

different individuals will pit their 'authorities' against one another in endless debate. Some will be favoured because of names long hallowed by past association, others because they are the latest thing from the press, some because they represent particular schools of thought and yet others because they support certain doctrinal or theological positions.

The discriminating translator will probably learn in time to evaluate all the commentators for their particular virtues or vices and use them accordingly. But how does one learn to discriminate and what really constitutes a 'good' commentary for the translator's purposes? It may be said at once that very few, if any, of the standard commentaries have paid any special regard to the peculiar problems which the translator and reviser has to face in the fields of linguistics or cultural anthropology. This type of commentary is yet to be produced and in time it may well fall to the Bible Societies to sponsor it. Some commentaries, still fairly widely used, are out of date in their information on the Greek and Hebrew text as they ante-date the significant textual discoveries of the twentieth century. That is not to say that all such commentaries are completely useless, but it does mean that on textual matters they cannot be wholly trusted. And where exegesis is dependent on a right understanding of the text, this obviously can be a serious matter.

We believe that the Rev. C. K. Barrett's series of articles on the subject of commentaries in general will be of very considerable value to our readers, not only by making more widely known what is available, but in helping to assess this whole field of Biblical literature from the translator's point of view. It is a subject of the utmost importance and we hope that Mr. Barrett's treatment of it will elicit further enquiry and comment in due course.

The Origin and Nature of the Chief Printed Arabic Bibles

John A. Thompson

Part III

III. The Smith-Van Dyck Version

Title: *Al-kitāb al-muqaddas ay kutub al-'ahd al-qadim wa al-'ahd al-jadid, qad turjima hadīth min al-lughah al-'ibrāniyyah wa al-lughah al-yūnāniyyah*. Beirut: American Press, 1865.

A. Origin of the Smith-Van Dyck Version

This version might be called a result of the world-wide surge of the Protestant missions in the 19th century, which carried missionaries of the American Board to Syria in 1819. One of the impulses to the production of the Smith-Van Dyck Version was the unsatisfactory nature of the Propaganda edition pointed out above. Much of the credit for

this version should be attributed to the linguistic ability and industry of the two American editors, Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Alen Van Dyck. Their work would not have been possible without the collaboration of Syrian scholars, who were leaders in the renaissance of classical Arabic literature. This literary renaissance was a circumstance which made the revision of the Arabic Bible imperative. The printers, the American Press in Beirut, combined high standards of exactness with close contact with the Arabic-reading public. Another organization which helped to make this Arabic Bible possible was the American Bible Society, which provided funds and also arranged for the electrotyping in New York of plates for a popular edition.

The basis for this new Arabic Bible was laid by Eli Smith, a man equipped by ability and experience for the task. He was born in Northford, Connecticut, in 1801 and graduated from Yale College in 1821 and from Andover Seminary in 1826. He was first sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Congregational) to Malta in 1826, but he transferred to Beirut in 1827. Smith had opportunities for extensive travel throughout the Near East. With Harris Grey Otis Dwight he travelled through parts of Asia Minor, Armenia, Georgia, and Persia, a survey which resulted in the founding of a Protestant mission in Armenia. Most noteworthy were his journeys in 1838 and 1852 with his former professor, Edward Robinson, covering Sinai and Palestine, and parts of Syria. Smith's perfect command of spoken Arabic and intimate knowledge of the people were important factors in Robinson's findings, which are the basis for the modern study of the historical geography of the Holy Land. His linguistic abilities included both ancient and modern languages. He kept in touch with some of the leading German Arabists, especially Professor Emil Roediger of Halle. The Biblical and linguistic library assembled by Smith was of great aid in editing the Arabic Bible. Furthermore Dr. Smith, as head of the American Press in Beirut, had practical knowledge of the problems of Arabic printing. A colleague wrote the following significant comments on Eli Smith: "To him every pursuit was subsidiary to a faithful translation of the Word of God into the Arabic language . . . His idea of perfection was so high that it was difficult for him ever to be satisfied with his work".³⁴ In 1890, Daniel Coit Gilman, first President of John Hopkins University, provided a memorial plaque which is now on the wall of the room where Smith and later Van Dyck worked on the Protestant Arabic Bible.³⁵

Eli Smith was fortunate to have as Syrian associates in the editing of the Arabic Bible two of the leading figures of the Arabic literary renaissance. One of these, *Buṭrus al-Bustāni*, was born of a Maronite family in 1819. At the Patriarchal school of the Monastery of Ain Warka he studied Arabic grammar, Latin, Syriac, and Italian. From the study of the New Testament he was led to Protestant doctrines, and at the

³⁴ H. H. Jessup, *Fifty-three Years in Syria*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910, Vol. I, p. 56.

³⁵ In addition to Jessup's work, pp. 51-57, see regarding the chief facts of Smith's life W. F. Albright, "Eli Smith", in *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone, Vol. XVII, New York: Scribner's, 1935, pp. 257-258.

age of twenty he fled from the monastery and took refuge with Eli Smith. He became one of the original members of the Beirut Protestant Church and served as an elder for many years, taking part in preaching and in Sunday School teaching. He conducted a flourishing school, and one of his private students was Van Dyck. In addition, he edited several Arabic journals, a daily, a weekly, and a monthly. His literary products included the translation of school books into Arabic. His two greatest works, in addition to his aid on the Arabic Bible, were *Muḥiṭ al-muḥiṭ*, an Arabic dictionary in 2 vols., Beirut, 1867-1870, and *Dā'irat al-ma'ārif*, an Arabic encyclopedia, of which 6 vols. appeared, beginning in 1876, before his death in 1883.³⁶

Smith's other Syrian collaborator on the Arabic Bible was *Nasif al-Yāziji*. He was born in 1800 of a Catholic family. Graf calls him the most respected Arabic Christian writer and scholar of the 19th century. The titles of his works are given in five pages in Graf,³⁷ and cover such subjects as Philology; Essays on Style, Rhetoric, and Poetry; Poems, and Varia. These works prepared the way for the renaissance of Arabic literature in the 19th century. Sheikh Nasif taught both at the school of his friend, Butrus al-Bustāni and at the Syrian Protestant College (now the American University) in Beirut. Among his students was Cornelius Van Dyck.

Some landmarks in the progress of the work under Smith and his associates were as follows. In 1837 the missionaries of the American Board in Syria decided to prepare a new Arabic Version, in "the best modern form of spoken Arabic".³⁸

Eli Smith devoted some time to the preparation of a new font of Arabic type for the projected Bible. This was no mean undertaking, since a complete vowelled font of Arabic type requires about 1,800 pieces, compared with English about 100. Smith collected samples of calligraphy from various countries in the Near East and prepared large master copies of the letters and their combinations. With these copies he set off for Germany to have the type made, but his boat was wrecked off the coast of Karamania, and Smith lost all his baggage including the models for the type. He returned to Beirut and reproduced the manuscript copies of the letters. With the technical aid of Homan Hallock, the head printer of the American Press in Beirut, the new font of type was completed in 1843. This font has been admired for its clarity and its conformity to the best Arabic penmanship.

In 1844 Dr. Smith reported to the Syria Mission on the desirability of a new Arabic translation of the Bible, and a committee was appointed to study the matter, including both Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck, then only twenty-six years old. In 1847 the Mission decided to begin the new translation and named Eli Smith to head the undertaking. An appeal for funds was sent to America "to give the Word of God to forty million

³⁶ On *al-Bustāni* see Jessup, *op. cit.* Vol. II, pp. 483-486, and Graf, IV, pp. 326-327.

³⁷ Vol. IV, pp. 319-323.

³⁸ Franklin E. Hoskins, "A Chapter in Bible History. First Font Reference Arabic Bible", three separate pages accompanying the Revised Reference New Testament published in Beirut by the American Press in 1912, p. 1.

perishing sinners",³⁹ to use the words of the Syrian committee headed by Smith.

By 1850 the translation of Genesis was completed and one hundred trial copies were printed. In 1854 Smith submitted to the Mission the Pentateuch and part of the New Testament. By the time of Smith's death from cancer in 1857 he had completed the printing of Genesis and Exodus 1-39, and Matthew 1-16, and he left manuscript translations of the entire New Testament, and of the Pentateuch, Isaiah 1-52, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum.

The basic texts followed by Smith were the Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament and the Greek for the New. Other versions both ancient and modern were consulted. For the New Testament Smith made his own revised Greek text, selecting from Tischendorf, Lachmann, Tregelles and Alford. When H. H. Jessup gave his new copy of Alford to Smith, another missionary humorously remarked that the Arabic translation of the Bible had thereby been delayed, for now Smith would revise the whole New Testament again. Since the policy of the American Bible Society was to follow the *Textus Receptus*, Smith's eclectic New Testament text had to be revised by Van Dyck.

Smith's method was painstaking. Buṭrus al-Bustānī would make the first draft. Smith would then revise the translation by comparison with the original. Finally Sheikh Naṣif would go over the material, making stylistic changes. The result was printed and copies were sent to other missionaries in Arabic-speaking countries and to some German scholars. Not only the learned were consulted, but common men also were asked to indicate words which were not clear to them. Then Smith went over the returned suggestions and prepared a new copy for the final printing.

One can understand why Van Dyck always insisted that Smith should be given due honour for providing an "invaluable" basis for the completion of the work.⁴⁰ Eli Smith may be compared to Moses, who established the principles on which to proceed in possessing the Promised Land, but lived only through the conquest of the lesser portion east of the Jordan.

The one who played the part of Joshua in completing this Arabic Bible was Cornelius Van Alen Van Dyck. He was born in Kinderhook, New York, in 1818 and studied medicine in Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, from which he graduated in 1839. In the same year he was appointed as a missionary by the American Board, and he arrived in Beirut in 1840.

Van Dyck was privileged to study Arabic with some of the leading literary figures of Syria: Buṭrus al-Bustānī (who became a life-long friend), Naṣif al-Yāzījī, and the poet, Yūsuf al-'Asīr. A fellow-missionary wrote of Van Dyck's mastery of Arabic as follows: "He soon mastered the best productions of Arabic poetry and literature, and by his wonderful memory could quote from the poetry, proverbs, history, and science of the Arabs in a way which completely fascinated the Syrian people. They

³⁹ Hoskins, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁰ Isaac Hall, on the basis of a letter from Van Dyck, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* XIII (1889), p. xlvi.

said, 'He is one of us'. He had no peer among the foreigners in his knowledge of Arabic language and literature".⁴¹ A Syrian poet told Professor Isaac Hall, "Dr. Van Dyck had Arabic at his tongue's and finger's ends" before he began to translate the Bible.⁴²

Van Dyck's missionary life was amazingly varied. He served as a medical doctor; as a professor in schools, Seminary, College, and Medical School; as final editor of the Arabic Bible; as manager of the American Press; and also as a preacher. While he was in America superintending the electrotyping of the plates for the Arabic Bible, he taught Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary in New York, which offered him a professorship. He declined, saying that he had left his heart in Syria. In 1890 on the Jubilee of his arrival in Beirut, among the gifts to him was a bookcase containing all the Arabic books he had written, numbering twenty-six and covering many sciences as well as fiction and theology. In 1891 the Greek Hospital of St. George in Beirut erected a marble bust in honour of his fifty years of medical service in Syria. The most enduring monument to Cornelius Van Dyck is the Protestant Arabic Bible.⁴³

The chief Syrian collaborator with Van Dyck in the completion of the Protestant Arabic Bible was the Muslim Sheikh, *Yūsuf ibn 'Aql al-Asīr al-Ḥusaynī*. He was born in Sidon and studied in Damascus and for seven years at the al-Azhar University in Cairo. He held government positions in Beirut and Istanbul. Then he returned to Beirut and taught for many years at the Madrasat al-Ḥikma of the Maronites. His chief publication was a volume of poems.⁴⁴ Van Dyck preferred a learned Muslim as an assistant because he would have no preconceived idea of what a Biblical passage ought to mean and also because he would be more exactly acquainted with classical Arabic usage.⁴⁵

After Van Dyck was appointed to take Eli Smith's place as editor of the Arabic Bible in 1857, the work progressed regularly till it was completed in 1865. Van Dyck followed in general the method used by his predecessor. Sometimes he delayed printing in order to receive the criticisms of Roediger of Halle and Fleischer of Leipzig. The revision of the New Testament according to the Textus Receptus was completed in 1860, and it was printed in the same year. The translation of the Old Testament was finished in 1864, and the printing and binding of the Old Testament with the New took place in 1865. A Service of thanksgiving was held by Syrians and Americans at the American Press.

⁴¹ Jessup, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 107.

⁴² "The Arabic Bible of Drs. Eli Smith and Cornelius V. A. Van Dyck", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* XI (1885): p. 285.

⁴³ For further details about Van Dyck see Jessup, *op. cit.* Vol. I, pp. 104-111; W. L. Wright, Jr., "Van Dyck, Cornelius Van Alen", in *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone, Vol. XIX, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 186.

⁴⁴ On Sheikh Yūsuf and his publications see Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, Zweiter Supplementband, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1938, p. 759.

⁴⁵ Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

A Syrian, *Ibrāhīm Sarkīs*, composed an Arabic hymn in honour of the occasion.⁴⁶

Cornelius Van Dyck's work on the Arabic Bible did not stop with 1865. He kept the first completed printed Bible and noted in its margins all the corrections and changes in subsequent printings. In 1866-1867 he was in America superintending the making of electroplates under the sponsorship of the American Bible Society. The British and Foreign Bible Society was furnished a copy of these plates. Since he became a member of the committee in Syria for a new Arabic translation of the Bible in 1844, Dr. Van Dyck could be said to have spent about fifty years on the Arabic Bible by the time of his death in 1895.

The chief changes in this Bible since Van Dyck have been in the Reference editions. Franklin E. Hoskins brought out an edition with revised references in 1916, the Fourth Edition of the First Font Reference Bible. The 1949 printing of the Second Font Reference Bible has a slightly different format.

B. Nature of the Smith-Van Dyck Version

1. Format

The first Reference Bible published in 1865 is a large quarto volume. The Old Testament occupies 1534 pages, and the New 509. Vowel signs are indicated only in occasional cases of possible ambiguity. Words not represented in the original and added for clarity are printed in smaller type, and brackets enclose New Testament passages not in the oldest manuscripts. Variant readings and variant renderings are printed at the bottom of the pages. The chapters are divided into paragraphs, putting this Arabic Bible ahead of the English King James editions of the time. Outlines precede each chapter in smaller print. In many places, especially in the historical books the dates proposed by Archbishop Ussher (17th century) are on the margin.

The octavo edition electroplated in New York in 1867 is still reprinted for popular use. It is a much smaller volume, without references, chapter outlines, or variants, and supplied words are not differentiated. Though this edition has only the Bible text, yet it is completely vowelled, an advantage especially to the common man. The Old Testament in this edition has 1358 pages, and the New 422.

In the Fourth Edition of the First Font Reference Bible of 1916 the references were revised by Franklin E. Hoskins of the American Press in Beirut. Hoskins followed the references used in the English Revision of 1880 and in the American Standard Version of 1901. Parentheses (instead of brackets) are used around what was lacking in the oldest manuscripts. The Old Testament occupies 1068 pages and the New 357.⁴⁷

The 1949 printing of the Second Font Reference Bible has no chapter outlines. The Old Testament has 1062 pages, and the New 358.

⁴⁶ Jessup, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 76.

⁴⁷ On this revision of the Arabic Reference Bible see the work of Hoskins cited above and also Charles C. Torrey, "A New Edition of the Arabic Bible", in *The American Journal of Theology*, XXIII (1919): 105-107.

2. Texts Used in the Smith-Van Dyck Version

In contradistinction to the Polyglot and Propaganda editions, whose basic texts are bewilderingly heterogeneous, the Smith-Van Dyck Version consistently follows received texts in the original languages. In the Old Testament this is of course the Massoretic edition in Hebrew and Aramaic. Occasionally the ancient versions are used as the basis for variant readings in the footnotes of the reference editions. In the New Testament the text followed, according to the policy of the American Bible Society at that time, was the *Textus Receptus*. Isaac Hall ascertained that Van Dyck used the edition of this text published by Mill. Dr. Van Dyck realized the shortcomings of this text, and with the permission of the Bible Society he indicated many variant readings in the footnotes of the Reference Bible. He noted especially variants found in the Syriac and in other Arabic versions.⁴⁸

Following the Massoretic Hebrew and the Greek *Textus Receptus* necessitated many textual departures from the Propaganda edition. For example, in Ruth 1 : 1-22 Smith-Van Dyck differs from the Propaganda in the basic text in thirty-three places; in Ephesians 1 : 1-23 Smith-Van Dyck differs in eleven places in the text translated.

3. Quality of the Translation.

In the same chapters Smith-Van Dyck differs from the Propaganda edition in vocabulary and style. In Ruth 1 : 1-22 about eighty-five such changes are made, and in Ephesians 1 : 1-23 there are ninety-three changes. All agree that most of these changes are a great advance in both clarity and in classical standards of Arabic.

Noteworthy are some comments by the two chief editors on the style of their translation. In 1856 Smith wrote to Roediger that he always attempted to remain true to classical Arabic usage, but also to use only that part of the old language which is understood by the unlearned.⁴⁹ Van Dyck pointed out that an effort was made to vary the style of the Arabic according to the style of the original. In the "historical and didactic parts the style is pure and simple, but in the poetical parts the style necessarily takes on the higher standard of the original".⁵⁰

C. *Evaluation of the Smith-Van Dyck Version*

A British Protestant wrote of this version that it is "recognized to be one of the finest of all Bible translations, a standard work which has taken its place among the literary treasures of that beautiful language [Arabic]".⁵¹

An unfavourable Roman Catholic view is expressed in a letter by *Yūsuf al-Marīd*, Bishop of 'Arqā and Delegate of the Maronite Patriarch. He characterizes the Smith-Van Dyck Version as "full of defects and corruption, cutting off from it [the Divine Book] some holy books,

⁴⁸ Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

⁴⁹ "Aus einem Briefe von Dr. E. Smith, Beirut, d. 9 Mai, 1856", in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, X (1856): 813.

⁵⁰ Jessup, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 75.

⁵¹ R. H. Kilgour, "Arabic Versions of the Bible", in *The Moslem World*, VI, (1916): 388.

denying them canonicity contrary to the doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church and its witness preserved from mistake and error".⁵²

High praise for this version has come from both Orthodox and Catholic scholars. *Ghubreen Jebara*, a learned Greek ecclesiastic of Beirut, spoke as follows in a public address in 1865: "But for the American Missionaries, the Word of God had well-nigh perished out of the language: but now through the labours of Dr. Eli Smith and Dr. Van Dyck, they have given us a translation so pure, so exact, so clear, and so classical, as to be acceptable to all classes and all sects".⁵³

The Catholic scholar J. F. Rhode refers to "the Protestant edition of Smith-Van Dyck" as "justly praised for its simple language and popular tone".⁵⁴

A very fair and generous tribute comes from the Catholic Dr. Georg Graf, the doyen of Christian-Arabic scholars: "the translation of the Hebrew of the Old Testament (the 'Apocrypha' was omitted) and of the Greek for the New Testament was done with the greatest care and special concern for maintaining a simple, popular style of speech together with the most exact linguistic correctness".⁵⁵

A Syrian Protestant writes as follows: "This translation . . . is one of the truest and most exact Arabic translations . . . and there is no doubt about its literalness . . . nor of the expression of the spirit of the book in the translation as in the original". At the same time this Protestant pastor admits that some improvements in wording and style could be made and that this version contains some Syrianisms which are not acceptable in Egypt.⁵⁶

Another way to evaluate this version is to test its effect on the spiritual life of people and churches. For almost ninety years the Smith-Van Dyck Version has been faithfully distributed by Bible Societies, by Protestant missions, and by national Protestant churches in the Near East. A survey of the influence of this version in Arabic-speaking lands would be a study in itself. For example, in Egypt, which is best known to the author, the Smith-Van Dyck Version has helped to reform the Coptic Church, has developed a Bible-reading Protestant church, and has been one of the chief instruments in leading non-Christians to know Jesus Christ, the Living Word.

D. Possible Revision of the Smith-Van Dyck Version

Some have been suggesting that the Smith-Van Dyck Version should be extensively revised. Both Smith and Van Dyck, if they were living, would agree that improvements could be made. The New Testament is especially in need of revision from a textual standpoint, because it follows the *Textus Receptus*, which is certainly not the Greek text closest to

⁵² *Al-kitāb al-muqaddas*. Vol. I. Beirut: Matba'ah al-ābā' al-mursalin al-yasū'iyyin, 1876, p. (4).

⁵³ Jessup, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 78.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Graf I, p. 98.

⁵⁶ Ṭrānjān, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 50.

the original. After a study of a proposed revision of Proverbs 4-6 the author approved of thirty-eight minor changes in these three chapters. Some (twenty-eight) of these changes would bring the Arabic closer to the Hebrew, and ten others would be clearer or more modern Arabic. A Cairo committee of which the author was a member, suggested eighty-six changes in the book of Ephesians. The textual changes in this book to conform to Nestle's Greek text number forty-one, of which nineteen were anticipated in the marginal readings or parentheses of the Smith-Van Dyck Reference edition. The proposed improvements in interpretation and style are forty-five, of which only two are found on the margin of the Reference edition.

On the other hand, the Protestant and some non-Protestant people of the Near East have come to love the Smith-Van Dyck Version as the King James is loved in the English-speaking world or as Luther's translation among the Germans. Some national Christian leaders fear that an extensive revision would only confuse both Christians and non-Christians. Decisions regarding revision will require not only vision and linguistic knowledge, but also practical wisdom.

(To be continued)

New Testament Commentaries

I. Classical Commentaries

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In this series of articles I assume readers who are concerned with the serious, and critical, study of the New Testament, and I have accordingly referred not at all to purely 'devotional' (or to very elementary) commentaries; though I should not for a moment agree that there is any opposition, or indeed any ultimate discontinuity, between a truly critical and a truly devotional reading of the Bible. All the books mentioned in this article will, I believe, in various ways and in various degrees, help those who use them to hear the Word of God in the Scriptures.

Many of the best New Testament commentaries are contained in series. These will be frequently mentioned, and it will be convenient here to describe some of them briefly, and to give the abbreviations by which they will be referred to.

The International Critical Commentary (I.C.C., published by T. and T. Clark) was founded towards the close of the last century. Since then volumes have appeared at intervals. The New Testament is complete apart from Acts, on which no commentary has so far been published. Use of the Greek text and a critical approach are presupposed. The volumes vary greatly in quality. It would perhaps be a good thing if they were progressively brought up to date, like those of some of the great German series shortly to be mentioned.