors, and no two printings were the same – this tendency continues even into the 21st century. The main reason is that no copy of the King James Version was acknowledged as the standard – attempts to increase consistency and to remove errors were practised by various printers, accompanied by the danger that serious new errors could be introduced (The Holy Bible, 1611, Introduction, 53).

Thomas Paris, a scholar in Cambridge, made a serious attempt to revise the King James Version in 1762 by standardising spelling and punctuation and correcting printer's errors, but it attained a low circulation and was criticised for its remaining errors (Brake 2011:213–214). Building on the Cambridge revision by Paris in 1762, Benjamin Blayney (1728–1801), Hebrew scholar of Oxford, published his revised edition in 1769, known as the Oxford edition, which became the standard edition of the King James Version for more than 100 years (Brake 2011:214–217). For example, Cyrus I. Scofield edited and annotated the text of the 1769 revision for the Scofield Reference Bible, which was published in 1909 and revised in 1917 (Brake 2011:220–222). The 1769 revision included revised spelling, italics, marginal notes and chapter summaries. However, mistakes were still carried over into the 1769 version. For printing, publishers

consulted both the Paris and Blayney editions. Both editions modernised the King James Version and prepared its way in the 19th century. In 1833, Oxford University Press produced a line-for-line reprint of the *editio princeps* whose accuracy is acknowledged, but the progress in printing, diction and spelling made it a non-user-friendly edition (Brake 2011:217). F.H.A. Scrivener (1813–1891), a biblical scholar in London, attempted to bring the editions of Paris and Blayney together with the Cambridge Paragraph Bible to support one critical revision of the 1611 edition, published in 1873 (Brake 2011:218–220). An appendix was included that compared all the major and minor editorial revisions between 1611 and 1769. About 125 abandoned readings were restored. Other revision attempts are described by Scanlin (2013:141–155), such as the one of William Newcome (1729–1800) in 1792. None of those revisions gained universal approval. The public clung to the established and familiar King James Version of 1611 and refused to accept revisions other than Blayney's revision of 1769.

However, the work on a next revision, the English Revised Version, had been underway already for 3 years. Scrivener accepted an appointment to the revision committee; one can therefore assume that his Cambridge Paragraph Bible was consulted for the revision work.

## Revisions for language modernisation

### English Revised Version (1885)

The increase of knowledge about the Hebrew and Greek texts and the nature of the language use of the King James Version, which was too remote from ordinary speech, necessitated revisions. In 1870, the Bishop of Winchester, Dr Wilberforce, proposed such an official revision, which was accepted by the relevant official bodies (The Holy Bible, 1611, Preface, x). Work on such a new revision of the King James Version resulted in the (British) Revised Version of 1881 (New Testament) and of 1885 (Old Testament and New Testament), which is the first genuine text revision extending beyond editorial changes since 1611. The archaic pronouns and verbal inflections were kept, as well as the verse-formatting in prose sections, but a poetic line structure was followed in poetry (The Holy Bible, 1611, Preface, x). Instead of the Geek text of Beza, the one of Westcott and Hort, which has thousands of differences, is followed in this revision with the implication that, for example, the Johannine comma in 1 John 5:7 was removed: 'For there are three that beare record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one' (as cited in the original orthography of the KJV) (The Holy Bible, 1611, Preface, x).

### American Standard Version (1901)

Work on a new American revision of the King James Version, which paralleled the revision process of the (British) Revised Version of 1881 (New Testament) and of 1885 (both Old Testament and New Testament), commenced in 1885 in the

United States of America. After intensive revision, especially from 1897, it was published as the American Standard Version in 1901, without the deuterocanonical books (The Holy Bible, 1901, Preface, iii). The American reviewers were not prepared to follow the same strict conservative guidelines as the British, who adopted an archaizing policy in which no modern English expression that was not current in 1611 would be used and who always used the same English words for the words of the incipient texts. Accordingly, certain archaic 16th-century words like 'drave', 'holpen' and 'twain' were deleted, and the orthography of proper names was improved (The Holy Bible, 1901, Appendix, 285–286). The renderings preferred by the American readership were used: for example, 'Jehovah' instead of 'The Lord', 'Holy Spirit' for 'Holy Ghost' and 'Sheol' for 'the grave', 'the pit' and 'hell' (The Holy Bible, 1901, Preface, iv). The word 'Saint' is omitted in the titles of the Gospels, and 'Paul the Apostle' in the title of the Epistle to the Hebrews (The Holy Bible, 1901, Appendix, 285).

Although the ASV became the preferred translation of many in North America, it failed to supplant the King James Version. At issue for the American readership was not comprehension but style.

## Conclusion

In this essay, it was demonstrated that the history of English Bible translation emerged through a continuing tradition of revising and retranslation since its inception as the oral–aural Bible in Old English as hearing-dominant communication. This is evident in the interpretive translations of Caedmon (ca. 680) into performative texts as songs, as well as handwritten manuscript Bibles in Old English, which were mostly word-for-word translations in the format of interlinear Bible translations. His primary contribution was the translation of biblical concepts. The translations were partial and not complete Bibles and were intended for clerical use and not for laypersons, in accordance with Roman Catholic doctrine. These translations as word-for-word translations from Latin incipient texts eventually emerged as complete Bibles in Middle English during the 14th century, associated with the pre-Reformation theology of John Wyclif and intended for use by laypersons. The move to text-dominant communication followed from the introduction of book printing in the West, which made quick dissemination of knowledge possible through widespread literacy. In light of the reformation theology of Luther, retranslation from the Greek (and Hebrew) incipient texts emerged, which is associated with William Tyndale in Modern English. It was followed by revisions (Coverdale Bible, Great Bible and Bishop's Bible on the one hand and the Matthew's Bible and the Geneva Bible on the other hand). The next revision emerged as the King James Version (or Authorised Version) of 1611, which was the product of several large teams and not of a single translator, shaped by a particular relationship between politics and religion in Jacobean England. The translators produced a revision of its predecessors and not a new translation, which was the product of not only a collective effort by the

contemporary translators but also the amalgamated efforts of prior translators dating back for more than a millennium. The King James Version eventually replaced all its predecessors and was never fully replaced for the next four centuries – not even by its revisions. All the versions in this tradition were literal or word-for-word translations.

These states of affairs falsify the traditional fragmented viewpoint that the origin of this tradition is to be associated with William Tyndale. In this essay, it was demonstrated that there was a long prehistory out of which the Tyndale–King James Version tradition as a translation complex emerged in its interactions with social reality. Each subsequent translation reached a higher state than the previous one by adapting to the emergence of incipient text knowledge (rediscovery of Hebrew and Greek texts), emergence of the (meaning-making) knowledge of the incipient languages (Hebrew and Greek), language change (Old, Middle and Modern English), mode of communication (hearing-dominant and text-dominant) and products (oral–aural Bible, handwritten manuscript Bible and printed Bible).

In separate essays, it is demonstrated that revisions and retranlations of the King James Version continued into the 20th and 21st centuries as literal or word-for-word translations but as divergent branches and not any more as a linear development, as in previous centuries (Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2022; Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2022). This development represents the next age in Bible translation, which started in the second half of the 20th century (Naudé 2005a). In these essays, it is also demonstrated that some scholars incorrectly interpret these branches as new translations on a par with the independent new translations outside the Tyndale–King James Version tradition, as analysed in Naudé (2021b).

## Acknowledgements

The author thanks C.L. Miller-Naudé for critical comments on the research.

## Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## Author's contributions

J.A.N. is the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

## Funding information

This work is based on research supported in part by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (UID 85902).



The grant holder acknowledges that opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in any publication generated by the NRF-supported research are those of the author, and that the NRF accepts no liability whatsoever in this regard.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this study as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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