

THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

PERIODICAL FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BIBLE TRANSLATORS

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Editorial Comment

The importance of English as the major missionary language in the world has been increasingly recognised of late. Surveys of theological education in Africa and of Christian literature in India have underlined the fact that any marked raising of the standards in the training of the ministry in these countries will almost certainly involve an extension of the use of English and not a curtailment. Throughout Australasia, and especially in New Guinea where there are no fewer than four hundred distinct vernaculars and dialects in use, it is increasingly clear that the only ultimate solution to the problem of communication is the general adoption of English which, even now, is the major lingua franca; while from Indonesia we learn that the Government has recently adopted its use as the second language. For a very long time it has been known at Bible Society headquarters that for the great majority of Bible translators English was the indispensable means of getting near to the original texts of Scripture. Not only have the standard English texts provided the basis for many versions, but nearly all the commentaries and exegetical material used by translators have been in that language. In this age of version making, almost every new English version has been greeted with the greatest of interest, and wherever else these versions may be found, most of them will almost certainly make their way to the tables and studies of translation and revision committees.

These considerations, among others, have led the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society to make a decision which we believe will be of the utmost importance to readers of this journal. Helpful as many of these modern versions are, not one of them has been made with the special needs of translators in mind. While it is obviously true that in every instance the translator has tried to set forth the Greek text in clear, intelligible English, most of them would seem to have been prepared for a particular constituency. The fine new Revised Standard Version, current today in America and other parts of the English-speaking world, is obviously directed to the needs of the church of America. It remains a lineal descendant of the English Authorised Version. Nor is it very difficult to a discerning reader to see what effect this approach has upon the many individual translators who have tried their hands in recent years. The particular constituency which concerns the Bible Societies, however, is one whose needs and demands are of a very special nature. We are

thinking of the ever-increasing number of nationals in India, Africa, S.E. Asia and the islands of the Pacific who are being called to shoulder greater responsibilities than ever before in the matter of translation and revision. In many important revision projects today, the initiative rests with nationals whereas the missionary members of the committee act in a secondary, though very important, capacity. Furthermore, there are certain areas, notably in Assam and Burma and possibly in Formosa, where, if further pioneer work is to be done at all, it must be done through national translators working virtually alone, for missionary support may no longer be available.

It is for these various groups that the British and Foreign Bible Society has now authorised the preparation of a new version of the New Testament. It is to be regarded primarily as an instrument for translation into other languages and this will condition its style and format. It will be produced in diglot form with the Greek of the Bible Society's new edition of the Greek New Testament, page for page with the new English translation. The latter will be prepared by three panels. The first will consist of experienced missionary translators who have had a lifetime of experience and service in different parts of the world. It will be their responsibility to prepare drafts and agree on the form of English which, in their opinion, will be intelligible to the educated national in the area with which they are familiar. There will be no artificial 'word counts' and no suggestion of a basic vocabulary. The safeguard for intelligibility will be simply the consensus of opinion of this group of responsible and competent missionary scholars. When their drafts are agreed, they will be submitted to a second panel of some sixty or more missionary consultants in all parts of the world. The final draft, amended as may be necessary, will then be submitted to a third panel of New Testament scholars whose responsibility will be to commend the version for accuracy to the General Committee of the Society. Intelligibility and style obviously come foremost in the general terms of reference, but the third important feature of the version will be that, unlike most other English translations, it will deliberately draw attention to the various nuances and ambiguities of the Greek text. The translator's attention will then be drawn to the available literature on these passages and the responsibility for deciding the form and content of his own vernacular version will thus be left to him and his committee.

A second series of notes will deal with the various Biblical terms which usually defy translation into very many other languages. These are, of course, mostly social, cultural and religious terms which belong peculiarly to the context of the Bible. The various books will be published as they are ready and work on Mark's Gospel has now begun. It is hoped that very shortly three teams of draft translators will be at work on different sections of the New Testament, a method which should help considerably to expedite the work.

We give this preliminary notice because we believe that many of our readers will see in this new project a valuable and significant addition to the many aids to translators which various Bible Societies have furnished in the past. It should also be seen as an earnest of the desire of the Bible Societies to support in a new spirit of realism, the many who have sought

this special kind of assistance for so long. Much more will be heard of this new spirit of realism in the days to come.

The Origin and Nature of the Chief Printed Arabic Bibles

John A. Thompson

Part II

II. The Propaganda Version

Title: *Biblia Sacra Arabica sacrae congregationis de propaganda fide iussu edita ad usum ecclesiarum orientalium: additis e regione Bibliis Latinis Vulgatis*. 3 vols. Rome: Typis eiusdem Sacrae Congregat. de Propaganda Fide, 1671.

A. Origin of the Propaganda Version

Several influences led to the publishing of a new Arabic Bible by the Roman Catholic Congregation de Propaganda Fide in Rome. Certainly one influence was the final union of the Arabic-speaking Maronites with the Roman Church in the 16th century, and the establishment of a Maronite College in Rome strengthened this relationship. A new Arabic Bible was needed to replace the variety of translations used by the Maronites with a uniform and complete version conforming to the Latin Vulgate. This contact with the Maronites showed the need for missionary propaganda in the Near East, in which a printed Bible would be a great aid. Gregory XIII (Pope 1572-1585) urged the project and the procuring of Arabic Biblical manuscripts in preparation for such an edition. The proposal in 1622 in the Congregation to carry out the editing of an Arabic Bible was in part stimulated by the publication of the Dutch Protestant scholar, Thomas Erpenius, of an Arabic New Testament in 1616 and an Arabic Pentateuch in 1622.

In 1622 the Papal Nuncio appointed four men to take up preparations for an Arabic Bible. The chairman of the committee was Sergius Risius (*Sarkis ibn Mūsā al-Ruzzī*), Maronite Archbishop of Damascus. Risius came of a leading church family in Syria and had studied in Rome. He was in charge of the work till his death in 1638. With his own hand he copied most of one of the MS. used for this Bible, Casantense arab. carsh. 2 (no. 2108). Another Maronite member was Victorinus Scialac Accurensis (*Nasrallah Shalaq al-Aqūrī*), who taught Arabic and Syriac in Rome and helped to bring out an Arabic Psalter in Rome in 1614. He died in 1635. Father Hilarion Rancati, a Cistercian, was later Abbot General of that order. The Franciscan, Thomas Obicini de Novara, had been a missionary in Syria and the Custodian of the Holy Land. It was he who submitted the plan for the Bible to the Congregatio in 1622.