BRIAN WALTON
Printed Book, 1655
Courtesy of Tisch Library Special Collections, Tufts University

This Introduction served as a reference tool for readers of the London Polyglot Bible (literally, “in many tongues or languages”) published by the Anglican priest Brian Walton. Polyglot publications, including the so-called Genoa Psalter also included in this exhibition, were expensive undertakings that required the collaboration of scholars, type cutters, clerics, and patrons. Walton included alphabets of the nine languages printed in the Polyglot as well as explanations on how to vocalize foreign characters and words. The book is organized from back to front and numbered accordingly. Page 84 shows an excerpt from the Koran in Persian (Chapter 5, Sura 58). The Persian text, read from right to left, reads in English: “And when you call to prayer, they take it in ridicule and amusement. That is because they are a people who do not use reason.” The Latin transliterations follow a different pattern; although the sentences are written from right to left, each word is spelled from left to right. Thus, as the reader progressed through the various languages, he or she acted out multiple identities and competencies required to navigate the early modern Mediterranean world.

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