

## HUGH BROUGHTON'S *CENSURE* TO THE KING JAMES BIBLE

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*“The New edition crosseth me, I require it be burnt” is one of the blunt expressions the renowned Hebraist Hugh Broughton (1549-1612) used in his pamphlet A Censure of the late translation for our Churches (1611) to criticize the new print first edition of the King James Bible (1611). Studies exploring the invaluable impact of the Authorized Version upon the English language and literatures in English logically proliferate in the year of the 400th anniversary of the KJB. With a view to contributing to the celebration, this paper schematically goes through the history of the translations of the Bible into English before focusing on the production of the KJB and its early reception by unimpressed scholars such as the choleric and controversial Hugh Broughton. As the following pages will show, the beginnings of the KJB were no bed of roses, a rather surprising revelation given the unanimous acclamation the book has received ever since the second half of the seventeenth century.*

In the year of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first appearance in print of the King James Bible, it is inevitable to repeatedly read laudatory speeches justly praising the language and style of the Authorized Version commanded by King James I, and remarking the book's overwhelming influence in subsequent centuries. However, this deserved and understandable praise often obscures the fact that the King James Bible was not the immediate success one would expect it to have been, given its posterior impact upon English language and letters. D. Norton, author of the insightful study *A History of the Bible as Literature*, has in this respect remarked that “the King James Bible was generally scorned or ignored as English writing for a century and a half after its publication” (Norton 1993:xiii), and that it did not even manage to replace the Geneva Bible until mid-seventeenth century. Similarly, R. Carroll and S. Prickett note that the KJB's “present reputation and status was not immediate or even automatic – indeed, for a long time it was highly unpopular in some quarters”; “[n]or is it the Bible of Spenser, Shakespeare, or Donne” (Carroll and Prickett 1998:xxv). More recently N.H. Hamlin and W. Jones have affirmed that the “new Bible was not a runaway

success” and that “ironically, the KJB translators themselves quote from the Geneva, rather than their own translation, in the KJB preface” (Hamlin and Jones 2010:8). One of the most authoritative voices against the Authorized Version was Hugh Broughton’s (1549-1612), an eminent English Hebrew scholar that had not been called to form part of the committee of translators responsible for the new version – most likely due to his well-known (and much feared) irascible character. After a quick overview of previous translations of the Bible into English and of the origins and early history of the KJB, the pages that follow will give an account of Broughton’s criticism of the new official version of the Bible as explained in his eight page-long pamphlet *A Censure of the late translation for our Churches: sent vnto a Right Worshipfull knight, Attendant vpon the King* (1611).

The usual accounts of the history of the translations of the Bible into English typically begin with that of the Oxford professor John Wyclif, who between 1382 and 1384, and along with a cadre of Bible teachers under his direction, rendered into English (and into manuscript form) the Latin Vulgate. Thus, it is too frequently overlooked that before Wyclif there already existed Anglo-Saxon versions of the Gospels and of the Psalters.<sup>1</sup> The first printed English translation of the Bible appeared in 1526 and was the work of William Tyndale, who, following Martin Luther’s German translation of the New Testament in 1522, decided to render the New Testament into English from the Greek text, taking Luther’s German version and the Vulgate in Latin as guides for his own translation. Tyndale’s enterprise to render the Old Testament into English was interrupted shortly after he finished the Pentateuch, as he was then caught, accused of heresy, and burned at the stake in 1536. Both Tyndale’s New Testament and Pentateuch were banned by King Henry VIII and therefore only printed in the continent.

Shortly after Tyndale’s death, King Henry VIII broke with Rome, and then, the idea of having a translation of the Bible in the vernacular seemed no longer abhorrent. In this situation, the English churchman Miles Coverdale created his own edition by blending his own work with the Vulgate, Luther’s German version, and of course, Tyndale’s work, and as he did not know Hebrew or Greek, he heavily relied upon all these sources. Coverdale’s Bible, entitled *Biblia: The Bible, that is, the holy Scripture of the Olde and New Testament, faithfully and truly translated out of the Douche and Latyn into English*, was printed in 1535 at Zurich and contained fewer notes. In England, it was allowed to be printed and sold, although it did not become the official Bible for use in English churches.

Coverdale’s work was followed in 1537 by another version of the Bible signed by a Thomas Matthew, in reality the pseudonym of the associate of Tyndale John Rogers. Tyndale in fact had continued translating the Bible while in prison, and managed to give the manuscript to Rogers before dying. Rogers, probably making use of Coverdale’s version, completed what remained to be

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1. For more on pre-Wycliffite versions of the Bible, see Pope 1952:3-88.

translated of the Old Testament, and, to be on the safe side, published it under a false name. Archbishop Cranmer, deeming it a better translation than Coverdale's, allowed Matthew's Bible to circulate in England. Two years later, in 1539, there appeared a version that came to be known as "Cranmer's Bible" or the "Great Bible", due to its large size. In a second edition of the same published in 1540, a preface by Cranmer was included and at the foot of the title page it was declared that the Bible was appointed to the use of the churches, which makes it the first English Bible officially approved. The reason behind this new version was simply that Coverdale's Bible had not been translated from the Greek and Hebrew, and so, a revision seemed pertinent. Coverdale then revised the Old Testament taking Matthew's 1537 version (that is, Tyndale's) as one of its major guides. In 1539 Richard Taverner published his own version, which was essentially a revision of Matthew's Bible (1537).

The year 1560 saw the publication of the so-called Geneva Bible, an undertaking by English Puritans that had fled to Geneva on the accession to the throne of Mary Tudor, who died a year before its printing. In Geneva, these exiles became tremendously influenced by Calvinism. With deep knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, they strove for accurateness and provided many explanatory notes. The Geneva Bible soon became the most popular version, partly due to factors such as its handy size and its clearer type, which contrasted with the large size of the Great Bible and its painful-for-the-eye black letter. Because of the Calvinist overtones of the Geneva Bible, it seemed appropriate to commend a new version of the Bible in the vernacular; hence, the printing in 1568 of the Bishops' Bible. Leading this major enterprise was Matthew Parker, Elizabeth I's Archbishop of Canterbury, who in 1561 had circulated a proposal for a new version among the bishops. Although the Bishops' Bible was appointed as the version to be read in church services in England, it did not manage to eclipse the widespread use of the Geneva Bible in religious instruction and private reading. The 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible (the last edition to appear) became the real basis for the KJB, which eventually superseded the former. Between the publication of the Bishops' Bible and the KJB, the complete Catholic version of the Bible in English was published in the Continent: the New Testament was translated and published at Rheims in 1582, and the Old Testament, – and also translated at Rheims and even before the New Testament – was published in 1609-1610 at Douay.

Due to the generalized thought that the Geneva Bible was more accurate than the Bishops' Bible, which was the version authorized in church services, King James I was asked to commission a new official version, the KJB, eventually published in 1611. Miles Smith, author of the preface to the KJB, discusses in the following terms the reasons behind the new translation enterprise:

And what can the King command to be done, that will bring him more true honour than this? And wherein could they that have been set a work approve their duty to the King, yea, their obedience to God, and love to his Saints, more, than by yielding their service, and all that is within them, for the furnishing of the work? But besides all this, they were the principal motives of it, and therefore ought least

to quarrel it. For the very historical truth is, that upon the importunate petitions of the Puritanes at his Majesty's coming to this crown, the conference at *Hampton-court* having been appointed for hearing their complaints, when by force of reason they were put from all other grounds, they had recourse at the last to this shift, that they could not with good conscience subscribe to the communion book, since it maintained the Bible as it was there translated, which was, as they said, a most corrupted translation. And although this was judged to be but a very poor and empty shift, yet even hereupon did his Majesty begin to bethink himself of the good that might ensue by a new translation, and presently after gave order for this translation which is now presented unto thee. Thus much to satisfy our scrupulous brethren. (Smith 1998:lxii)<sup>2</sup>

In other words, Miles Smith points out as the main two reasons for commissioning a new translation of the Bible a public demonstration of King James's virtuous religious zeal, as well as "petitions of the Puritanes" wishing a new authorized version that replaced the previous and "most corrupted" one. Indeed, this new Protestant version of the Bible was the result of a tangle of both religious and political factors, as Miles Smith evinces at the beginning of the preface when stating the following:

It doth certainly belong unto kings, yea, it doth specially belong unto them, to have care of religion, yea, to know it aright, yea, to profess it zealously, yea, to promote it to the uttermost of the power. This is their glory before all nations which mean well, and this will bring unto them a far most excellent weight of glory in the day of the Lord Jesus. (Smith 1998:lv)

The project to produce the new Authorized Version of the Bible was undertaken by a team of revisers organized in three clusters, each of which was then subdivided into two companies: there was one group at Westminster (supervised by Lancelot Andrewes and Barlow, subsequent bishop of Lincoln), one at Oxford (led by Dr. Liveley and Dr. Bois), and a final one at Cambridge (headed by Harding and Miles Smith, author of the Preface). The group at Westminster was assigned from the Genesis to II Kings, plus from Romans to Jude; the one at Cambridge, from I Chronicles to Ecclesiastes, plus the Apocrypha;<sup>3</sup> and the one at Oxford, from Isaiah to Malachi, and, additionally, the Gospels, Acts, and Apocalypse. In total, around fifty translators got involved in the project, all of them under the ultimate supervision of Lancelot Andrewes, Dean of Westminster and chaplain to the Chapel Royal. The idea behind this distribution was that every company sent their work to the other two to debate

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2. The Hampton Court conference mentioned in the text was held on 14, 16, 18 January 1604, and the puritan Rainolds, Broughton's old adversary, participated in it proposing that a new English translation of the Bible should be made.

3. As G. Campbell explains, "After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Bibles used for reading in churches contained the Apocrypha, as did some Bibles produced for private study, but in the nineteenth century the decision of the British and Foreign Bible Society to exclude the Apocrypha from their Bibles dealt a mortal blow to their inclusion, and thereafter the Apocrypha disappeared from Bibles on sale to the general public" (Campbell 2010:46).

over the most controversial points and, finally, reach a consensus on the translation that each of them put forward. In other words, the new Bible was to be a carefully designed collective piece. The work of the committees began around 1607 and in 1611 the KJB was in print, in black letter and measuring 16 inches by 10 inches, which made it larger than the Great Bible. Another peculiarity of the KJB version is that, unlike Tyndale's contemporary vernacular translations, "the language of the new translation was often deliberately archaic and Latinized", and as a result of "its careful distancing from the immediate present it was less liable to go quickly out of date" (Carroll and Prickett 1998:xxviii).

Supposedly, James I himself drew fourteen rules for the revisers that essentially indicate a willingness to follow closely the Bishops' Bible altering it as little as possible, thus sticking to tradition (in terms of proper names and chapter divisions, for example), and inserting no notes unless it was strictly necessary to explain problematic Hebrew or Greek terms. What is more, it was made explicit that Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's and the Geneva Bible could be used whenever they offered better renderings than the Bishops' Bible. Nonetheless, the popularity of the Geneva Bible remained very high although the KJB was the one read in churches, and indeed the Geneva Bible continued being printed and imported (chiefly from Amsterdam) until 1644.<sup>4</sup> Given all this, David Norton demystifies in the quotation below the idea that the KJB had an immediately successful and revered reception matching the general admiration that it enjoys in our days:

The truth is probably this: for all the significance 1611 now has in the history of the English Bible, the publication of the KJB was not an event. Publication then was not the kind of occasion it is usually made into now. Moreover, there was no mechanism for the critical reception of new work. [...] But there are more particular reasons why the publication of the KJB, if an event at all, was not much of one. First, the KJB was left to make its way in competition with existing Bibles, especially the Geneva, which continued to be highly popular. Second, and perhaps more important, most people were not concerned with the precise verbal form of their Bible: one translation was as good as another. This, of course, presents a paradox: it appears to go against the abundance of evidence that the KJB translators were pressured to be, and indeed tried to be, as literally accurate as reasonably possible. [...] Lastly, the KJB did not appear initially in a popular

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4. As H. Hannibal and N.W. Jones explain: "Although the monopoly [the royal monopoly to print the English Bible] broke down along with the monarchy itself in the 1640s, English (mainly London) printers continued to prefer the KJB to the Geneva, perhaps because so many editions of the Geneva continued to be printed across the channel. Although one might think that the Puritan Commonwealth would have been committed to the Bible most associated with English Puritans (the Geneva), even Oliver Cromwell now favored the KJB (...). Even before the end of the Commonwealth, no one was printing anything but the KJB, and its domination of the English Bible market was assured for the next 250 years" (Hamlin and Jones 2010:8). Finally, S. L. Greenslade remarks that, "Strictly speaking, the Authorized Version was never authorized, nor were parish churches ordered to procure it. It replaced the Bishops' Bible in public use because after 1611 no other folio Bible was printed" (Greenslade 1963:168).

form but as a large and expensive folio. This too muted the impact of its publication.

A consequence of this lack of reception for the KJB is that the year 1611 is hardly a truer historical dividing-point than, say, the turn of a century. The same Bibles continued to be read. The Roman Catholic Bible and attitude to Bible translation continued to be a matter of controversy. The Psalms and other poetic parts of the original Scriptures continued to rise in reputation, and they continued to be translated. Nobody was interested in the merits of the new Bible as a piece of English writing. (Norton 1993:160)

The same year the KJB was published, one of the most prominent Hebrew scholars of his time, Hugh Broughton (1549-1612), complained of the mistakes of the translation in a pungent eight-page pamphlet entitled *A Censure of the late translation for our Churches: sent vnto a Right Worshipfull knight, Attendant vpon the King*. Broughton had been for some time a Cambridge fellow in Christ's College and, from 1589 onwards, spent many years of his life abroad, mainly in Germany and the Netherlands. Broughton did not figure in the long list of revisers of the KJB despite the fact that, years before, in *An Epistle to the Learned Nobilitie of England, Touching Translating the Bible* (1597) and in *An Advertisement of Corruption in our Handling of Religion to a Member of the Royal Court* (1604), he had argued in favour of a new version of the Bible in English due to the mistakes of the previous renderings.<sup>5</sup> What is more, Broughton himself had translated into English some Old Testament books: *Daniel* (1596) into Latin and English (1596), and *Ecclesiastes* (1605), *Lamentations* (1606), and the Book of Job (1610) into English. In addition to this, Broughton (unsuccessfully) wrote to King James I in 1609 asking him to fund his project of translating into Hebrew the New Testament with the final objective of converting the Jews to Christianity. In 1611 Broughton was sent a copy of the new Bible to Middelburg, where he was residing at the time. Broughton was stricken by the translation of the Authorized Version, and wrote a review to it where he proved categorical; the opening of his critical pamphlet in fact asserts the following:

The late Bible, Right Worshipful, was sent me to cēsure: which bred in me a sadnes that will greeve me while I breath. It is so ill done. Tell his Maiest. that I had rather be rent in pieces with wilde horses, then any such translation by my consent should bee vrged vpon poore Churches. (Broughton 1611:A1<sup>r</sup>)<sup>6</sup>

Immediately afterwards, Broughton begins enumerating and briefly discussing ten different mistakes he has identified in the new version. He takes them as a sample of the many more that ought to be corrected. The selected errors are not of a linguistic or stylistic nature, but rather have to do with the

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5. Campbell (2010:278-295) lists all the known translators of the 1611 Bible and accompanies names with brief biographical sketches.

6. The pamphlet is unnumbered; however, for convenience's sake, I take the first page as A1<sup>r</sup> and 'number' the rest as A2<sup>v-r</sup>, A3<sup>v-r</sup>, A4<sup>v-r</sup>, and A5<sup>v</sup>.

accuracy of the translation and faults in chronology. For instance, error three is explained as follows:

It denyeth David ever to have bene in the worlde, and so by a consequent Christ him selfe, Act. chap.13. vers.20. where they say: God gave them Iudges about the space of foure hundred & fiftie yeares. It is but foure hundred and foure score yeares from the Lambe to the Temple. Now David was not borne before Elies death, but ten yeares after. About 30. of the fourty yeres in the Wildernes, with about foure hundred and fiftie yeares, will make foure hundred and foure score yeres. So by our Bishops all the holie storie should bee a lye. (Broughton 1611:A2<sup>f</sup>)

Similarly, error four, also of a chronological nature, is explained in the following manner:

I warned how Baasa K. of Israell was a warriar against Asa, being ten yeres dead: and Ochozias was made two yeares elder then his Father, and twentie yeares elder then him selfe. (...) The K. can iudge" (Broughton 1611:A3<sup>v</sup>).

Error five is of a different nature, though. Consider, in this respect, the following extract:

Abraham bought no sepulcher in Sichem. And the sepulcher there was bought for sheep. Thrise the terme Keshita is vsed, and still in the Chaldie and Greeke for sheepe. The margent note for sheepe burneth the hart of the Translatours: who bade them put the error in the text, and right in the margent? (Broughton 1611:A3<sup>f</sup>)

To these errors Broughton is, without exception, merciless. Regarding one of them he affirms that "This stubburne error deserved all punishment" (Broughton 1611:A1<sup>f</sup>), and, on a different occasion, Broughton states: "The New edition crosseth me, I require it be burnt" (Broughton 1611:A2<sup>f</sup>). In contrast with the fallibility of the KJB's translators, Broughton praises his own knowledge, expertise and translation abilities:

And two and twentie yeares agoe admired by French in London, and by them to Zurick, how by Iewes I cleared the text: and by my enemies in London, as my friends wrote vpon the advertisement, to super-admirable report: that none before me did, nor would after match my heed. (Broughton 1611:A2<sup>f</sup>)

Shortly after this statement, Broughton again repeats his wisdom: "I will suffer no scholer in the world to crosse me in Ebrew and Greek, when I am sure I have the truth" (Broughton 1611:A4<sup>v</sup>). The fact that the KJB team of translators did not contact him must have felt insulting for Broughton; and in a way he must have taken it as an official underestimation of his knowledge and skills. Broughton's rage as a result of what he felt was a clear personal attack combines with his feeling that a bad translation of the Bible associated to the King's name

left the monarchy in an almost ridiculous position. In other words, a flawed rendering of the Scriptures would not only imply disrespect to God, but also to the King himself: “And what a prank is this: That translators sould so mocke with the King” (Broughton 1611:A2<sup>r</sup>). The fact that a group of supposed scholars working for the king not only disregard his worth as a Hebraist, but also dare submit a faulty translation of the Scriptures that becomes a nation’s official version makes Broughton interpret it as a cheeky insult to God, the King, and himself. The idea that God, King James I, and himself had been laughed at by a group of scholars that for Broughton were halfwits easily explains that a choleric man like him demanded the KJB to be immediately burned and replaced by a decent translation. Broughton closes his pamphlet with a somewhat reconciling epilogue that, after all, recognizes a positive quality of the KJB: the preservation of the general features of past translations to avoid confusion among readers:

I blame not this that they keepe the vsual style of former translations in the Church: that the people should not be emazed. For the learned the Geneva might be made exact: for which paynes whole 30 yeres I haue bene called vpon, and spent much time to my great losse by wicked hinderance. When you find the K. at leasure shew his M. this short advertisement. And if his Highnes bid me again as once by the Earle of Pembroke, the faultie places I will in a few sheetes translate what I blame most: that they may be sent to all Churches, that haue bought Bibles. So all may be well pacified. (Broughton 1611:A5<sup>v</sup>)

In this manner, Broughton shows his willingness to be of some use to the King and improve the errors of the translation for the benefit of readers across the country. Nevertheless, Broughton probably would not have been able to maintain his promise even if he had been asked by the King himself to amend the mistakes, for in November 1611, Broughton was already very ill and embarked for England knowing his end was near; he died in August 1612. In the end, as D. Norton states, “Much of Broughton’s work was ignored” (Norton 1993:143).<sup>7</sup>

One of the reasons why, despite his erudition, Broughton was not called for the project could have very well been his strong and highly irritable character, and the confrontations he had had with some of the coordinators of the teams of translators. For instance, he had argued with John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, upon biblical matters, and also with Thomas Bilson, bishop of Winchester, and Richard Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury; additionally, John Reynolds, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and Edward Lively, regius professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, attacked Broughton’s first book *A Conccent of Scripture* (1588) upon the matter of biblical chronology. His disputes with Lively continued throughout the years, and, unfortunately enough, Lively was appointed one of the three men in charge of finding appropriate translators for what would later become the KJB.

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7. D. Norton in fact dedicates some pages to Hugh Broughton’s ideas on translation and literary matters additionally drawing from other titles by him. See Norton’s “The excluded scholar: Hugh Broughton” (Norton 1993:139-144). For more on Hugh Broughton’s life, see his entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.



John Lightfoot (1602-1675), a man of extensive learning particularly devoted to Rabbinic and Talmudic literature,<sup>8</sup> collected Broughton's works and published them under the title of *The vvorks of the great Albionean divine, renown'd in many nations for rare skill in Salems & Athens tongues, and familiar acquaintance with all rabbinical learning* (1662). In a biographical note about Broughton that Lightfoot prefaces to this collection, he discusses Broughton's indignation towards his exclusion from the KJB project, and devotes some words to Broughton's strong character, as the ultimate cause of his marginalization:

He was of an indefatigable Studiousness, which swayed his temper a little towards austerity. And yet among his Friends he was of a very sweet, affable, and loving Carriage. Sharp, and severe, and exceeding bold against Errour, and Impiety, and would reprove it, whatsoever it cost him. He was once travailing here in *England*, and being in his Inn, a Royster, in the next room to him, was swearing most horridly, and at no measure; in goeth he boldly to him, and, *Who art thou, saith he, thou wretch, that daarest thus to profane the glorious Name of the great God?* and some other like words, which he set on with so great an aw, and boldness, that the Roarer became calm, and took his castigation, especially, when he understood who he was, in very good part.

He was free, and communicative to any, that desired to learn of him; but would withal be very angry with *Scholars*, if they did not readily understand him in his discourse, as thinking it a shame to them to be ignorant of such things. Among his Friends he would be very pleasant, especially at his Meals. (Lightfoot 1662:C2<sup>v</sup>)

Of course, Broughton was not the only outstanding scholar excluded from the KJB teams of translators, or the only objector to the new official translation of the Bible into English. For example, neither was the well-known Hebraist and Cambridge scholar Andrew Willett (1562-1621), Doctor of Divinity and Prebend and Rector of Ely, taken into account for the KJB translation. It seems that the fact that Willett worked for a time as tutor to Henry Prince of Wales and had preached on several occasions before King James court made no difference in this respect. Neither the publication of his *Emblematum Sacrorum Centuria* (1592), the first religious emblem book in England, nor of *Hexapla, or Six-fold Commentary upon Genesis* (1605), which insisted that the original and only language of humankind was Hebrew, were enough to convince the KJB translators-recruiters to count him in.

Also, Ambrose Ussher (1582-1629), the young brother of James Ussher, Bishop of Armagh and specialist in biblical chronology, translated by himself most of the Bible; unluckily enough, the KJB got published when his own work was very advanced. As a result, it was not taken into consideration at all, and the fact that his work remains in Trinity College Dublin in the form of a manuscript has made scholars think that it was never even sent to the King (Norton

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8. For more on Lightfoot, see Edwards (1837).

1993:215).<sup>9</sup> In his preface, Ussher indeed made some remarks on the KJB accusing it of being a hasty undertaking. Then, in 1645, the Hebraist John Lightfoot called for a revision of the KJB in a sermon in the House of Commons, explaining that there were some occasional flaws related to accuracy. Effectively, in 1657 the Parliament approved of a subcommittee that reported points to revise in the KJB, although the meetings eventually came to nothing and the revising project was not undertaken. Two years later, Robert Gell (1595-1665) wrote his long *Essay toward the Amendment of the Last English Translation of the Bible* (1659), where he also argued that the KJB should be improved: “though I think our last Translation good, [...] yet I doubt not but *Ours* may be made *much better* then it is” (Gell 1659:D1<sup>v</sup>). However, it would not be until 1885 that the English Revised Version, the first major revision of the KJB, appeared.

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9. G. Campbell discusses some of the interesting features of Ussher’s translation: “its language does provide a revealing contrast to the KJV: he uses contemporary personal pronouns (‘you’ instead of ‘ye’) and has a distinct preference for Anglo-Saxon words rather than Latin ones, so he uses ‘lust’ rather than ‘concupiscence’; on the other hand, he tries to follow Hebrew word order in the Old Testament, and so his prose is sometimes clunky” (Campbell 2010:124).

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