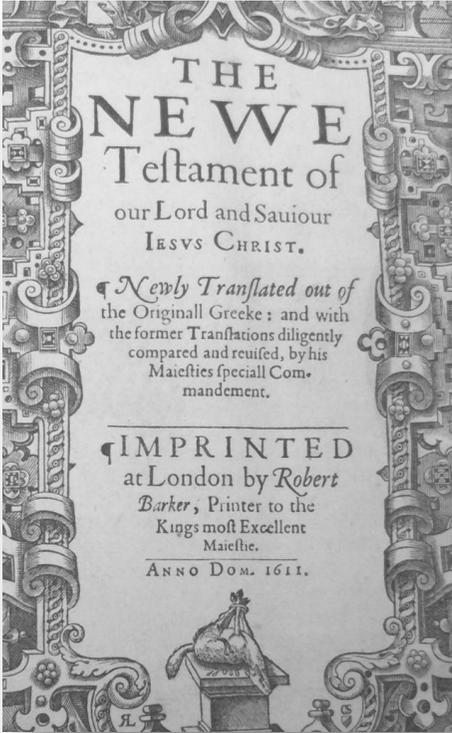


The Art of the New Testament Front-Piece Of the 1611 King James Bible



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**Figure 1: From the 1611 King James Bible
New Testament Title**

This year we celebrate the 400th anniversary of one of the most remarkable and influential books ever published, the King James Version of the Bible. As is appropriate to such an occasion a number of new books and articles have appeared about the King James. Relatively few of these touch however on the question of the art and illustration of the King James Bible. The present article attempts to fill that gap a little by taking a look at the engraved Title Page (hereafter TP) included at the beginning of the New Testament portion of the 1611 first edition of the King James.

To be sure the New Testament TP is not the only piece of illustration of any interest in the King James Bible, indeed the front-piece at the beginning of the Old Testament is better known, and it even includes a piece of symbolic imagery that has special interest to me, and to which I dedicated an article in an earlier issue of this journal (fig. 3).¹ I refer to pelican with her children as a symbol of Christ. The ancient belief being illustrated was described in the early 13th century Aberdeen Bestiary as follows:

It is devoted to its young. When it gives birth and the young begin to grow, they strike their parents in the face. But their parents, striking back, kill them. On the third day, however, the mother-bird, with a blow to her flank, opens up her side and lies on her young and lets her blood pour over the bodies of the dead, and so raises them from the dead.²

This symbolism of the pelican as representative of Christ and our redemption, although extremely popular in the middle ages, is not well known to most Protestants, who have avoided Roman Catholicism's and Eastern Orthodoxy's enthusiasm for religious images out of a (quite justifiable) desire to avoid idolatry.

In the Old Testament front-piece to the KJV this traditional symbolic depiction of the pelican and her children appears at the center of the bottom of the page between the evangelist Luke (on the left) and John (on the right) and just beneath the publication date 1611.

As with the symbolism of the pelican and her children, much of the other imagery found in the original King James will be unfamiliar and even surprising to many modern Christians. In some of the decorated capital letters that grace the beginning of chapters we even find imagery from pagan mythology, such as the figures of Pan (1 Pet 3 & Ps 141), Neptune (Matt 1 & Rev 1), and Daphne (Rom 1) (Fig. 4). The presence of these figures has resulted in some speculation as to why they were included. Gordon Campbell, Professor of Renaissance Studies at the



Figure 3: The Pelican and her children from the 1611 KJV OT front-piece.

¹ Ronald V. Huggins, "The Sign of the Pelican on the Cross of Christ," *MJT* 9.1 (2010): 119–32.

² Aberdeen University Library MS 24, Folio 34v-35r; ET: Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library.

University of Leicester, opines that they appear not simply as themselves but as “pagan foreshadowings” of Christian truth.³ Thus, according to Campbell, Pan foreshadows “Jesus as the Good shepherd, and his name, which means ‘all’ in Greek [hints] . . . at Christ as ‘all’.”⁴ Similarly, suggests Campbell, Neptune foreshadows resurrection and Daphne transfiguration.⁵



Figure 9: Capital initials from the original King James featuring images from Greek and Roman Mythology.

There is, to be sure, some truth to what Campbell says in general. We may think for example of the line calling the new-born Jesus Pan in Milton’s *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity* (1629):

The Shepherds on the Lawn,
Or ere the point of dawn,
Sate simply chatting in a rustick row;
Full little thought they than,
That the mighty Pan
Was kindly com to live with them below;
Perhaps their loves, or els their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busie keep.⁶

Still, it is scarcely obvious from their actual placement in the original King James that that is why they were included. If Pan foreshadows Christ as the Good Shepherd, why not place him next to the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10, or at least 1 Peter 5 instead of 1 Peter 3, since it is

³ Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611-2011* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 101, 103.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶ John Milton, *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity* VIII, 85–92.

in 5:2 that Peter exhorts the elders among his readers to “shepherd the flock of God”?

And Daphne, if she is supposed to remind us of transfiguration, why not place her next to one of the transfiguration accounts (Matt 17, Mark 9, Luke 9)? So, also, Neptune? If he is supposed to make us think of resurrection why not place him next to, say, 1 Corinthians 15?

A simpler explanation seems to lie in the fact that the printers simply needed the capital letters to start out the chapters these figures accompanied (L for Pan, T for Neptune, and P for Daphne), so they simply included them as they always did when printing books. This is the view, for example, of Peter Stallybrass, who argues that at the time “The reuse of decorative initials, irrespective of context, was the norm.”⁷ The norm, yes, but not the universal rule. So, for example, the Gospels of Luke and John in the original KJV open with decorated capitals accompanied by depictions of Luke with an ox and John with an eagle (both traditional symbols, see later on).

In any case, given there were so many versions of the printed Bible prior to 1611 it is scarcely surprising that printers had prepared decorative initials to introduce the Gospels that included images of the respective apostles. What *is* a little surprising is that the King James includes only images of Luke and John, and not of Matthew (which opens instead with Neptune), and Mark (which opens with a design incorporating a bird with dragon or bat wings). In the King James, Matthew and Mark have as the first letter of both of their Gospels the letter T, whereas Luke has F and John, I. This was also the case with earlier English translations such, for example, as the Tyndale New Testament (1526), Matthew’s Bible (1537), Coverdale’s Bible (1535), Taverner’s Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), and the Bishops’ Bible (1568). All began with T in Matthew and Mark, F in Luke, I in John. One would have thought that by the time the King James went to press printed decorative initial T’s depicting the evangelists Matthew and Mark would have become standard. But interestingly they did not.

⁷ Peter Stallybrass, “Visible and Invisible Letters: Text Versus Image in Renaissance England and Europe,” in *Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings* (eds. Marija Dalbello and Mary Shaw; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 91.

I. THE NEW TESTAMENT TITLE PAGE

When we come to the TP of the original King James New Testament, the symbolism, even if unfamiliar, is less mysterious because most of its representations derive from Christian rather than pagan iconography. But before delving into that we must first say a few words by way of introduction.

The New Testament TP was engraved by the Swiss artist Christopher

Switzer and (possibly) Rowland Lockey. Their monograms appear in the niches on either side of the image of the sacrificed lamb on the altar (fig. 5). One thing that we should have clearly in view from the beginning is that the main front-piece at the beginning of the Old Testament in most first editions of the KJV was executed by another artist, named Cornelis Boel.

Furthermore, the New Testament TP was not produced in conjunction with Boel's front-piece. In fact it was not produced for use in the King James Bible at all, but had already appeared as a title page in the last edition of the earlier Bishops' Bible, which appeared in 1602 (fig. 6).

Besides being used as the TP in the original King James New Testament, it also replaces Boel's Old Testament title-page in some first edition KJVs as well.⁸

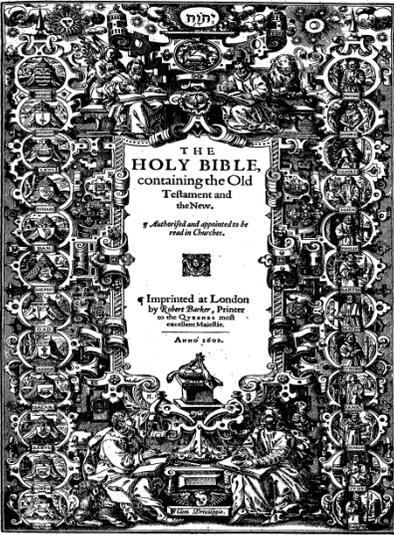


Figure 10: Title page of the 1602 Bishops' Bible.



Figure 5: Monograms of artists Rowland Lockey (?) and Christopher Switzer

⁸ David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 120–21. Thanks are due to Professor Norton for pointing me to his work and providing me with a scan of the 1602 Bishops' Bible title page reproduced here.

We begin, then, with an overview of the TP image as a whole (fig. 7), after which we will focus our discussion in a more detailed way on the various elements of the picture. Running down the left side of the page in twelve joined circular frames are pictures of the tents and shields of the twelve tribes of Israel. Paralleling these on the right in identical but mirrored frames are the twelve Apostles. At the center top, we see the Trinity represented with the divine Tetragrammaton (YHWH) representing the Father, and then, under that, a Lamb carrying a banner, representing the Son, and finally, below that, a Dove, representing the Holy Spirit.

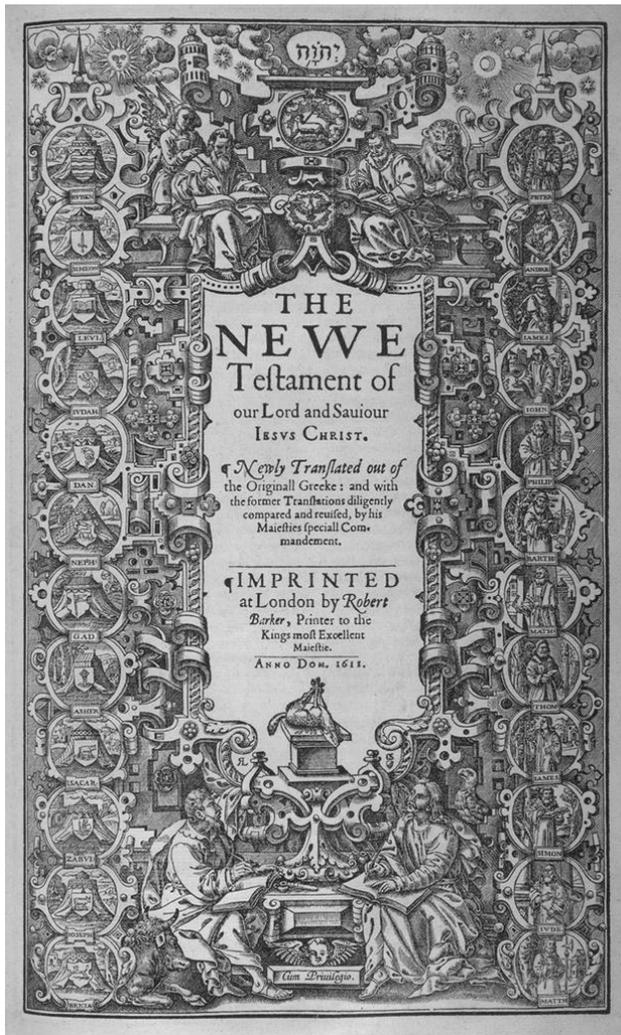


Figure 11: The 1611 King James New Testament Title Page.

To the left of the images of the Lamb and the Dove sits the evangelist Matthew, writing his Gospel. To their right, the evangelist Mark does the same. These are mirrored at the bottom of the page with the evangelists Luke (left) and John (right), also depicted in the process of writing their gospels. In between and above these two lower figures is an altar

intruding into the empty space in the center where the title and other publication information is given. On the altar is a lamb that has been slain, as is evidence by its bound feet, the blood pouring out beneath it, and its downward hanging head.

In several of the details this image follows the examples of earlier models. Thus, for example, another front-piece used in earlier Geneva Bibles from the same publisher (Robert Barker) had a design that was quite similar in that it also had the shields of the

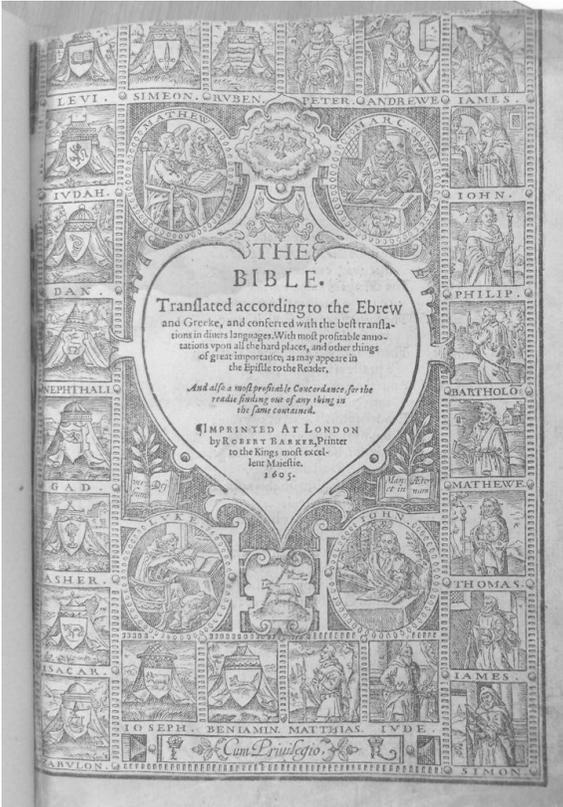


Figure 12: A 1605 Geneva Bible with elements similar to the 1611 KJV New Testament Title Page.

twelve tribes of Israel on the left, the twelve apostles on the right (both in the same order with the same symbolic representations), and the four gospel writers (again in the same order) (Fig. 8).⁹ Just how close the relationship is between this earlier front-piece and the KJV New Testa-

⁹ This front-piece appears in a number of Bibles of the period, including in a Geneva Bible New Testament published by Christopher Barker in 1599, then also others by Robert Barker in 1606, 1611, 1615. Nor was it used exclusively for the Geneva Bible, as is seen by its use as both Old and New Testament front pieces for a King James published in London in 1649 and 1672. Examples are easily multiplied.

ment TP will become clear as we discuss particular parallels of the individual features.

II. THE SHIELDS OF ISRAEL

In order to get a better picture of the twelve shields of Israel and their tents I extract them, placing them in the order in which they appear in the TP (left to right/top to bottom) (fig. 9). The theme of the banners or standards of Israel hearkens back to Numbers 2, which reads in the KJV, “Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house.”



Figure 13: The Shields (Standards) of Israel (Num 2:2).

In the seventeenth century, Sylvanus Morgan reported a poetic description of the heraldry of the traditional shields of Israel that agrees at most points with what we find in the TP of the original KJV New Testament:

JUDAH bare Gules, a Lyon couchant, or,
 ZABULUN'S black *Ship's* like to a man of warr.
 ISSACHAR'S *Asse* between two burthens girt,
 As DAN'S *Sly Snake* lies in a field of vert.
 ASHUR with azure a *Cup of Gold* sustains,
 And NEPHTALI'S *Hind* trips o'er the flowry plains.
 EPHRAIMS strong *Ox* lyes with the couchant *Hart*,
 MANNASEH'S *Tree* its branches doth impart.
 BENJAMIN'S *Wolfe* in field gules resides,
 REUBEN'S field argent and blew *Barrs Waved* glides.
 SIMEON doth beare the *Sword: and in that manner*
 GAD having pitched his Tent sets up his *Banner*.¹⁰

For the most part the devices on the shields in the TP agree with Morgan's poem, except that Manasseh and Ephriam in the poem are replaced by Joseph and Benjamin in the TP. The imagery originates for the most part from the prophetic blessings of Jacob of his sons in Genesis 49 and the blessing of the tribes by Moses in Deuteronomy 33.

Here, then, are the devices appearing on the shields of the tribes in the order in which they appear on the TP, along with the biblical passages upon which they are based:

Reuben (water): he is "unstable as water" (Gen 49:4)
 Simeon (sword): "instruments of cruelty... in [his] habitations. (Gen 49:5)
 Levi (book): "They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law" (Deut 33:10).
 Judah (lion): "is a lion's welp." (Gen 49:9)
 Dan (snake): "a serpent by the way." (Gen 49:17)
 Neph[thali] (hind): "a hind let loose" (Gen 49:21)
 Beni[amin] (wolf): "shall ravin as a wolf" (Gen 49: 27)
 Gad (lion on a banner): "he dwelleth as a lion" (Deut 33:20)
 Asher (cup): "he shall yield royal dainties" (Gen 49:20)

¹⁰ Quoted here in Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* 5.10 ("Of the Scutcheons of the Twelve Tribes," in Sir Thomas Browne's Works: Including his life and Correspondence III (ed. Simon Wilkins; London: William Pickering, 1835), 121.

Isacar (ox/cow): We would expect an ass, as in Morgan’s poem and in Gen 49:14: “Issachar is a strong ass,” but the animal on Isacar’s shield here looks much more like an ox or cow. Interestingly, in the earlier depiction of Issachar’s shield in the Geneva Bible front-piece, the animal in question looks much more like an ass, yet in the Boel front-piece to the original edition Old Testament of the KJV, insofar as we can see it under the cross-hatching, it looks even more like an ox than like a donkey (fig. 10)

Zebul[un] (ship): “Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships” (Gen 49:13), and “[Zebulun and Issachar] shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand” (Deut 33:3)

Joseph (bullock): “His glory is like the firstling of his bullock” (Deut 33:17).

Beni[amin] (wolf): “shall ravin as a wolf” (49: 27)

An interesting point in relation to the shields has to do with their sequence. They do not perfectly adhere to the sequence given in Morgan’s poem, nor that of Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, or Numbers 2. However in the front-pieces we have discussed, the two in the original King James for the Old and New Testaments, and the one from the later-edition Geneva Bible, all agree in both sequence and in heraldic symbolism.¹¹



Figure 10: the device for Issachar from (left to right, top to bottom) Speed’s 1592 *Genealogies*, a 1605 Geneva Bible, Switzer’s 1611 KJV NT front piece, Boel’s 1611 KJV OT front-piece.

Significantly, they agree as well for the most part with the genealogical tables of John Speed, which were originally published in 1592¹² and were incorporated into the original edition of the King James Bible. The only point at which the sequence of Speed differs

¹¹ Except that the devices are sometimes turned around in the different front-pieces.

¹² Publication date of Speed’s *Genealogies Recorded in the Sacred Scripture* given by Norton, David Norton, *King James from Tyndale to Today*, 94.

from that of the three front-pieces mentioned is in the inclusion of Joseph in the front-pieces, where Speed had instead (and after Benjamin) Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Another interesting feature of Speed's genealogical table, as it appeared in the original KJV and a number of other Bibles of the period, is that there can be no doubt as to his intending to represent Issachar's shield as having an ass as its device, not a cow or ox (fig. 10).

III. THE TWELVE APOSTLES



Figure 14: The twelve Apostles from the right hand column of the 1611 KJV NT Title Page (left to right, top to bottom).

The depiction of the Apostles on the right-hand side of the TP derives for the most part from medieval iconographical norms rather than from biblical history. Let's take a moment to discuss each figure.



Peter appears holding a key,¹³ a reference to the famous “keys of the kingdom” passage of Matthew 16:19. The front-piece at the beginning of the 1611 KJV also presented Peter in this aspect. Keys were the identifying symbol of Peter’s (and by extension the pope’s) alleged papal authority throughout the Middle Ages. This makes it significant that the front-piece of the Coverdale Bible (1535) had depicted all the apostles with the keys of authority not just Peter (Fig. 12).



Figure 12: Peter alone with his keys (1) in a typical Late-Gothic portrayal of Peter from the Eggenberg Altarpiece (prior to 1470, Schloss Eggenberg, Graz, Austria) (left), (2) in the 1611 KJV OT Front-Piece (middle), (3) all of the Apostles holding the keys in the 1535 Coverdale Bible (right).

¹³ Not “keys” as stated in Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611-2011* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 96.



Andrew appears as he always does with the X-shaped “Saint Andrew’s Cross” upon which he was allegedly crucified. The tradition that Andrew was crucified is an ancient one, though perhaps not ancient enough to be credited, but the traditional X-shape of the cross came only later. It makes its first appearance on a tenth-century troparium from Autun.¹⁴



James the Great: In Acts 12:2–3 we read that Herod “killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.” So we might have expected to find James depicted holding a sword. Instead we see him with pilgrim’s hat and staff, looking as though he is on the move. The symbolism dates to the Middle Ages and derives from the fact that his bones were thought to have resided at Santiago de Compostela in Spain, the Western terminus of the great pilgrim road from the East, which is still known as the Way of Saint James. Santiago de Compostela, Rome and Jerusalem were the three most popular pilgrimage destinations in the Middle Ages. James is depicted here as the ideal pilgrim coming back from viewing his own bones in Spain. Usually when this symbolism is used, the scalloped-shell pilgrim badge, or *concha venera*, which was given out to visitors of the Compostela shrine, is also shown attached to his hat, staff, cloak, or satchel.¹⁵ In the original KJV Old Testament front-piece, we see the shell attached to his hat (fig. 13). In the picture of this James from the 1605 edition of the Geneva Bible we see it on his cloak (fig. 8 and 13).

¹⁴ Peter M. Peterson, *Andrew, Brother of Simon Peter: His Story and His Legends* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 45.

¹⁵ William Melczer, *The Pilgrim’s Guide to Santiago de Compostela: First English Translation, with Introduction, Commentaries, and Notes* (New York: Italica, 1993), 58.



Figure 13: James wearing Compostela Pilgrim Badge (*concha venera*) in (1) a statue Seckau Abbey, Austria (left), (2) the Old Testament front-piece from the 1611 KJV (middle), and (3) from the frontpiece of a 1605 Geneva Bible (on shoulder) (right).



John, son of Zebedee, is shown with the cup of poison tradition said he drank in the presence of the wicked Ephesian priest Aristidemus to persuade him of the truth of Christianity (fig. 14). As the story goes John was unaffected, though two criminals who drank from the same elixir died.¹⁶



Philip holds a spear, which is not really traditional for him. Campbell is incorrect when he describes Philip here as holding a “book and staff.”¹⁷ There is no book and what Campbell calls a staff is clear-



Figure 15: John with his cup of poison (with serpents) c. 1380–1410 (Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Missouri).

¹⁶ (*Acts of John XX–XXI*) Note that the sections identified by Roman numerals in M. R. James’s edition are placed between sec. 105 and 106 near the end of his translation. This same passage is also sometimes referenced as *Virtutes Iohannis VIII* (Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), 263–4.

¹⁷ Campbell, *Bible*, 96.

ly a spear. Tradition held that Philip was either crucified (e.g., the *Golden Legend* [1275]¹⁸), stoned (e.g., the *Martyr's Mirror* [1660]¹⁹) or crucified and stoned (e.g., Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* [1563]²⁰). Hence he was usually depicted with a cross or stones. Curiously the only other example I have found where Philip holds a spear is in the front-piece to the Old Testament in this same volume and the front-piece used earlier in Geneva Bibles.



Figure 16: Saint Bartholomew with his skin draped over his right arm (St. Xaver Church, Leoben, Austria).

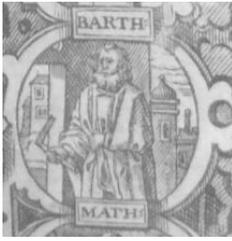


Barth[olomew] holds a book and the traditional knife with which he was supposedly skinned alive. Sometimes Bartholomew is depicted with his own skin as well (fig. 15), but Switzer here has spared us that detail.

¹⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, or Lives of the Saints* (7 vols.; trans. William Caxton; ed. F. S. Ellis; London: J. M. Dent, 1900), 3.72.

¹⁹ Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater of Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* (5th ed.; trans. Joseph F. Sohm; Scottsdale, PA/ Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1950 [orig. Dutch ed. 1660]), 73.

²⁰ *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe: A New and Complete Edition* (8 vols.; preliminary dissertation George Townsend; ed. Stephen Reed Cattley, 1837–39), 1.97. This book is more popularly referred to as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.



Mat[hew] holds a builder's square, which presents us with a very interesting puzzle, because that symbol goes not with Matthew, but with Thomas in connection with an apocryphal story where the king of India commissions Thomas to build him a palace.²¹ The 1611 Old Testament front-piece at the beginning of the same volume in fact depicts Thomas that way (fig. 16). So what happened? One possible explanation is that the artist went wrong in drawing the picture as a result of forgetting which apostolic list he was supposed to be following. The names given under each picture follows the order given in Luke 6:14–16, except that Judas Iscariot is replaced here by Matthias, as per Acts 1:23. In Luke's list Matthew follows Bartholomew and Thomas follows Matthew. In the list of the twelve given in Matthew 10:2–4, however, Matthew and Thomas are switched so that the order runs instead Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew, with the result that an artist may have engraved Thomas, when he was really supposed to be engraving Matthew. Then, when he realized his mistake (he does get back in sync after that), he simply let it stand. Normally Matthew appears holding a sword, as he does in fact in the Old Testament front-piece of the original King James.



Figure 16: Thomas with his builders' square lurking in the shadow of doubt on the 1611 OT front-piece.



Thomas, like Philip, is shown with a spear. He also holds a book. Unlike Philip the spear is traditional for Thomas. Campbell is again mistaken when he described Thomas as holding a staff here (as he had been in saying Philip held a staff).²²



James son of Alphaeus, also referred to as James the Less, is shown holding a fuller's club, the traditional implement of his martyrdom in Western iconography. The ultimate source for the symbolism is a second-century tradition which held that after being thrown down from the temple, James

²¹ *Golden Legend*, 2.141–43.

²² Campbell, *Bible*, 96.

the brother of Jesus, was finished off with a fuller's club.²³ The transfer of the fuller's club from the brother of Jesus to the son of Alphaeus derives from Jerome's attempt to identify the two James in his late-fourth century treatise, *Against Helvidius*, as part of his larger argument that Jesus had no actual brothers or sisters but only cousins. Jerome's argument served the picture he wanted to paint of Mary and Joseph based upon his own unbiblical belief that "all sexual intercourse is unclean."²⁴ From his perspective, it did not seem fitting to admit that only Mary was "ever-virgin," Joseph had to be as well. Thus Jerome insists in *Against Helvidius* 21 that "He who was thought worthy to be called father of the Lord, remained a virgin."²⁵

Scripturally, Jerome's identification of the brother of Jesus with the son of Alphaeus simply doesn't work. What evidence there is suggests that Jesus' brothers (cousins on Jerome's reading) did not believe in him during his lifetime (John 7:5). Why then would Jesus need to entrust his mother into John's care at the cross (John 19:26), if she was already in the care of his cousins, the believing apostle James son of Alphaeus (and the apostle Jude Thaddeus as well, according to Jerome and Roman Catholic tradition).

In fact, however, the mother and brothers of Jesus are clearly distinguished from the apostles in the Gospels and Acts. In Mark 3:18 Jesus chooses the twelve, including James the son of Alphaeus and Jude Thaddeus, but then a few verses later, in verse 21, we read that "when his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind,' " and in verse 31, "His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him."

In Acts 1 we find the Apostles mentioned as being in the upper room *with* the mother and brothers of Jesus. In the context James son of Alphaeus and Jude's names are listed as apostles *not* as brothers of Christ: "they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, *James the son of Alphaeus* and Simon the Zealot and *Judas the son of James*." But then it goes on immediately to say: "All these [Apostles] with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, *and his brothers*" (Acts 1:13–14, italics mine).

Since the identification of the two figures was an innovation of a Western father as late as the end of the fourth century, it is scarcely sur-

²³ Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1.4; Hegesippus in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.18.

²⁴ Jerome, *Against Jovianus* 1.20 (ET: *NPNF*² 6.3651).

²⁵ ET: *NPNF*² 6. 344.

prising that the Eastern Church—which correctly regards the brother of Jesus and the son of Alphaeus as two different individuals—does not endorse it. Yet notwithstanding its clearly unhistorical and unbiblical character, the Roman Catholic melding of the son of Alphaeus and the brother of Jesus still exercises considerable influence in the West, reaching even into such remote quarters as the world of country music. I refer to the line from the song in Johnny Cash’s 1973 film *Gospel Road*, where Johnny sings in Jesus’ voice at the Last Supper: “Have a little bread Simon, give a little wine to James my brother.”²⁶



Simon: Foxe tells us that Simon the Zealot (also called the Cananaean in Mark 3:18 and Matthew 10:4), was crucified.²⁷ The *Golden Legend* said that he and Jude were “hewed” to death.²⁸ Right through the Middle Ages and up to the present time, Simon is usually depicted as here with the saw (behind him) with which he was supposedly dismembered.



Jude son of James (also called Thaddaeus in Mark 3:18 and Matthew 10:3), is only very infrequently depicted holding a sword. Most often he appears with a club similar to the one James son of Alphaeus holds (above). Another example in which Jude holds a sword (one of very few), comes from the mid-fifteenth century, and may be seen in the Church of Our Lady in the Bavarian town of Memmingen, Germany (fig. 17).

²⁶ The son of Alphaeus was there, the brother of Jesus was not! Dictionaries of the Saints often fail to bring clarity to this issue of the distinction between the two James. See for example the very vague and inadequate entry on James the Less in David Farmer’s *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (5th rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 228. Much better is the entry “Philip and James (the Less), Apostles,” in Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Saints from Mary to Saint Francis of Assisi to John XXIII and Mother Teresa* (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 189, which actually informs its readers of the difficulties of simply equating the two figures.

²⁷ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* 1, 95.

²⁸ *Golden Legend*, 6.80.



Matt[hias], who was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:23), appears holding a halbert, or axe with an extended handle, as is usual for him.



Figure 17: the Apostle Jude with a sword, Hans Strigel the Elder (15th century).

IV. THE FOUR APOSTLES, THE TRINITY AND THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB

As the parallel sets of twelve tribes and twelve apostles provide balance to the left and right sides of the picture, so also two compositional triangles create a symmetrical relationship between its top and bottom halves. In the four bottom corners of the two triangles are the four evangelists, each identified by their traditional symbols, an angel with Matthew, a lion with Mark, an ox with Luke and an eagle with John. The derivation of these symbols for the evangelist is very ancient and ultimately derive from the descriptions of the four animals around the throne in Rev 4:7: “And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.” The explicit identification of these animals with the four evangelists goes at least as far back as the late second century writer Irenaeus. According to Irenaeus, however, the lion went with John, the ox with Luke, the eagle with Mark and the man with Matthew (*Against Heresies* 3.11.8). Mark and John traded symbols and Matthew’s symbol was graduated from a man to an angel centuries before the appearance of the King James.

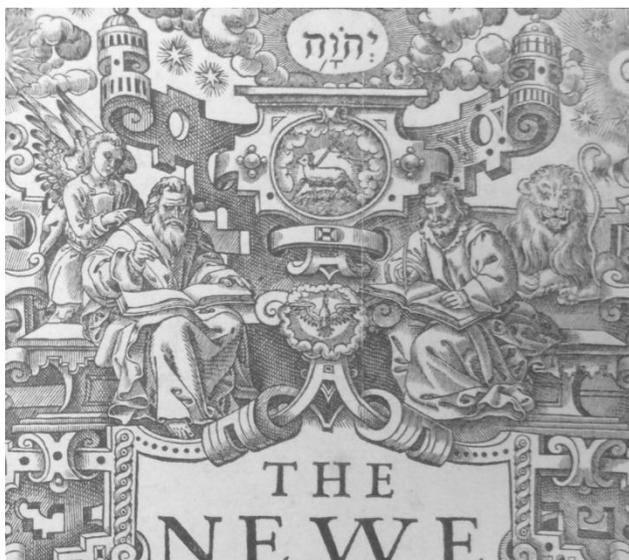


Figure 18: Upper triangular composition on the 1611 KJV NT Title Page.

In the upper triangle (fig. 18) three elements that had already commonly appeared separately in other Bible front-pieces, are brought together to represent the Trinity. The first of these is the Tetragrammaton, the divine name Yahweh. We have already seen this symbol standing alone as representing God in other Bible front-pieces of the period, as for example in the Coverdale Bible of 1535 and the New Testament front-piece of the 1611 smaller “HE” edition King James Bible. Next comes the symbol of the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God, bearing a staff topped with a cross with banner attached. The expected marking on the banner would also be a cross, and that is indeed what we find here if we look closely. In some traditional depictions, the Lamb appears without the cross banner, and instead a cross appears standing beside him. The most famous and majestic of these is Jan van Eyke’s *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432) from the Ghent Altarpiece. One element that is missing from the TP that is often seen in more traditional depictions of the Lamb of God with a banner is a spring of blood flowing from the lamb’s breast into a cup (fig. 19). The TP image also appears standing in combination with the Dove but not the Tetragrammaton in the 1605 Geneva front-piece shown earlier.



Figure 19: Detail, from the Crucifixion panel of Matthias Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* (early 16th cent.).

Finally, the Spirit appears below in the form of a Dove, a symbolism based on the Spirit’s descent upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism (Matt 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke

3:22, John 1:32). This figure also appears independently or semi-independently in other Bible front-pieces of the time. A case in point is in the later Geneva Bible front-piece where the Dove appears above the printed title, and the Lamb with his banner below it.

Between the images of the Lamb and the Dove in the TP, the viewer will note a sort of band emerging from the background. Gordon Campbell intriguingly suggests that this represents a “diamond wedding ring” representing “the marriage of Christ and the Church.”²⁹

When we turn to Boel’s Old Testament KJV front-piece we notice that he has depicted the Trinity in the same manner, except that he switched the position of the Lamb and Dove, so that the Lamb is at the bottom with the Dove in the middle between it and the Tetragrammaton.

The way in which the Trinity is depicted in the two original KJV front-pieces in a certain sense represents a variation of a very common and traditional way of depicting the Trinity, a way in fact that is still common, for example, among more recent Roman Catholic iconographers (fig. 20).



Figure 20: Three depictions of the Trinity (1) Altarpiece (c. 1250), State Museums of Berlin, Gemäldegalerie; (2) Johann Michael Rottmayr (1721), Abbey Church of Melk Monastery (Lower Austria), Felix Liefert (1918), Cathedral of the Madaleine, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁹ Campbell, *Bible*, 95.



Figure 21: The lower triangular composition from the 1611 KJV NT title page.

In the bottom triangle (fig. 21) we see Luke on the left and a mustachioed John on the right with the sacrificed lamb between and above them, its bound feet creating the topmost point of the triangle. The triangular form of this group is strengthened by the upward focus of both evangelists, each of which is gazing up at the sacrificed Lamb, the central theme of what they are writing about. This is markedly at odds with the two evangelists at the top of the page, who do not gaze upward (or even sideways) to view the triumphant Lamb of God, or the Tetragrammaton. It is in fact quite difficult to determine just exactly where these upper two evangelists are looking.

An attractive suggestion would be that they as well are actually gazing *over* their respective volumes down toward the sacrificial Lamb. If that were the case, then all four of the evangelist would be focusing on the sacrificed Lamb, calling to mind pictorially what Paul said to the Corinthians about determining “not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), and Martin Kähler, about the Gospels representing “passion narratives with extended introductions.”³⁰

Certainly the downward cast of their gaze lowers the composition’s center of gravity in that direction in any case. But when we blow up the

³⁰ Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (trans., ed., intro., Carl E. Braaten; forward Paul J. Tillich; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1964), 80, nt. 11.

image of the two upper evangelists it looks rather like they are both focused on what they are writing in their respective books.

Finally, at the bottom of the page between Luke and John, under the shared surface supporting the books they are writing in, we see a cherub (represented as a child's head with wings) under which appear the words *cum priuiegio*, "with privilege," providing the notice that that the work was published with authorization or permission.

V. CONCLUSION

It is certainly arguable that the New Testament front-piece of the original 1611 King James Version is not great art. One of the standard criticisms of it has been that it is too busy, that is to say, too cram-packed with details, making it a bit overwhelming to the viewer. Its importance and interest for us, however, does not rest in its surpassing artistic merit, but rather in the fact that it was fortuitously attached to the very first edition of the English translation that has meant so much to the advance of the gospel and development of the English language. And in any case, while we might fault it as well for carrying over from the Middle Ages some of the non-historical and non-biblical stories about the apostles, yet we can be thankful that most of the pictorial elements portrayed biblical themes. In other words, Switzer and Boel happily spare us yet another Bible decorated with flattering portraits of the Kings and Queens of England, of the sort that can be seen, for example, in the front-pieces of the Coverdale Bible (1535), the Great Bible (1539), and the Bishops Bible (1558). If the egos of self-important monarchs must be stroked in order to get the Word of God out, then by all means do it. But if there is any way possible, at least spare us having to be confronted with royal mugs every time we open our Bibles. Better discreetly restrict your gushing flattery to a brief preface, if at all possible. And that is what the King James translators did in a dedicatory epistle addressed "To the most High and Majestie Prince James, by the Grace of God King of Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c."

The real thanks for the King James Bible, goes not to James with all his pretensions and titles, but to the martyrs who struggled to get the Bible into English, believing scholars who translated this wonderful translation of the Bible, most importantly to God, who gave us His Word, and who has caused it to continue to bear good fruit through this and other translations right down to the present day. So then in conclusion I say, Hooray for the King James Bible, and God bless it! (But then, of course, he already has!)