

FORMAT AND LOCALIZATION: THE EIGHTEENMO IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

IN DISCUSSING JOHANNES LEUSDEN'S Hebrew-Latin *Liber Psalmorum* (London, typis S. Palmer, 1726. 18°), Brian Hubber makes the observation that 'Imposition in eighteens is, itself, experimental at this time.'¹ Palmer's wrestling with the problems of imposing in eighteens — even to the extent of changing imposition scheme in mid stream — does indeed imply that he had no precedent, though why he should choose to compound his difficulties by producing *half-sheets* — which obviously can be imposed *only* in such a way as to create at least one singleton (and thereby to create a binder's nightmare) — is, on the face of it, mystifying. What advantage did the eighteenmo (whether or not in half-sheets) hold over the twelvemo or the twentyfourmo in sixes, eights or twelves? — this is a question for which I have not found a satisfactory explanation.²

Until the appearance of 'The Imposition of eighteenmos in sixes, with special reference to tranchefiles', by Annemie Gilbert and Sylvia Ransom,³ I had innocently believed that the eighteenmo was a creation of the very late eighteenth century, and hence my surprise to find them discussing an eighteenmo of 1750, Spenser's *Works* (London: printed for J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, 1750, 6 vols.). In view of this earlier surprise I would have been quite content to accept Hubber's 1726 as being a likely *terminus a quo* had it not been for the fact that shortly after reading his article I happened to handle several small editions of the King James Bible⁴ and the Psalms⁵ which were definitely eighteenmos — they were even gathered in eighteens — but which, according to their title pages, were printed in 1648 at Cambridge. If the '1648' was to be believed — which perhaps it ought not to be without hesitation, given the prevalence of mis-dated English Bibles in the seventeenth century⁶ — then Palmer's eighteenmo had been anticipated in Cambridge by 78 years, the provincial imprint perhaps accounting for Palmer's lack of model. But if the dating *was* suspect, might a truer approximation be afforded by a knowledge of the incidence of eighteenmos in Britain before (say) 1750? In other words, there was a need to establish when the eighteenmo really *was* introduced. Further study of the 1648 eighteenmos soon revealed that they were not even printed in Cambridge, but rather in Amsterdam, and that their date of printing was probably closer to 1680 than 1648.⁷ A new question now arose: did printing in eighteens outside Britain precede its introduction within? If so, format alone might constitute a means of 'localization', if only to the extent of suggesting that (in this case) the Bibles were not printed in Britain — or alternatively that if printed in Britain they could not have been printed before a particular year.

'Localization' is a bibliographical pursuit formalized by R.A. Sayce.⁸ Essentially it is concerned with the examination of printing-house habits (otherwise, though inaccurately, termed 'compositorial practices') in an effort to identify those peculiar at specific times to specific locales, thereby providing a basis for 'localizing' volumes (a) without stated place of publication, (b) with a place of publication which is patently fictitious, or (c) with a place of publication

which is plausible but false. Sayce's particular concern was with signatures, catchwords, foliation and pagination, and dates in imprints. Thus — whatever the claims of the imprint — the signing of the preliminaries with asterisks in a volume of the seventeenth or eighteenth century is a good indication of Dutch origin, and the use of press figures in any period is an almost certain indication of British origin.

Elements other than those considered by Sayce might also be brought to bear on the question of localization⁹ — e.g. imposition schemes, the number of leaves to a gathering, and format. An analysis of the first would be prodigal of time though nonetheless valuable. The second and third, however — at least in their more exotic manifestations — would quickly produce bases for localization. For example, was the practice of gathering quartos in sixes peculiar to a small group of London printers in the early sixteenth century? or is the gathering of sixteenmos in eights in the first half of the sixteenth century an indication of Continental origin rather than British?¹⁰ With format the variations are much more limited: the vast majority of volumes printed before the middle of the eighteenth century were in folio, quarto, octavo and twelvemo, to which was added, in the second half of the eighteenth century, eighteenmo. Nonetheless, there are oddities of format which may be of value in localization, like the thirtytwomo in eights — or like the eighteenmo. My limited enquiry leads me to propound this addendum to Sayce: before 1690 the eighteenmo is a characteristic of Continental printing, not British. Or, to apply this particular generalization: an eighteenmo with imprint date earlier than 1690 and purporting to be British is very likely — assuming the imprint date to be correct — to have actually been printed abroad.

Putting one's hands on a group of seventeenth-century eighteenmos is not easy. The most practical way of isolating them would probably be by reading the shelves of a library whose shelf-arrangement is basically by size-gradations. For the most part, however, I have had to depend on chance identification and the leads provided by secondary sources.

The major difficulty with using secondary sources is simply that they cannot be relied upon to identify eighteenmos accurately. The most obvious problem for compilers of catalogues and bibliographies is that many eighteenmos — perhaps the majority — are gathered in sixes and therefore are liable to be mistaken for twelvemos or twentyfourmos; but this difficulty should not be insuperable before the mid-1750s (when wove paper was introduced) except where the volume in question lacks watermark, tranchefiles, and press figures.¹¹ The difficulties are compounded by the practice of using 'fol.', '4°', '8°' etc. to indicate dimensions rather than strict bibliographical format, a practice which at all times has probably been more widespread than I have previously acknowledged.¹² For example Lea Wilson's *Bibles Testaments Psalms and other books of the Holy Scriptures in English* (London, [privately printed], 1845) contains many 'eighteenmos', of which I have checked as many as I could — only to find that none was bibliographically an eighteenmo;¹³ the real problem of

course is that there may well be genuine eighteenmos masquerading as twelvemos or twentyfourmos. Even being *gathered* in eighteens is no guarantee that an eighteenmo will be described correctly: the Bodleian Library catalogue records the '1648' Bibles variously as octavo and sixteenmo, and Wing (B2226) as twelvemo,¹⁴ though the accompanying *Psalms* (B2432) is correctly described.

In an attempt to discover the incidence of eighteenmos in British printing in the seventeenth century I have scanned parts of the second editions of the STC¹⁵ and Wing¹⁶. Of the STC I have looked through the entire second volume¹⁷ as well as all of letter B,¹⁸ thereby including the entries under 'Bible'. Of Wing I have looked through only letters B and L. Potentially, a concentration on Wing would have been the more fruitful, but I found so many of the formats wrong¹⁹ that continuing the search seemed a waste of time. Nonetheless, it would be worth pursuing those items described as in sixes — i.e. where Wing is non-committal — to arrive at a definite *terminus* for the introduction of the eighteenmo.

The unreliability of Wing might be illustrated by reference to the apparently unique exemplar of B1801 (in the second edition), *Witch-craft proven, arreign'd, and condemn'd in its professors, professions and marks*, by John Bell (1676-1707), Minister of Gladsmuir (Glasgow, printed by Robert Sanders, 1697). According to Wing it is an eighteenmo. The volume comprises only two gatherings, A⁴ B⁴, and since the chain lines are vertical and there are traces of watermark visible in the upper inner corners of B³ and B⁴,²⁰ I take it that *Witch-craft proven* is two half-sheets of octavo,²¹ not one half-sheet of an eighteenmo imposed so as to produce sixteen leaves (for which imposition schemes are actually given in the printers' grammars of the early nineteenth century).

To revert to the STC: the only entries that I have noted therein described as eighteenmos are these (imprints only recorded):

- 14945.5 [St. Omer, Eng. Coll. press,] 1623. [in sixes]
- 15524 [St. Omer, English College Press,] 1621 [in sixes]
- 16096 Mackline, H. Jaey, 1615.
- 16099 St. Omers, [widow of C. Boscard f.] J. Heigham, 1631.
- 16100 St. Omers, J. Heigham, 1631. [another issue of 16099]
- 23988.5 Mackline, H. Jaye, 1616.

In other words the only 'English' books printed before 1641²² are a small group of Recusant publications which — overtly or demonstrably — were printed across the Channel for surreptitious introduction into Britain.²³

The items printed in Mackline [i.e. Mechelen or Malines, mid-way between Antwerp and Brussels] by Henry Jaye (or Jeay or Jaey) are of particular interest for their date: on the basis of the specifically 'English' sources consulted they may be the earliest eighteenmos known. The earliest known to Charles Mortet was 1627: Alexandre Irvinus, *De jure regni*, published in Leyden by

Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevier, which is apparently gathered in alternating 12s and 6s.²⁴ Mortet observes that the eighteenmo was quite exceptional in the output of the Elzeviers and that it was only in the early eighteenth century that it came to be used, the reason adduced being that with the increasing size of sheets the dimensions of a traditional twelvemo could now be achieved only by imposing eighteen pages to the forme rather than twelve.

It might be noted here that there is evidence to suggest that at least one eighteenmo was produced in the sixteenth century. Leon Voet records that in the 1615 Plantin catalogue — *Index librorum qui ex Typographia Plantiniana prodierunt* — one eighteenmo is advertised: "Litanien tot ghebruyck des Catholycken Legers ende alle Godtvruchtighe menschen, in 18, soo met copere als met houte figuren" (Litanies for the use of the Catholic Army and all Godfearing people, in 18mo, with both copper[plate] and wood[cut] illustrations) of 1595.²⁵ Voet's citation is tentative in that it seems to be merely a quotation from the 1615 *Index* unsupported by reference to an exemplar of the work in question (and it is not clear what the source of the date is). I have been unable to equate the 'Litanien' with any extant publication.

Mortet cites further eighteenmos of 1630, 1642, 1649 and 1651, all of which would appear to be properly dated 'normal commercial' publications. In other words, there is ample testimony, independent of the Recusant publications, that the eighteenmo was in use on the Continent well before 1690.

For the period 1641-1700 the incidence of eighteenmos printed in Britain is — for the reasons already adduced — difficult to establish with any certainty. Wing's B sequence contains four eighteenmo editions of the Psalms dated 1648-1698, but since all are almost certainly Continental piracies they are to be eliminated from the quest. A small number of those described as in sixes — those printed before 1690 — have also been eliminated as twelvemos²⁶, leaving ten in the B and L sequences in sixes not checked: some may indeed turn out to be eighteenmos, but since the earliest of these is 1690 it can tentatively be asserted that the earliest British eighteenmo did not predate that year.

Can we then with any certainty push the *terminus* back beyond 1726? The earliest eighteenmo recorded in the British Library Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue²⁷ is in fact 1702: Ambrose Rigge, *A Scripture catechism for children* (London, printed and sold by T. Sowle, 1702). And between 1701 and 1725 the BL ESTC files contain 33 eighteenmos in all. 1703, 1717, 1718, 1719 are not represented, and no year is represented by more than three publications (1707, 1710, 1712, 1714 have three). Edinburgh is represented by three publications, Glasgow by three, Belfast by two, Boston (N.E.) by one, Louvain by one and Leipzig by one. Discounting the last three, there are therefore 30 eighteenmos with British imprints dated between 1701 and 1725 known to the ESTC; if the two Bibles are discounted as well²⁸ the figure is 28. Assuming that the ESTC formats have been correctly assigned (as I do) it can confidently be asserted that 1726 is not the *terminus a quo* for the introduction of the eighteenmo into British printing. For the present, 1702 must be granted that distinction, pending an examination of an uncertain number of publications from

the latter part of the Wing period: on the basis of the limited sampling done, and the incidence 1701-29,²⁹ it seems likely that the *terminus* will not be earlier than 1690, and therefore that eighteenmos with British imprints dated earlier are suspect, either in place of printing or in date.

Finally it might be noted that Hubber's observation remains true, that imposition in eighteens in 1726 should still be regarded as experimental: the incidence of, on average, fewer than two publications in eighteenmo in each year of the previous two decades hardly constitutes a tradition. And certainly — on the evidence of the BL ESTC file — Palmer himself had not previously attempted a volume in eighteenmo. Whether or not Palmer had a model in choosing to impose in half-sheets of eighteens must remain an open question.³⁰

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NOTES

¹ 'Eighteenmo in nines: an experimental technique', *BSANZ Bulletin* 7(1983), 183-6 (p. 185).

² Was it that printers realised that they could get 'three half-sheets of twelves' from one sheet as the size of sheets of conventional printing papers continued to increase? Or was the catalyst rather an improvement in press work in certain printing houses which made solid blocks of smaller type consistently legible for the first time? Or what?

³ *BSANZ Bulletin* 4(1979-80), 269-75.

⁴ Items 612-16 in *Historical catalogue of printed editions of the English Bible 1525-1961*, revised and expanded from the edition of T.H. Darlow and H.F. Moule, 1903 by A.S. Herbert (London, British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968) ('DMH').

⁵ Item B2432 in D.G. Wing, *Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English books printed in other countries 1641-1700*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (N.Y., Modern Language Association of America, 1972).

⁶ One account of wholesale mis-dating is Nicholas Pocock, 'Some notices of the Genevan Bible. Part IV', *The Bibliographer* 3(1883), 28-31; Pocock shows that the various Genevan-Tomson Bibles claiming to be printed in London by the Deputies of Christopher Barker in 1599 were in fact printed in Amsterdam in 1633 [probably by J.F. Stam]. There are other references to mis-dating scattered throughout the seventeenth-century sequence of DMH.

⁷ I hope to pursue elsewhere the various problems associated with the '1648' Bibles.

⁸ In 'Compositorial practices and the localization of printed books, 1530-1800', *The Library* 21(1966), 1-45 (Re-issued with addenda and corrigenda as Occasional Publication No. 13 of the Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1979).

⁹ See, for example, C.J. Mitchell, 'Quotation marks, national compositorial habits and false imprints', *The Library* 5(1983), 359-84.

¹⁰ Passing observation suggests that both practices may indeed be peculiar and therefore aids to localization.

¹¹ See the article cited in note 3 and my 'Press figures and format', *BSANZ Bulletin* 7(1983), 109-19, for fuller discussions of the characteristics of eighteenmos.

¹² 'About the size of it', *Journal of Library History* 17(1982), 429-52.

¹³ Wilson (p. vi) writes: 'In this list, without regarding the printer's signatures, or gathering of the sheets, I have generally given to each the designation that a volume of similar dimensions would receive, if published at the present time.' In the absence of any scale even dimensions cannot be reconstructed, let alone bibliographical format.

¹⁴ However, DMH and the catalogues of the British Library and the Cambridge University Library do get it right.

¹⁵ *A Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English books printed abroad, 1475-1640*. Compiled by A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, 2nd edn., revised and enlarged, begun by W.A. Jackson and F.S. Ferguson, completed by K.F. Pantzer, vol. 2 (London, Bibliographical Society, 1975).

¹⁶ See note 5; vol. 2 of the 2nd edn. was published in 1982.

¹⁷ Piece-meal, as a relief from other activities, I must add.

¹⁸ In the proof-sheets, in the set deposited in the Cambridge University Library; I am most grateful to Miss Pantzer for her continued readiness to make available the contents of vol. 1 of the revised STC, publication of which is expected in 1986.

¹⁹ It is not perhaps until one reads long stretches of Wing (as opposed to consulting specific entries) that one becomes aware of how many entries lack any indication at all of format - there are literally hundreds. When the palpable errors (like '9', B3983) and the plausible errors are added the extent of error in format alone is seen to be alarming.

²⁰ In an uncut state it is likely that the watermark would span the upper inner corners of B1-4.

²¹ It is described as an octavo in Harry G. Aldis, *A List of books printed in Scotland before 1700 including those printed furth of the realm for Scottish booksellers* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 1904; photographically reprinted with additions including entries for books published in 1700, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, 1970), entry 3719 (the 1904 edition of Aldis describes it as a twelvemo).

²² There may be several more appearing in vol. 1 of the revised STC, but all the candidates that I am aware of are also Recusant publications printed on the Continent. A.F. Allison and D.M. Rogers, *A Catalogue of Catholic books in English printed abroad or secretly in England 1558-1640* (*Biographical Studies [later Recusant history]* 3(1956), nos. 3-4; reprinted 1964 for Wm. Dawson, London), record as eighteenmos two items not in the original STC in the A-H sequence:

A&R 28 S. Omers, for Iohn Heigham [by George Seutin?], 1624.

A&R 269 [S. Omer, Eng. coll. press.] 1634.

There are two A&R eighteenmos entries for items in the original STC — both recorded there as twelvemos: 47 (=STC 954/942) and 215 (=STC 4871). In addition there are two A&R eighteenmos which are contradicted by the new STC: 532 (=STC 17506.5, twentyfourmo in sixes) and 649 (=STC 19937.5, octavo).

²³ On Recusant printing in general see A.C. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose 1559-1582* (London, Sands & Co., [1950]; the second volume, referred to by Allison and Rogers as being 'now in course of preparation' (p. vii), was apparently never published).

²⁴ Charles Mortet, 'Recherches historiques sur le format des livres', *Revue des bibliothèques*, 31(1924), 349-76 (p. 374).

²⁵ Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses; a history and evaluation of the printing and publishing activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp, vol. 2, The Management of a printing and publishing house in Renaissance and Baroque* (Amsterdam, VanGendt, 1972), pp. 161, 168.

²⁶ I am pleased to be able to record my debt to Mr. Paul Morgan of Oxford, who checked for me the Bodleian exemplars of L2350 and L2588 (both 1671), confirming that Wing's 'sixes' are undoubtedly twelvemos: they both have horizontal chain lines, with half the watermark in the upper outer margin of \$4 or \$6 — i.e. they appear to be half sheets of duodecimo, imposed for work and turn (see Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford, 1972), fig. 59).

²⁷ I am most grateful to Dr. Robin Alston for searching the ESTC data base for me and supplying the information reported here.

²⁸ Small Bibles are *ipso facto* suspect; in addition to the two Edinburgh editions in the ESTC (1715/16, DMH 941; 1722, ?DMH 963, '12^{mo}') there are two London editions of 1699 (DMH 850 and 851, both probably printed abroad) and an Oxford of 1720 (DMH 955).

²⁹ To the 28 (or 30) are to be added one each for 1726 (the Leusden *Liber Psalmorum* described by Hubber), 1727 and 1729 (another Edinburgh Bible) — an average of one a year.

³⁰ I had wondered whether one of the two 1688 editions of Leusden might have served as model for Palmer. But Dr. Mervyn Jannetta — to whom I am most grateful for this assistance — has confirmed that the exemplars in the British Library are both twelvemos.

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