

THE BIBLE IN HUNGARIAN

The author of this review article is editor of *Babel*, the official journal of the International Federation of Translators.

1. **Biblia, Istennek az Ószövetségben és Újszövetségben adott kijelentése.** [Protestant]. Budapest 1971 (issued in 1975). 1282 + 350 pp., 8 maps. Forint 180.
2. **Biblia. Ószövetségi és újszövetségi Szentírás.** [Roman Catholic]. Budapest 1976. 1456 pp., 8 maps, illustrated. Forint 300.
3. Bottyán, János: **A magyar Biblia évszázadai.** [The history of Hungarian Bible translation]. Budapest 1982. 206 pp., illustrated. Forint 128.
4. **Mózes öt könyve és a Haftárák.** [Hebrew text of Pentateuch and Haftoras, with Hungarian translation and commentary by Dr. J. B. Hertz and others]. Budapest 1984. 5 vols.: xx + 544, xiv + 613, xiv + 478, xiv + 484 and xiv + 624 pp., Forint 970.

1.

The traditional Protestant Bible by Gáspár Károli, published in 1590, was stylistically inseparable from the development of Hungarian as a literary language. The new translation has been made by the Hungarian Bible Council in co-operation with the United Bible Societies. The new text still reflects the traditional Hungarian “Bible style”, but anachronisms and some unclear expressions have been eliminated, and some passages re-interpreted. Apart from references to parallel passages, there is no comment, explanation, preface or postface. There is not even any text on the cover, which is of smooth black leather.

The new translation was published by the Press Office of the Synod of the Reformed (Calvanist) Church on the authority of the Hungarian Bible Council. It is the first Hungarian Bible to be formally accepted by all Protestant confessions.

2.

Hungarian Catholics also had their traditional Bible, translated by György Káldi and published in 1626. Perhaps less poetic than Károli, it was written in a more developed form of Hungarian. The 1976 Bible is an entirely new translation, prepared under the stimulus of the Second Vatican Council. The publisher is the Society of Saint Stephen, the Hungarian publishing house of the Apostolic See. In contrast with the 1975 Protestant version, it contains much additional material: a short preface by the chairman of the Hungarian Catholic Board of Bishops, a list of translators, directions for use, and, for each book of the Bible, a historical-critical introduction, and philological (mostly etymological) notes. The translation, which includes the Apocrypha, was based on the original texts, but uses the French Bible de Jérusalem as a model.

The translation has sometimes been criticized for going too far in the direction of common language. For example, the traditional word for “neighbour”, *felebarát*, which breathes a centuries-old biblical atmosphere, has been replaced by *embertárs*, meaning “fellow[-man]”. The maps are borrowed from the Protestant Bible; the 16 photos illustrate the history of the Bible in the world.

3.

János Bottyán's *The Centuries of the Hungarian Bible* includes summaries in English and German; what follows is based on the English summary.

The translation of the Bible into Hungarian began at the time of the nation's conversion to Christianity in the first third of the 10th century, under Stephen I, who was later canonized. The first complete Bible translation was made by two young Franciscans between 1416 and 1440; other orders shared later in the work.

From 1533, humanist scholars and Reformers helped the spread of the Reformation by translations of the scriptures, the complete Bible appearing in 1590. The Psalms were repeatedly translated, both in prose and in verse. Particularly interesting are the so-called Jeremiads, in which the authors paraphrased biblical texts to describe the sufferings of the country under Turkish rule.

The 17th and 18th centuries saw new editions of Károli's translation under the supervision of excellent linguists, with amendments and in a more up-to-date spelling.

By the middle of the 19th century, the critical spirit had extended to the old Bible translations, and revisions of both Károli and Káldi were produced. A New Testament was completed in 1862 by a Nazarene believer, István Kalmár, but not published.

The Old Testament was published in 1907 by the Literary Society of Hungarian Jews. Among individual translations, those of the Psalms by the Catholic priest and poet Sándor Sik (1955), and by Dénes Farkasfalvy (1975), a Hungarian Catholic priest living in Austria, are of special interest, the latter having taken account of modern biblical scholarship, including the Qumran literature.

4.

The Jewish translation of, and commentary on, the Pentateuch and Haftoras is a reprint of the original edition published in 1939, when the Nazi menace was already casting over Hungarian Jews the shadow of future persecution. The main editor, Dr. J. H. Hertz, was chief rabbi of the British Empire. The Hebrew biblical text is that published by the British and Foreign Bible Society; the Hungarian translation is that of 1907, mentioned above, and long out of print. The 1984 reprint of this enormous work is itself a significant publishing event, as was the 1981 facsimile edition of the 1590 Károli Bible. It is good to note that the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities now each have an edition of the Bible to meet their various needs.