New sources prove a Frenchman was one of the translators of the King James Bible
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New research has shed light on the translators who worked on the first edition, with King James commissioning a renowned French scholar, Isaac Casaubon, who was visiting London at the time, to work on the final revision of the translation.

Dr. Nicholas Hardy, University of Birmingham said: "The sources show us that the translation was not just an English affair. Casaubon was a Frenchman who had only just arrived in London, and could barely speak or write English."

"Instead, he corresponded and conversed with the other translators in Latin, the common language of scholars in Europe at the time."

The King James Bible was drafted by more than forty translators, divided into 'companies' working on separate sections of the Bible. The companies then sent delegates to London to revise the whole translation before it was printed.

But the few documents that survived from the drafting and revision stages told us almost nothing about how the translators actually worked with one another.

Now Dr. Nicholas Hardy, University of Birmingham, has found three new sources—including Casaubon's work on the translation, which had previously gone unnoticed by scholars for 400-years— in both the British Library, in London, and the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford.

These sources are the first new discoveries of their kind for half a century and led to the discovery of the Frenchman's involvement in the translation.

Dr. Hardy's discoveries include a printed copy of the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, as well as a set of three unpublished letters between Casaubon and another of the translators John Bois, discussing difficult elements of the translation.

The third discovery was that of Isaac Casaubon's notebooks in the Bodleian, where they have been since the 1670s. In one of these notebooks the researcher found records of conversations which Casaubon had with another translator, Andrew Downes, about further problems associated with the translation.

The discoveries brings the number of known sources associated with the translation of the King
James Bible up to seven, enabling us to learn a lot more about how the King James Bible was translated.

Dr. Hardy, University of Birmingham added: "Casaubon was regarded as the world's most accomplished scholar of ancient languages, and the translators consulted him because they were still dealing with a lot of unresolved problems in the original texts which they were translating from.

"These new sources show us how complex those problems were, and how strongly the translators could disagree with each other about how to solve them. For example, one of the toughest questions they faced was about the relationship between parts of the Old Testament that survived only in Greek and Latin, usually known as the 'apocryphal' books, and the parts that survived in Hebrew.

"Casaubon was there to help the translators deal with issues like this, but they did not always agree with the solutions he put forward."

Dr. Hardy has just published an edition and translation of the correspondence between Bois and Casaubon, as well as an extensive discussion of their context and the other relevant sources, in a contribution to a collection of essays on the making of the King James Bible.

He is currently writing a book-length study of the King James Bible for Princeton University Press.

- Hardy's work on Bois's Old Testament led him to his second discovery. This was a set of three unpublished letters, held in the British Library since the early nineteenth century, which Bois exchanged with another translator while he was revising the translation in London. Bois's correspondent was Isaac Casaubon, a renowned French scholar who was visiting London. Casaubon was not previously known to have been involved in the translation. Bois wrote to Casaubon with several queries about specific passages which he and his colleagues had struggled to translate, and Casaubon replied to each one.

- For the third discovery Hardy returned to the Bodleian Library, in Oxford, where Casaubon's notebooks have been since the 1670s. In one of these notebooks, he found records of conversations which Casaubon had with another translator, Andrew Downes, about further problems of translation which he did not discuss with Bois, covering the New Testament as well as the Apocrypha.