



***Before the Bible
Coming to Terms with the Plurality
of the Biblical Tradition***

Are these fragments real? Research continues

In 2002, dozens of previously unknown “Dead Sea Scroll” fragments began appearing with antiquity dealers. Universities, museums, and private collectors acquired many of these “new” fragments. As scholars began to study them, some noted puzzling features and labelled them as forgeries.

MOTB published the initial research on its scroll fragments in 2016, but scholarly opinions of their authenticity remain divided. Scientific analysis of the ink and handwriting on these pieces continues.

❖ What would lead someone to forge/collect
'biblical' manuscripts?

1. The Bible(s) in Antiquity

Samaritan
Pentateuch

(Proto-)Masoretic
Text

Septuagint
(LXX)

Mark 4:10–12 (= MT)

¹⁰ When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ And he said to them, ‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; ¹² in order that

“they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.””

Matthew 13–15 (= LXX)

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and asked him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ ¹¹ He answered, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³ The reason I speak to them in parables is that “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.” ¹⁴ With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

“You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.””

Origen's Hexapla

(ca. 230–ca. 245)

1. Hebrew
2. Transliterated Hebrew
3. Aquila
4. Symmachus
5. Septuagint, annotated
6. Theodotion

➤ Eusebius,
Ecclesiastical History,
6:16



Are we when we notice such things immediately to reject as spurious the copies in use in the Churches, and to tell the fellowship that they should put away the sacred books current among them and should cajole the Jews into giving us copies which will be untampered with and free from forgery? Are we to suppose that providence which has provided for the edification of all the churches of Christ through the medium of the holy scriptures has not taken proper care of the needs of those for whom Christ died?

... I make it my endeavour not to be ignorant of their various readings, lest in my controversies with the Jews I should quote to them what is not found in their copies, and that I should make some use of what is found there, even though it should not be in our scriptures'

(Origen to Africanus, 4, 5)

Jerome's Vulgate (A.D. 390–405)

You urge me to revise the old Latin version, and, as it were, to sit in judgment on the copies of the Scriptures which are now scattered throughout the whole world; and, inasmuch as they differ from one another, you would have me decide which of them agree with the Greek original ...

... For if we are to pin our faith to the Latin texts, it is for our opponents to tell us which; for there are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies. If, on the other hand, we are to glean the truth from a comparison of many, why not go back to the original Greek and correct the mistakes introduced by inaccurate translators, and the blundering alterations of confident but ignorant critics, and, further, all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake?

(Addressed to Pope Damasus, A.D. 383)



טוב ורע
יט ט

καλὸν καὶ πονηρὸν

bonum et malum

3. In this letter I have further to say, that I have since heard that you have translated Job out of the original Hebrew, although in your own translation of the same prophet from the Greek tongue we had already a version of that book. In that earlier version you marked with asterisks the words found in the Hebrew but missing in the Greek, and with obelisks the words found in the Greek but missing in the Hebrew; and this was done with such astonishing exactness, that in some places we have every word distinguished by a separate asterisk, as a sign that these words are in the Hebrew, but not in the Greek. Now, however, in this more recent version from the Hebrew, there is not the same scrupulous fidelity as to the words; and it perplexes any thoughtful reader to understand either what was the reason for marking the asterisks in the former version with so much care that they indicate the absence from the Greek version of even the smallest grammatical particles which have not been rendered from the Hebrew, or what is the reason for so much less care having been taken in this recent version from the Hebrew to secure that these same particles be found in their own places ...

4. For my part, I would much rather that you would furnish us with a translation of the Greek version of the canonical Scriptures known as the work of the Seventy translators. For if your translation begins to be more generally read in many churches, it will be a grievous thing that, in the reading of Scripture, differences must arise between the Latin Churches and the Greek Churches, especially seeing that the discrepancy is easily condemned in a Latin version by the production of the original in Greek, which is a language very widely known; whereas, if any one has been disturbed by the occurrence of something to which he was not accustomed in the translation taken from the Hebrew, and alleges that the new translation is wrong, it will be found difficult, if not impossible, to get at the Hebrew documents by which the version to which exception is taken may be defended. And when they are obtained, who will submit to have so many Latin and Greek authorities pronounced to be in the wrong? Besides all this, Jews, if consulted as to the meaning of the Hebrew text, may give a different opinion from yours: in which case it will seem as if your presence were indispensable, as being the only one who could refute their view; and it would be a miracle if one could be found capable of acting as arbiter between you and them.

(Augustine, *Letters*, 70.3–4)

2. The Enlightenment and the Reformation

Erasmus, *Novum Instrumentum/Testamentum omne* (1516)

I perceived that that teaching which is our salvation was to be had in a much purer and more lively form if sought at the fountain-head and drawn from the actual sources than from pools and runnels. And so I have revised the whole New Testament (as they call it) against the standard of the Greek original ... I have added annotations of my own, in order in the first place to show the reader what changes I have made, and why; second, to disentangle and explain anything that may be complicated, ambiguous, or obscure.

(Dedication to Pope Leo X , letter 384)

➤ Cf. Complutensian Polyglot (1514)





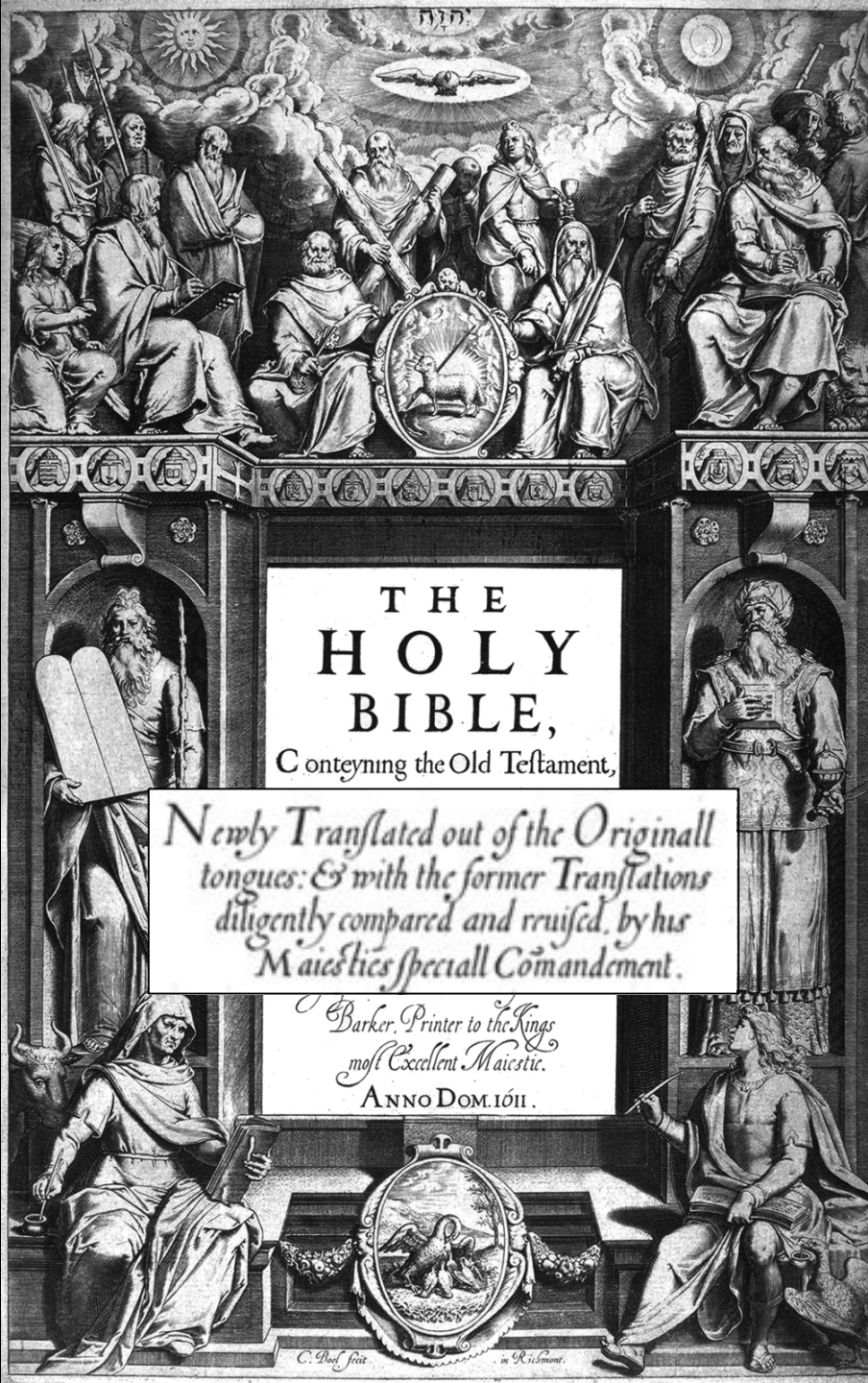


fol. 486
3424/151
f. Baumgarten
1535
f. Baumgarten

*Diese Bibel ist von dem so hohen weislichen,
sehr edeligen, der unsern Rath nicht wenig
von Nutzen gewesen, und durch den
Herrn Rath, so sich sehr bemühet, diese
Herrn Rathen ff. 47. 48
Conf. S. f. Baumgarten. Diese in der
Bibliothek der Universität zu
Wittenberg, im Jahr 1535
zu drucken.*

1535

Biblia/ das ist/ die
ganz Heilige Sch-
riffte Deutsch.
Mart. Luth.
Wittenberg.
Begnadet mit Kür-
fürstlicher zu Sachsen
freibeit.
Bedruckt durch Hans Lufft.
M. D. XXXIII.



THE
HOLY
BIBLE,
Conteyning the Old Testament,

*Newly Translated out of the Originall
tongues: & with the former Translations
diligently compared and reuised, by his
Maiesties speciall Comandement.*

*Barker, Printer to the Kings
most Excellent Maiestie.*
ANNO DOM. 1611.

3. The Bible in (post)Modernity

19th Century Historical Criticism: The search for origins

How Many Animals on the Ark?

6:19–20 “And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring **two of every kind** into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. (cf. 7:15)

7:2–3 “Take with you **seven pairs of all clean animals**, the male and its mate; **and a pair of the animals that are not clean**, the male and its mate; ³**and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female**, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth.”

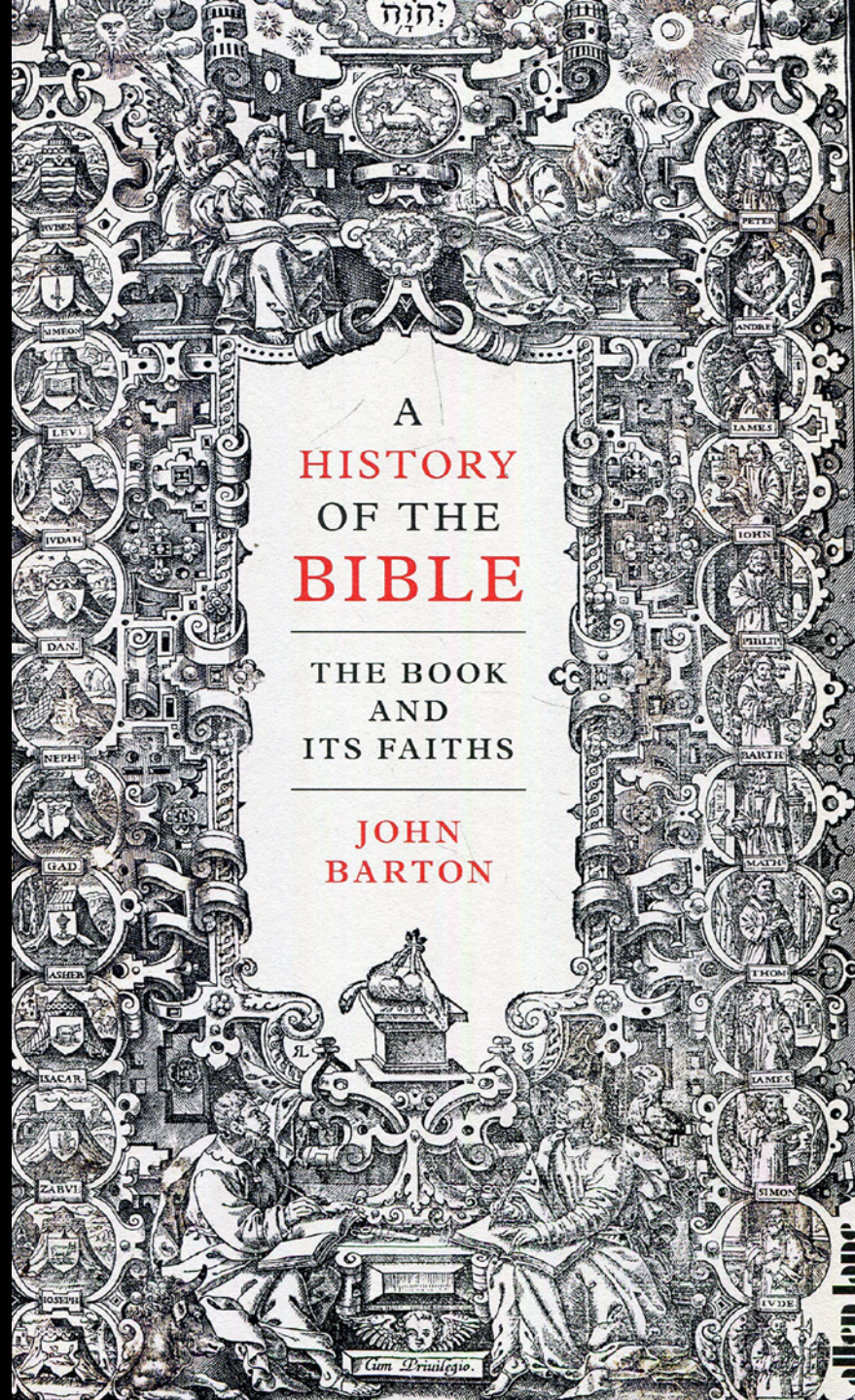


THE BIBLE
in Its Traditions

Conclusions

- Throughout its history, the Bible has been characterised by the tension between unity and diversity
- The Bible is both an object and an idea
- There are no easy answers: when we consider interpretation, we need also to consider the processes and texts that lie behind that interpretation
- Every translation is also an interpretation, with its own history and context

Further reading:



A
HISTORY
OF THE
BIBLE

THE BOOK
AND
ITS FAITHS

JOHN
BARTON

Cambridge University Press

Allen Lane