

## BOOK REVIEWS

de Waard, Jan and Eugene A. Nida: **A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth**. Helps for Translators, Vol. XV. London: United Bible Societies 1973.

This is the first of the Translator's Handbooks on a book of the Old Testament, applying the excellent principles of the series to Hebrew after dealing hitherto with Biblical Greek. The choice of *Ruth*, justified by the authors on practical grounds (p. 1), presents at the same time interesting problems for the translator. The Hebrew is generally thought to be late, which means that words and phrases may possibly not bear the meanings they have in the Classical Hebrew of the pre-exilic period, but rather meanings influenced by Mishnaic Hebrew or by Aramaic. Moreover, being what would in the 19th century have been called a bourgeois novel, its tone is more intimate and personal than that of most OT narrative, and it sometimes seems as if the Hebrew author had difficulties in expressing in the generally highflown literary language feelings that typically were couched in a non-literary register. The Bible translator faced with this text may often be at a loss whether to render such phrases into the style that would be used in his own language in ordinary speech or in stories written for entertainment, or to employ the style customary in religious writing, even if this be a "popular" version of such style. Examples of this difficulty are the rhetorical question "Have I yet sons in my womb?" 1.11, and Boaz's greeting to his labourers, "The Lord be with you", 2.4. Both are discussed at length by the authors, but while in the first case they encourage the translator to find a socially appropriate total equivalent in his language, they do not in the second case go as far as to suggest replacing the Hebrew greeting by one that would be used in the target language by a landowner towards his harvest workers. However, with the response "The Lord bless you", they draw attention to the importance of the social context of "bless" in some languages.

As with the previous volumes of the series, the running text is that of TEV (in this case a draft of Stage II), while the comments and suggestions are made entirely on the basis of the Hebrew text. For this purpose the Hebrew text is often rendered literally in the comments and its differences from the TEV version underlined. The present reviewer wonders whether, in view of the fact that Hebrew idiom and syntax differs more from the English of TEV than does Greek, it would not have been worthwhile to give these literal translations as a continuous text side by side with TEV, either in the larger sections or where it is repeated at the head of each verse. In this way TEV would serve as a helpful example of how to deal with the difficulties of the literal version rather than as a temptation to render into the target language sentences that have gone through the filter of transformations required by English and by the special English register adopted by TEV. Quite a few times the comments imply that a particular Hebrew phrase may translate more readily into some languages than it does into English.

The comments deserve the highest praise because of their lucidity, their sensitivity for the *finesses* of Hebrew grammar and style, and for the impressive range of sheer linguistic experience that permeates them. They are

further supported by almost twenty pages of Notes offering justification for renderings and possible alternative renderings, fully presented, with a wealth of bibliographical references. This material is so rich and so well selected, that this Handbook should serve the advanced Bible student and the student of Biblical Hebrew no less than the translator.

In a book for the practical translator, it was unavoidable that the commentators should select a certain way of understanding the Hebrew text and at most hint at others. Thus at 2.20 they have chosen the rendering "May he (Boaz) be blessed by the Lord, *who* keeps His promises to the living and the dead", underlined in TEV by adding "always", and stress that the subject of "keeps" is the Lord, and not Boaz. They are probably right in this, though it would at least have been equally correct to translate אֲשֶׁר

not "who" but "because", and it might be argued that Boaz as subject of "keeping loyalty" would not be out of the question. In 4.12 it would seem that "for it was they who built up the house of Israel" would be preferable to "who built up", for it is hard to conceive that people found it necessary to explain who Leah and Rachel were. In 2.7, where the Hebrew says literally "this her sitting in the house little", TEV and the authors take "house" as referring to a shelter in the field, and render "she stopped to rest for a while in the shelter". The Hebrew phrase is admittedly difficult to account for, but this rendering, apart from pointing out something Boaz must have seen, since he asked about her, suggests that the foreman had to defend himself against suspicion for having her in the shelter. By translating "she seems to spend little time in her own house", the normal meaning of בֵּית

is preserved, and the implied criticism of Ruth sets the rougher servant apart from the kind Boaz. There is, however, little doubt that the editors have acted right in deciding in each case on one definite interpretation of the text, rather than encouraging the older practice of multiplying marginal alternative renderings.

CHAIM RABIN

Phillips, J. B.: **The New Testament in Modern English** (Revised Edition). London: Collins 1972.

In undertaking this review, I am again forcibly reminded of the well-known fact that wisdom is achieved only through experience. In the July 1959 issue of *TBT* my review of the Phillips New Testament was published, and re-reading it today is a humbling and salutary experience. In those innocent days I was much more dogmatic than I am today about what a translator should and should not do. I hope I have become at least a bit less imperfect through the things I have suffered since then, and so it is with a deeper understanding and a much greater appreciation of what is involved that I come to review the Revised Edition.

In the Introduction, Phillips explains why he undertook this new translation, which is based on the UBS Greek New Testament (1966). His statement of what he has done in this new translation is an instructive one, and the whole Introduction should be read by every translator.

How quickly the time has passed, and how many translations of the New