

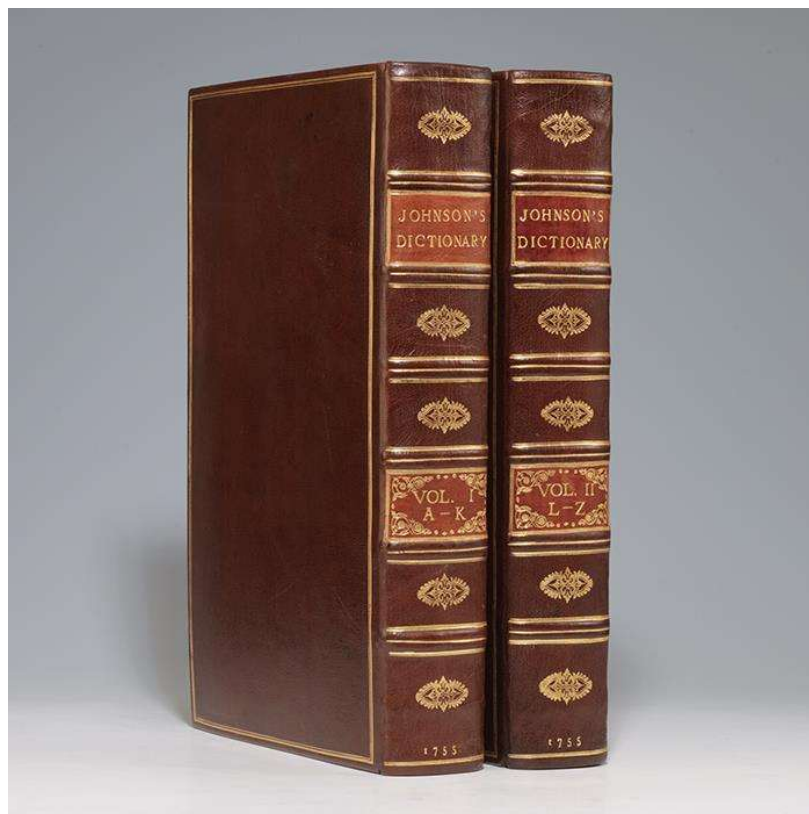
“Samuel Johnson’s First Great Dictionary of the English Language”, First Edition (1755), A Monumental Achievement

Curated by Stephen A. Batman

Tuesday, September 30, 2025

Summary of this Particular Rare First Edition

Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language, 1755



A
DICTIONARY
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE:
IN WHICH
The WORDS are deduced from their ORIGINALS,
AND
ILLUSTRATED in their DIFFERENT SIGNIFICATIONS
BY
EXAMPLES from the best WRITERS.
TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,
A HISTORY of the LANGUAGE,
AND
AN ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

By SAMUEL JOHNSON, A.M.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

*Quæ scilicet volumina credideris ferre bonis,
Audibis quæcumque pariter spectare videbunt,
Et sine pudore arces, et hinc inde feruntur
Vesta arces hinc, quæcumque loca credideris,
Et verba illius loca præsentia Vesta:
Omnibus de populo hinc arces, inquit,
Pudor in hinc spectare vocabula verba,
Quæ pectus membra Cæsarum arces Orbem,
Pecus sine istis pectus et Adria videtur.*

REX.

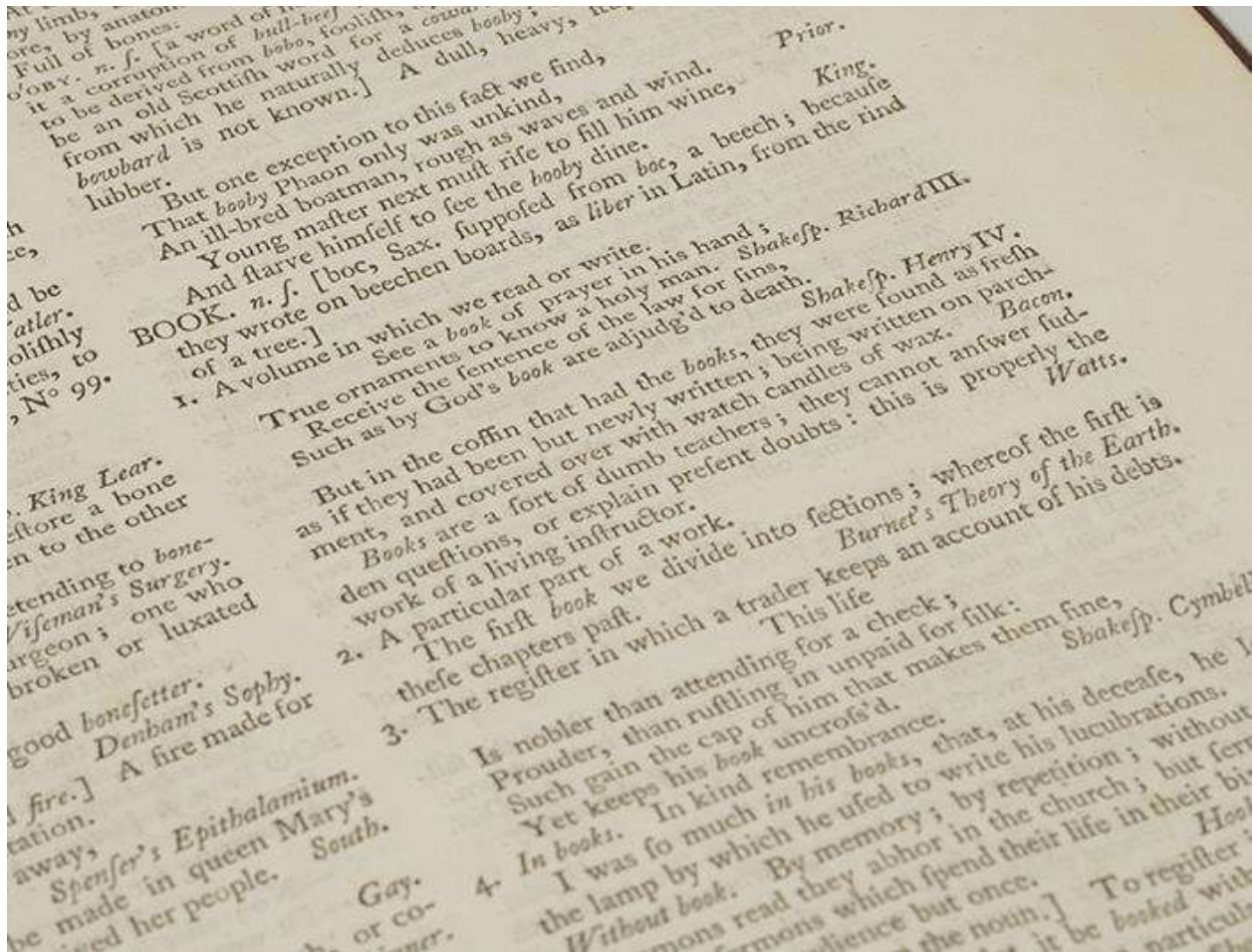
LONDON,

Printed by W. STRAHAN,

For J. and P. Knapton; T. and T. Longman; C. Hitch and L. Hawes;
A. Millar; and R. and J. Dodsley.

MDCCLV.

3



“THE MOST AMAZING, ENDURING AND ENDEARING ONE-MAN FEAT”: 1755 FIRST EDITION OF JOHNSON’S LANDMARK *DICTIONARY*

**A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words are Deduced from their
Originals and Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the best
Writers. To Which Are Prefixed, A History of the Language, And an English Grammar**

First edition of the first great dictionary of the English language, Johnson’s “audacious attempt to tame his unruly native tongue... combining huge erudition with a steely wit and remarkable clarity of thought” (Hitchings, 3)—“Johnson’s writings had, in philology, the effect which Newton’s discoveries had in mathematics.” Nicely bound in handsome period-style full Morocco.

"Johnson's Dictionary made him a superstar. To be sure, there had been dictionaries before his. The difference is that, while these were compiled, Johnson's was written... The glory of the book is that it is also a compendium of English literature, reprinting fine examples of words from the masters, often Shakespeare or Sir Francis Bacon. Johnson sought to 'intersperse with verdure and flowers the dusty deserts of barren philology'" (*Smithsonian Book of Books*).

"Dr. Johnson performed with his Dictionary the most amazing, enduring and endearing one-man feat in the field of lexicography... The preface ranks among Johnson's finest writings... It is the dictionary itself which justifies Noah Webster's statement that Johnson's writings had, in philology, the effect which Newton's discoveries had on mathematics" (PMM 201). Carlyle paid this tribute: "Had Johnson left nothing but his Dictionary, one might have traced there a great intellect, a genuine man" (Baugh et al., 992). Title pages printed in red and black. Courtney & Smith, 54. Grolier 100. Rothschild 1237.

Text near-fine, with just a bit of occasional light foxing; small marginal tear to last leaf, not affecting text, leaf bound in reverse. Period-style bindings are quite handsome.

JOHNSON, Samuel. A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words are deduced from their Originals and Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the best Writers. To Which Are Prefixed, A History of the Language, And an English Grammar. London: Printed by W. Strahan, for J. & P. Knapton, et al., 1755. Two volumes. Thick folio (11 by 17 inches), period-style full brown Morocco, elaborately gilt-decorated spines, raised bands, red Morocco spine labels. Each volume housed in a custom clamshell box.