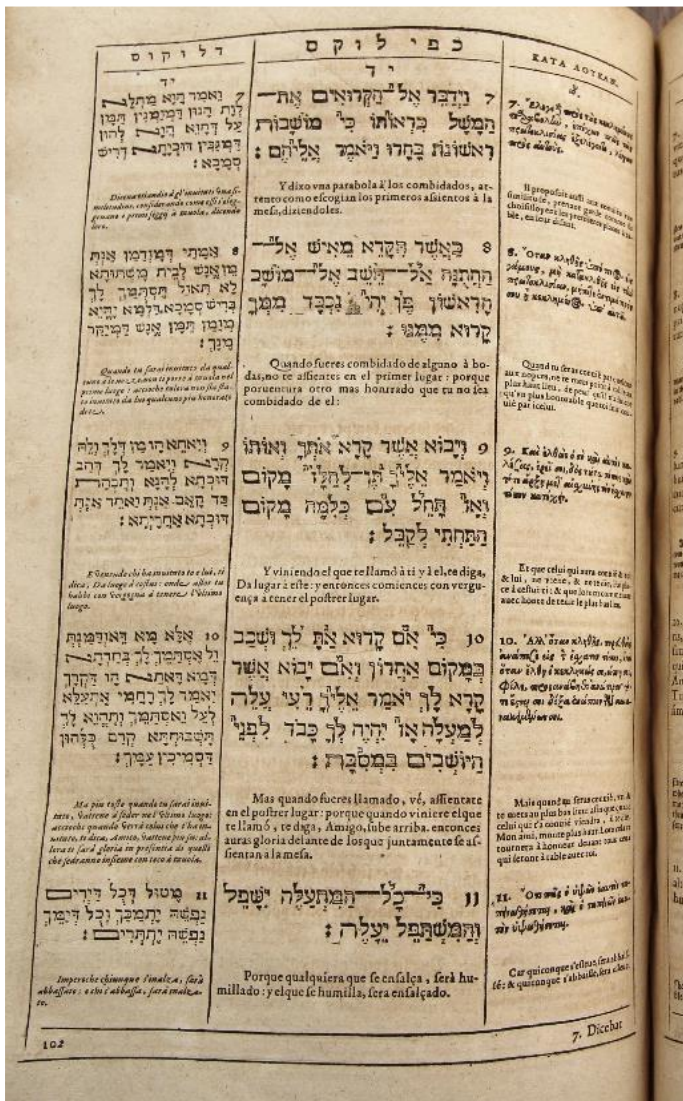


The Polyglot Bibles of Brian Walton (1657) and Elias Hutter (1599)

Polyglot Bibles have existed for much of Christian history, beginning perhaps with Origen's *Hexapla*. They contain the biblical text and various versions, depending on the editor, enabling the reader to compare a variety of translations in one volume. These editions enable the reader to note differences in translation, emphases of theology and have contributed to the standardisation of the biblical text.

The earliest printed polyglot Bible was produced at Complutense University under the supervision and financing of Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517). At this time, Spain was a centre of excellence for translation praxis and theory, a place where the thorny difficulties of translation were well understood. A particular concern was how to accurately translate religious texts. The polyglot was born out of this struggle: by viewing the text side-by-side in many different languages, it might be possible to grasp at meanings that had previously been corrupted or hidden.

Finally published in 1520, the enormous six-volume set contained both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament included parallel translations in Hebrew, the Latin Vulgate, the Greek Septuagint, and (in the Pentateuch) the Aramaic text with its own Latin translation. The New Testament contained parallel columns in Greek and Latin. The Complutense polyglot sparked a trend for the production of polyglot Bibles throughout the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.



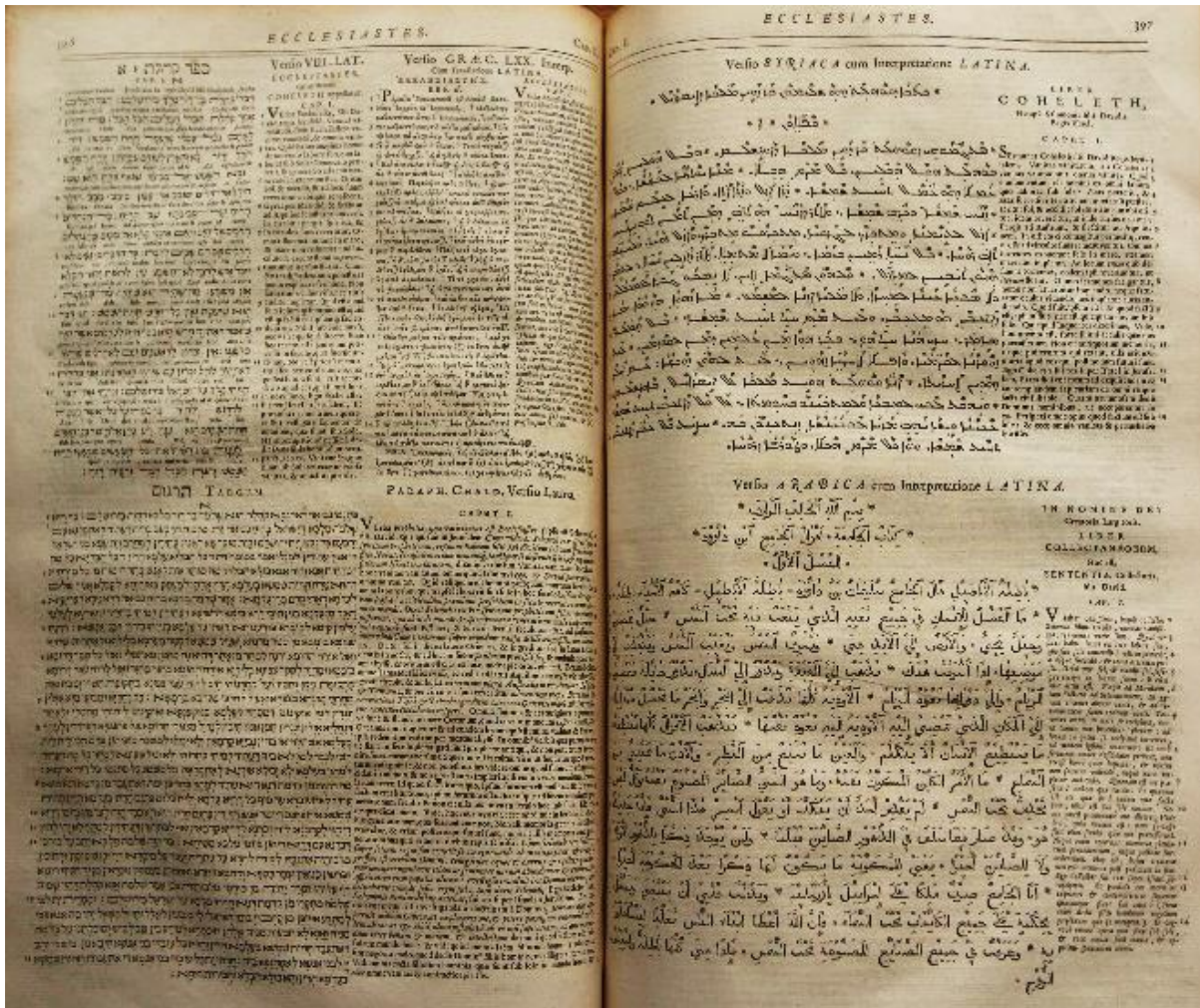
Shown here is the New Testament volume of Elias Hutter's edition, published in Nuremberg Germany in 1599, probably by Hutter himself. It contains the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in Greek with eleven translations: Hebrew, Syriac (=Aramaic), Latin, German, Bohemian (=Czech), Italian, Spanish, Gallic (=French), Danish, and Polish. Hutter was a professor of Hebrew, and this polyglot Bible was produced, along with many of his other works, to promote the learning of Hebrew among Christians. Hutter's innovations in Hebrew pedagogy are clearly visible on these pages.

In Hebrew, learning the 'root' letters is an important and challenging step in mastering the language. In this edition, the root letters are filled in black, and the suffixes and prefixes appear as hollow outlines. This would have been extremely expensive as the typeface was custom-made, the first of its kind. The translations into Hebrew and Aramaic (here called Syriac) are Hutter's own and the other translations seem to be mostly from Protestant sources (e.g. Martin

Luther's German New Testament), although Hutter gives no indication of his source texts. The Hebrew text follows the pattern of Hutter's 1588 Hebrew Bible. This New Testament belonged to Abbot Henry Gregory Gregory [sic], a monk of Downside, who went to Australia as part of the Benedictine Mission on that continent.

The other polyglot Bible shown below is a six-volume production from Lamspringe Abbey in North Germany. It translates the Old Testament (volumes 1–3) from Hebrew/Aramaic into 5 ancient languages (Latin, Samaritan, Greek [LXX], Syriac, Aramaic and Arabic). Volume 4 contains the Deutero-canonical texts and Targums on the Pentateuch; Volume 5 has a translation of the New Testament from Greek into Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic and Persian (where extant); Volume 6 is a series of notes on the text of the entire Bible.

This edition was edited by Brian Walton (1600–1661) and published in London in 1657. It was given to Lamspringe by Sir Thomas Gascoigne in 1669. Volume I also contains within it a Preface and a series of tables, diagrams and maps, including a detailed series of drawings of the Temple.



Our thanks to Dom Anselm Brumwell for this blog post.