

Teaching the History of the Bible as Book: A Bibliographic Essay

by Bruce Eldevik

INTRODUCTION

Theological librarians are well equipped to offer sessions or even a mini-course on the evolution of the Bible as a material object. Even though the Bible is central to the studies of seminary or divinity students, and while regular church-goers' interest in studying the Bible is high, this perspective on "how the Bible came to us" usually receives little attention. Almost all theological libraries, however, hold centuries-old artifacts, publications, and facsimiles that make teaching the history of the Bible as book not only possible, but interesting, fun, and perhaps even revelatory for all concerned.

The conviction underlying this essay is that providing an opportunity to look closely at the transmission of the Bible through its material formats — scrolls, codices, illuminated manuscripts, printed books — and its celebrated and condemned translations into other languages offers not only a unique and effective way to connect students with the library of their institution, but also to reach beyond the campus borders to engage a wider interested constituency. There is an inherent, though largely untapped, fascination for many of the "special" items that theological libraries have in their collections. Whether due to craftsmanship, visual beauty, historical significance, sheer age, or some combination of all of these, it is a beneficial undertaking to highlight the richness of detail within and the story behind these items, thereby engaging this natural curiosity and fostering a singular learning opportunity.

The purpose of this bibliographic essay is to recommend a collection of high quality secondary sources that will undergird an enterprise of this nature. A subsequent aim, for those libraries that may wish to add or link to resources about the story behind the physical evolution of the Bible, is to recommend a set of accessible, not overly technical publications (books, exhibition catalogs, websites) that lend themselves to teaching this topic.

The Bible As Book: Overviews

Neil R. Lightfoot's *How We Got the Bible*¹ is one of many surveys written for the "average reader." In short chapters Lightfoot covers ancient book production followed by the arc of the Bible's early history as a manuscript. He describes and compares the most important early Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, not shortchanging the drama accompanying their discovery. Several chapters are devoted to textual matters and questions surrounding the Canon. With the exception of a survey of English bibles up to the KJV, the Bible after the advent of printing receives relatively little attention. Nevertheless, due to its brief, non-detailed approach Lightfoot's book could double as a recommended text in a short course setting.

The single best treatment of the manifestations the Bible has taken throughout its history is Christopher de Hamel's *The Book: A History of the Bible*.² Beautifully illustrated and engagingly written, this title by itself could suffice as a comprehensive resource for surveying the history of the Bible. De Hamel begins with the fourth century when the Bible, in Jerome's Latin translation, had assumed nearly its present form and completeness. The second chapter jumps back to the Bible's origins in Hebrew and Greek, written on papyrus and parchment. From there the narrative follows a chronological timeline: medieval, Reformation, English and American, bibles of the early missionary era, and concluding

¹ Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

² Christopher De Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London: Phaidon, 2001).

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with the revolutionary impact of modern discoveries of ancient biblical manuscripts. The bibliography is extensive and could stand as an essay in its own right. In short, this is a first-rate resource that unfolds like an illustrated series of lectures.

Biblical Texts in the Ancient World

A topic that usually holds a great deal of interest is how biblical books, as literature first written in antiquity, were actually made and read. What did these early appearances of the scriptures look like? How were they used? The essay by Larry Hurtado and Chris Keith, “Writing and Book Production in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,”³ presents a succinct yet clear discussion of this process, including reasoned theories concerning the early adoption of the codex among Christian communities. This essay appears in the first volume of the soon-to-be-completed four-volume *New Cambridge History of the Bible*, a set that updates with current scholarship the highly regarded three-volume work published nearly a half-century ago.⁴

For an expanded investigation of this topic, Harry Gamble has produced a well-received study of the physical formats taken by books in the first centuries CE. In chapter 2 of *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*⁵ he surveys the evolution from the roll to the codex and posits the attraction and preference Christians had for the codex, e.g., its practicality for lengthier texts such as the compiled letters of Paul or the four Gospels, improved means of access for comparing passages, and, not least, creating a differentiation from the ongoing use of scrolls in Hellenistic culture. Gamble also incorporates into his narrative the Greek and Latin terms for books and book production: *biblos/volumen*, *tomoilibri*, *selis/pagina*, etc. which, when presenting on this topic, help to reinforce identifiable connections between books then and now.

*In the Beginning: Bibles Before the Year 1000*⁶ is the catalogue of an exhibition held in 2006-07 organized by the Freer and Sackler galleries of the Smithsonian Museum and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Four scholarly essays precede the catalogue itself. “Bible and Book” by Harry T. Gamble traverses in condensed form much the same territory as his monograph referred to above; “The Christian Orient” by Monica J. Blanchard surveys the regions in which the biblical manuscripts were produced; “The Book as Icon” by Herbert J. Kessler discusses the illustration and decoration of the scriptural texts; and “Spreading the Word” by Michelle P. Brown, the general editor and curator of the exhibition, who has written a wide-ranging study of how texts were collected, transmitted, and formed into a canon. All of these essays are both informative and readable, befitting a work intended for non-specialists. The star of this publication, however, is the catalogue itself, a 140-page section of bright, sharp color photographs of biblical manuscripts, from earliest fragments to examples from major codices, some elaborately decorated. Not only does this catalogue facilitate a comparison of biblical manuscripts, from the earliest centuries to later, but due to the quality of its plates it could also serve in a display or exhibit. A detailed reference index with description, location, and bibliographic references for all the plates adds considerable value to this fine production.

The Great Bible Codices

During his lifetime Bruce Metzger was considered the dean of American specialists on the manuscripts and textual history of the Bible. His *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Greek Palaeography*,⁷ published in 1981,

³ Larry W. Hurtado and Chris Keith, “Writing and Book Production in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to 600*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴ Peter R. Ackroyd et al., *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963-70).

⁵ Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁶ Michelle Brown, ed. *In the Beginning: Bibles before the Year 1000* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2006).

⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Greek Palaeography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

presents, in part one, a condensation of years of study and research concerning Greek writing and manuscripts generally and, in part two, page-length capsule summaries, with photographic plates, of individual manuscript witnesses to the text of the Bible. Part two constitutes its reason for inclusion here as Metzger's chosen examples often disclose interesting anomalies or editorial insertions that serve as reminders that these manuscripts were created by actual people. For example, included in his description of Codex Vaticanus, Metzger calls attention to an "indignant" insertion by a later scribe restoring the incorrect original reading that had been corrected by a previous scribe. The exasperated scribe writes, "Fool and knave, can't you leave the old reading alone, and not alter it!"⁸ The plate on the facing page shows the crabby note in situ next to the text of Hebrews 1:3. Similar instances of erasures or insertions and other unique features are mentioned in Metzger's descriptions of additional landmark codices: Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Washingtonianus, Bezae, etc., reinforcing their human dimension and furthermore enabling a teacher or librarian to present in some depth these important biblical witnesses without the need to do hours of research.

Using the enhanced presentation capabilities of digital technology, an excellent source for a close examination of one of these pre-eminent Bible codices is the Codex Sinaiticus Project's website, "Codex Sinaiticus: Experience the World's Oldest Bible" (<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>).⁹ A collaboration of the four international institutions where portions of the codex reside, the British Library, the National Library of Russia, St. Catherine's Monastery, and Leipzig University Library, the website is an unprecedented opportunity to examine every aspect of the codex to the smallest detail. The website is a marvel of technical virtuosity. Beginning from a full-page view it is possible to zoom in to see only a handful of lines of text. If desired, a transcription and transliteration of the text can also be invoked in separate panes. The codex can be viewed in either "standard" or "raking" light. The latter allows a topographical view of the vellum leaves, adding a touch of 3-D virtual reality. The site also provides a good deal of factual details about the codex – its history, how it was made, etc. – in summary fashion, but the main event here is the opportunity to display the codex to a group on a "wide screen in living color."

For those who can't get enough of Codex Sinaiticus, and there may indeed be some given the twists and turns of its fascinating history, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of the World's Oldest Bible* by D.C. Parker¹⁰ covers the whole of its fifteen-hundred-year career as one of the two earliest, most important biblical manuscripts. Parker writes for the educated layperson. His early chapters cover much of the same terrain as other entries in this essay, e.g., "The Christian Book in the Age of Constantine," "Making a Bible in the Year 350," and so on. The later chapters, however, hone in on the suspense of Sinaiticus including its discovery in a basket of scraps at Saint Catherine's Monastery, its removal from the monastery under less than clear circumstances (was it a loan or a gift?), and its later negotiated sale by the Soviet government to Great Britain for needed cash. The book stems from the Codex Sinaiticus Project mentioned above, and the concluding chapter describes that effort.

Medieval Bibles

In the West the Latin Vulgate translation of Saint Jerome became the text of the Bible in the Middle Ages. J.N.D. Kelly's *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*¹¹ is a lively re-telling of the colorful life of this scholar saint. In particular, Kelly's account of Jerome's translation, first of the Gospels when he lived in Rome (chapter 9) and later the Old Testament in Palestine (chapter 15), provides fascinating insight into Jerome's growing convictions about the process of translation and the surprising length of time (three to four centuries!) before his translation became normative.

The classic details contained in manuscripts — inhabited initials, decorated borders, etc. — often hold a high degree of recognition and interest for those with even the most casual acquaintance with them. The "Digital Scriptorium" (<http://vm136.lib.berkeley.edu/BANC/digitalscriptorium/>)¹² website offers an opportunity to view a wide range of manuscript pages on a greatly enlarged scale for an enhanced appreciation of their craft and artistry. The Digital Scriptorium will

⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁹ The Codex Sinaiticus Project, "Codex Sinaiticus: Experience the Oldest Bible," <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>.

¹⁰ David C. Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of the World's Oldest Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010).

¹¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

¹² "Digital Scriptorium," <http://vm136.lib.berkeley.edu/BANC/digitalscriptorium/>.

soon be joined by the Reading Room portion of vHMML, the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library's virtual site (<http://www.vhmml.org/>),¹³ constituting a repository for viewing thousands of *complete* manuscripts. Currently the site provides resources for studying manuscripts including annotated pages, a lexicon of terms, and bibliographic references.

Two variants of medieval bibles are the *Bible Moralisées* and the *Biblia Pauperum*. Both receive extensive description with illustrations in *The Making of the Bibles Moralisées* by John Lowden¹⁴ and *Biblia Pauperum: A Facsimile and Edition* by Avril Henry.¹⁵ The complexity of how text has been combined with image in these late-medieval “bibles” may lead one to forgo their detailed history and interpretation and rely on Lowden and Henry primarily for visualization purposes, supplementing with Christopher de Hamel's more concise description in *The Book*. Nevertheless, both are further examples of how Bible stories and themes were elaborately embellished with textual and artistic commentary during this era and how, particularly with respect to the *Biblia Pauperum* in its later manifestation as a blockbook, the transition to a printed Bible had begun.

An Introduction to the Medieval Bible, by Frans van Liere,¹⁶ provides an in-depth look at this thousand-year era of Bible history including the tradition of adding commentary to the text and its use in worship and preaching. Pertinent to this essay, its second chapter, “The Bible as Book,” is a helpful summary in thirty pages of the physical aspects of its composition and appearance.

The Saint John's Bible is an anachronism. Completed only in 2012, it is the first Bible in more than five hundred years made entirely by hand. As such, its values in conception, design, and production go directly back to the medieval era. Thus, Christopher Calderhead's *Illuminating the Word: The Making of the Saint John's Bible*¹⁷ is an excellent source for understanding how an undertaking as large and complex as a medieval Bible was accomplished. In addition to discussing the practical concerns of making a manuscript, e.g., the quality of the vellum writing surface, the strength and suppleness of the quill pens, etc., Calderhead raises some interesting metaphysical points as well — book as commodity vs. book as treasure; decoration as illustration vs. spiritual meditation on a text — that help us sense the much different world of medieval devotion. A related DVD, *The Illuminator: Bible for the 21st Century*,¹⁸ reviews the decision by the Saint John's Abbey and University to begin this project and profiles Donald Jackson, its artistic director. It contains a down to basics scene of Mr. Jackson making a quill pen that would be an informative but also entertaining excerpt to show to a group.

The First Printed Bibles

In *The Book* Christopher de Hamel devotes an entire chapter to the Gutenberg Bible to give it the recognition it deserves and to satisfy the high degree of curiosity that many have about the creation of this cultural icon. “Gutenberg Digital” (<http://www.gutenbergdigital.de/gudi/start.htm>),¹⁹ presents the opportunity to view online one of the few complete copies of this monumental achievement. The site also contains basic information concerning how Gutenberg's Bible was printed on a hand press. Once again, however, the chief benefit of this site is the capability of examining the individual pages in high resolution, to marvel at how the type mimics manuscript hand lettering and to enjoy the elaborate detail of the page decorations.

Supplementing this representation of the first Bible printed with moveable type is a slender book that focuses on the robust Bible printing industry that grew up in Venice not long after Gutenberg. *Let Your Light Shine: Bible Printing in*

¹³ Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, “vHMML: Resources for Manuscript Studies,” The Library, <http://www.vhmml.org/>.

¹⁴ John Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles Moralisées* (University Park.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Avril Henry, *Biblia Pauperum: A Facsimile and Edition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹⁶ Franciscus A. van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Christopher Calderhead, *Illuminating the Word: The Making of the Saint John's Bible*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

¹⁸ “The Illuminator: Bible for the 21st Century,” ([Collegeville, MN]: Hill Museum & Manuscript Library at Saint John's University, 2005), DVD.

¹⁹ “Gutenberg Digital,” UNESCO: Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission e.V., <http://www.gutenbergdigital.de/gudi/start.htm>.

Venice During the High Renaissance by Liana Lupaş²⁰ is the product of an exhibit of fifteenth-century Venetian bibles at the Museum of Biblical Art in New York. The exhibit and book set the process of printing bibles in the context of the Renaissance era's renewed interest in antiquity and describes how, through the assiduous efforts of Venetian scholar printers, bibles and other Greek and Roman writings were produced in editions that facilitated their study — running titles, chapter numbers, and cross-references, among others.

An interactive website that graphically displays the progress of the new industry of printing is “The Atlas of Early Printing” (<http://atlas.lib.uiowa.edu/>),²¹ created and hosted by the University of Iowa Libraries. In a classroom setting it can visually demonstrate in an intriguing way the rapid advance of printing across continental Europe and England from Gutenberg to 1500. An overlay shows relative output for each location, making it easy to identify the cities that became major centers of printing (Venice quickly became such). Other overlays include trade routes, fairs, conflicts, paper mills, and universities. Additional information beyond the map portion of the site includes a history of the site itself, overviews of printing and book production in the fifteenth century, a bibliography of sources, and links to related websites.

Reformation Bibles

The translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of Europe was one of the great achievements of the Reformation. *The Bible of the Reformation, the Reformation of the Bible*²² is the catalog of an exhibit of Reformation-era bibles curated by Valerie Hotchkiss, David Price, and Jaroslav Pelikan, who has also written four accompanying interpretive essays. “Bibles for the People,” the third essay, deals most directly with issues of translation faced by Luther, Tyndale, and others as they sought to render the Bible in the language of their people. Facsimile illustrations and insightful descriptions by Hotchkiss and Price of these ground-breaking translations comprise the catalog portion. Taken together the essays, descriptions, and illustrations provide a stimulating resource for explaining the major turn brought about by the Reformation in how the Bible was produced and packaged to meet its new audiences.

To Martin Luther belongs one of the most storied instances of early bible translation and adaptation. The circumstances of his 1522 translation of the New Testament and 1534 publication of the whole Bible in German are told and illustrated by Stephan Füssel in *The Book of Books, the Luther Bible of 1534: A Cultural-Historical Introduction*.²³ Füssel pays particular attention to the process Luther went through in translating from the Greek, providing examples of his “innovative, theologically bold and vivid language.” *The Book of Books* is intended to accompany a brightly hand-colored facsimile of the 1534 complete Bible. Libraries also owning this reprint edition have a fine piece for display that will show the growing importance of woodcut illustrations as interpretive devices in their own right. Füssel also includes a brief section on the importance of pamphlets in the ramped-up war of words and images, of which the Bible was a part.

An innovative source for presenting the woodcuts that accompanied and increasingly defined bibles in the Reformation period comes from within the theological library community. The “Digital Image Archive” (<http://pitts.emory.edu/dia/woodcuts.htm>) of the Pitts Theology Library, Emory University,²⁴ contains “more than 48,000 images of biblical illustrations, portraits of religious leaders, printers’ devices, engravings of church buildings, and other theological topics” digitized primarily from books in the library’s Kessler Reformation Collection. To view, for example, the inflammatory images created by Lucas Cranach for Luther’s 1522 translation mentioned above, a keyword search for Cranach and a scroll through the results to “1522Bibl” will quickly display a list of illustrations from that landmark Bible. Likewise, this site would also facilitate taking stock of the charm and imagination these Reformation printers displayed in the trademarks they devised to “brand” their publications.

²⁰ Liana Lupaş, *Let Your Light Shine: Bible Printing in Venice During the High Renaissance*, Rare Bible Series, 3 (New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2011).

²¹ The University of Iowa Libraries, “The Atlas of Early Printing,” <http://atlas.lib.uiowa.edu/>.

²² Jaroslav Pelikan, Valerie R. Hotchkiss, and David Price, *The Reformation of the Bible, the Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

²³ Stephan Füssel, *The Book of Books: The Luther Bible of 1534: A Cultural-Historical Introduction* (Köln: Taschen, 2003).

²⁴ Pitts Theology Library, “Digital Image Archive,” <http://pitts.emory.edu/dia/woodcuts.htm>.

English Bibles

David Daniell is the reigning expert on the Bible in English and its impact on English church and culture. His great work, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*,²⁵ in addition to its grand narrative sweep from Lindisfarne to the twentieth century, is, in particular, a rich source for understanding the point at which the Bible took its definitive form in the English language and consciousness. That point was William Tyndale. Daniell's chapter on Tyndale is a masterful account of the genius of his rendering the N.T. *koine* Greek into a bold English that, much as with Luther, captured how the language really worked. His account of the necessary secrecy surrounding the printing and distribution of Tyndale's 1526 N.T., along with the chilling details of his betrayal, imprisonment, and execution, adds the tragic element that Tyndale's work came at the cost of his life.

While Daniell surveys the entire history of the English Bible, a high point remains the publication in 1611 of the King James or Authorized Version. The flurry of recent books commemorating its 400th anniversary is an indication of its pervasive and lasting influence. One of these is *Manifold Greatness: The Making of the King James Bible*, edited by Helen Moore and Julian Reid.²⁶ Of the eight essays by a variety of British and American scholars, four deal directly with the politically motivated decision to produce a fresh translation (one that, in actuality, relied heavily on Tyndale) and how committees of translators were assigned to the task, a method continued for most subsequent translation projects. *Manifold Greatness* represents a collaboration between the Bodleian and Folger Shakespeare libraries. Both hold original KJB treasures in their collections, many of which have been attractively reproduced in clear, enlarged photographs for this volume.

Family Bibles

This final section highlights two books that describe the phenomenon of family Bibles dominant in bible publishing, if not so in total numbers then certainly in size and grandeur, from the mid-1800s through ca. 1920. Paul Gutjahr's *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*²⁷ tells the story of the emergence of bible production and with it the flourishing of the family Bible in the context of the religious, cultural, domestic, and business environments that combined to define everyday life for the majority of Americans in the nineteenth century. Chapter 2, "Packaging," discusses the process whereby the standard King James text was incrementally enlarged by supplementary reference material (concordance, dictionary, illustrations, maps, etc.) together with sections for personal family history and photographs. All this, together with increasingly ornate, sculpted covers, created, in Gutjahr's words, truly a "megabible." This exceptional moment in bible publishing has been over for more than a century, yet when these Bibles re-emerge out of attics or closets they remain a source of both wonder (and sometimes puzzlement) for individuals and families today.

The Book of Life: Family Bibles in America is another title by Liana Lupaş.²⁸ In her role as Curator of the Rare Bible Collection of the American Bible Society she has authored several titles in the Rare Bible Series, a project to publish catalogs of exhibitions mounted by the affiliated Museum of Biblical Art. The aim of the exhibits, and correspondingly these volumes, is to delight and instruct those with an interest in the Bible about its rich history as a physical object and how it both influenced and was influenced by the material culture of its surroundings. In a clear, straightforward manner, and with exceptionally well done, full-page illustrations, *The Book of Life* tells the unique life story of the Family Bible. In this short volume we learn some things about the Bible's reception history in America, American culture, and aspects of Bible printing and publishing. Its worthy objective is matched by its excellent execution.

²⁵ David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

²⁶ Helen Moore and Julian Reid, *Manifold Greatness: The Making of the King James Bible* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2011).

There is also an accompanying website ([http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Manifold_Greatness: The Creation and Afterlife of the King James Bible](http://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Manifold_Greatness:_The_Creation_and_Afterlife_of_the_King_James_Bible)) that contains an abundance of supplementary information including audio and video commentary by members of the curatorial committee and other scholars of this period.

²⁷ Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Liana Lupaş, *The Book of Life: Family Bibles in America*, Rare Bible Series, 4 (New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2011).

The works discussed in this essay tell the story of the changing ways the Bible has been produced and adapted for the needs of readers over the span of two millennia. These resources have been selected as being particularly well suited to telling this story for a general audience. There are, of course, many more publications pointed to within these titles that students and others who wish to pursue this topic will find helpful for more advanced study and research.