GLOBAL CALVINISM: THE MAPS IN THE ENGLISH GENEVA BIBLE

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Introduction

Five maps were included in the English translation of the Geneva Bible of 1560: Eden, Exodus, Canaan, the Holy Land in the time of Christ, and the travels of St. Paul (Figures 1 and 3–6).1 The maps were presented as ‘helps’ to assist readers visualizing difficult scriptural passages. They were important enough to be mentioned in the title page and bound with God’s revealed word. But they are ambivalent in status: novel on the one hand but supernumerary from any doctrinal perspective; mediocre in quality even by standards of the time, but sometimes given full-page spreads.2 In her wide-ranging survey of maps in bibles, Delano-Smith describes the phenomenon of maps in bibles as “a product of the Genevan rather than the Lutheran reform.”3 If the use of maps indeed blossomed in Calvin’s Geneva in particular,4 these maps would have a historical specificity worth delineating.

1 The Old Testament maps were inserted at Genesis, Numbers, and Joshua, respectively. In the New Testament, the Holy Land map appeared at the book’s outset just before the Gospel of Matthew. The map of St. Paul’s travels was inserted at Acts. All maps were placed in [W. Whittingham; A. Gilby; T. Sampson; R. Hall]. The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteynd in the Olde and Newe Testament…Geneva, 1560.

2 The maps have also been ignored by biblical scholars. David Daniell’s 962-page study of the English Bible mentions the maps only in passing. The Bible in English: Its History and Influence. Yale University Press, 2003, p. 302. Catherine Delano-Smith’s Maps as Art and Science: Maps in Sixteenth Century Bibles provides excellent documentation of maps in bibles but little by way of analysis. (London: King’s College, 1990).

3 Ibid, 29. Maps had been included in some Lutheran and Zurich bibles of the mid 1520s and Antwerp bibles of the 1530s and 40s but only sporadically. This map reappeared in some. Coverdale’s bible of 1525 copied maps from Luther’s folio of 1523, and included a detailed map of Palestine and Egypt which is upside down from a modern standpoint. James Strachan. Early Bible Illustrations. Cambridge University Press, 1957, pp. 54, 76. Oecolampadius used two maps in a Commentary on Isaiah that was first published at Basle in 1525 and reprinted 1558 in Geneva with maps by Barbier and Crispin. Ingram, Elizabeth Morley. “Maps as Readers’ Aids: Maps and Plans in Geneva Bibles,” Imago Mundi 45,1993, pp. 29–44; p. 33. See also Ian Green. Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England. Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 66, ff. 94. Maps were also included in Wolfe’s English New Testament of1549, Jugge’s Tyndale Testaments of the 1550s, and some editions of the Great Bible, Bishop’s and King James’ bibles. Delano-Smith, p. xcvv.

4 Upon surveying over 1,000 16th century English bibles and New Testaments, Delano-Smith concludes that “the history of maps in Bibles is part of the history of the Reformation.
The maps indeed reveal much about the attitudes of the Geneva Bible translators and their milieu. They embodied the purposes of the translators exiled at Geneva and their reflections on the state of Protestantism in the decade of the 1550s, and performed a variety of unstated symbolic and imaginative functions. The maps worked to shore up Protestant hermeneutics and claims to legitimacy, and just as the metrical psalms added to Geneva Bibles have been shown to be integral to the construction of Protestant identity, they can be taken as expressions of the ambitions of the Protestant project and markers of cultural significance. The maps also embody the tensions—such as that between the popular and scholarly and between the simple and sophisticated—that existed within the aims of early English Protestantism and within the Geneva Bible as a whole, and they were a conscious, if contradictory, assertion of cosmopolitanism, which is confirmed upon an examination of the translators' experiences in exile first at Frankfurt and then in Geneva.

To decode the meanings of the Geneva Bible maps, one must cast one's net widely. I here look at the bible's paratactic materials and notes; at the status of and attitudes toward geographic and cosmographic knowledge among Englishmen circa 1550; at records of exile experience—in particular, the so-called prayer book controversy at Frankfurt and the exiles' sojourn at Geneva—and at epistolary evidence from the bible's translators and their associates. Occasionally I turn to the views of the Geneva Bible translators' mentor and hero, Jean Calvin. I here consider the exiled translators as a collective, which is justified in that they meant their translation to be taken as such and in that the English congregation regularly made its decisions on a consensual basis. I also focus on the maps as a collective; and though I discuss connotations of some maps in particular, do not discuss all of them individually. It should be said that there is a great deal that this story will leave out—in particular, the important links between the translators' egalitarian views and the ways in which these cohered with maps and a cosmographic worldview. Such will have to wait for a later essay.

*Intentionality: Foundations and Hermeneutics*

Though they may appear an afterthought, there is much to argue that the maps in the Geneva Bible were after all quite intentional. The exiles who...