

TROUBLESOME TRANSLITERATIONS

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Introduction¹

Was Behemoth really a behemoth? Did Queen Esther have two fathers? Are Tiglat-Pileser and Feglafllassar the same person? Was Noah's son Ham an impudent boor, a shaman, or a thin slice of pork? These are some of the potentially amusing but relevant questions that this paper will touch upon in its examination of the difficulties that transliteration can cause those of us who are involved in the field of Bible translation.

Whereas translation proper attempts to recreate the meaning of a source language term without carrying over its original form, transliteration adheres to the most formal level of equivalence between source and recipient language, being a wholesale import of the spoken or written form of the source language term. As Brinkley Messick eloquently puts it in his 2003 article on transliteration: "While translation tends to leave the other language behind, seemingly eradicating its physical traces, transcription and transliteration actively preserve such traces and, in the process, construct a bridge between two languages, between two worlds, their geographies, temporalities and metaphysics" (Messick 1992, 180).

In principle, a distinction can be made between *transliteration* (graphically-based: source language letter substituted by recipient language letter or combination of letters) and *transcription* (auditory-based: source language sound represented by recipient language letter or combination of letters).² Messick does an able job of differentiating these two formal approaches in his discussion of translation and transliteration from Arabic. In the rest of this article, however, I will not accord much attention to this difference and will use *transliteration* as a general term referring to either auditory- or visually-based correspondence between source and recipient language terms.

1 A condensed version of this paper was presented at the Bible Translation 2011 Conference sponsored by SIL International and the Graduate Institute for Applied Linguistics in October 2011.

2 On p. 244 of his classic work, *Bible Translating* (1947), Eugene Nida offers a mirror image of this definition, with *transliteration* referring to sound-for-sound correspondence and *transcription* to letter-for-letter correspondence. The current article prefers to follow Messick's explanation of the difference between these two terms, based on the standard use of *transcription* in anthropological research to refer to text-recording techniques with unwritten languages (Messick 1992, 181-82).

What types of terms are typically transliterated in Bible translations? As in other types of literary translation, so in Bible translation, “transliterations or transcriptions usually concern key concepts . . . [that] figure centrally in the making of an account” (Messick 1992, 193). These central concepts usually consist of proper names, place names, and important terms that are felt by the translator to be difficult to render into the recipient language without losing or distorting some important component of meaning. Key biblical terms (apart from person and place names) that have been transliterated into many of the European languages³ include:

In the Old Testament (from Hebrew or Hebrew through Greek): Behemoth, cherubim, ephod, Leviathan, Levite, Psalm, Sabbath, Satan, seraphim, Urim and Thummim, etc.

In the New Testament (from Greek): angel, apostle, baptize, Christ, Evangel, Hades, Pharisee, prophet, Sadducee, synagogue, etc.

This list is by no means complete, nor do the various European language translations of the Bible necessarily transliterate exactly the same key terms. For example, English translations use the native Anglo-Saxon “gospel” instead of the transliterated “evangel”/“evangelion” form, while Russian has the native Slavic term *krestit* “christen/baptize/make the sign of the cross” instead of a transliteration of the Greek term *baptizein*.

This brief article cannot, of course, encompass all major issues related to transliteration of terms in Bible translation as a whole. Rather, I will selectively look at certain interesting issues that have arisen with the implementation of transliteration in three languages that I have personally worked with as a Bible translator: English, Russian, and Tuvan. English has a significant tradition of Bible translation dating back to the fourteenth century with John Wyclif, and has seen much continuity over the past several hundred years in how words have been transliterated in Scripture. Thus, the spelling of names found, say, in the English Standard Version of the 2000s is substantially the same as that found in the King James Version of 1611.

The Russian Bible translation tradition also goes back to the Middle Ages with its inception in Church Slavonic translations. The first full translation of the Bible in modern Russian, the Russian Synodal Translation (RST), was finalized in the 1870s and set the standard for the spelling of biblical names. Only very recently have Russian Bible translations started to depart from the RST spelling tradition in favor of a stricter transliteration based on the source language spelling, as was done by the *Sovremennyy russkij perevod* published by the Bible Society in Russia in 2011, or in favor of a spelling system based on an alternate tradition, as was done by the *Vostochnyi perevod* (or Eastern Russian Translation, <http://www.slovocars.org/en/index.php>) of 2003, which is based on the Islamic/Quranic name tradition, prevalent in Central Asia.

³ I am grateful to Stefano Cotrozzi for helping me compile this list using his personal knowledge of the Bible in a broad range of European languages.

The third language, Tuvan, is a Turkic language spoken by about a quarter of a million native speakers in the Russian Federation, mostly in south Siberia, and about 30,000 more in Mongolia and China (Lewis 2009). The first Scriptures ever published in Tuvan appeared in the 1990s, just as the first Tuvan-speaking Christian churches were being founded in the area following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian Synodal Translation was the dominant Bible version in the area when Bible translation work into Tuvan was begun by the Institute for Bible Translation in Russia, and Tuvan Christians had no prior contact with biblical names and terms apart from the Russian tradition. The mother-tongue translators working on the Tuvan Bible all worked from various Russian versions of the Bible, while I, the project's exegete, checked the resulting translation drafts against the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic original texts. Thus, the question of what to transliterate and how exactly to transliterate it became an acute one for our translation team.

Inconsistency in transliterating

Existing problems in Russian Synodal transliteration practices made it necessary (or at the least, highly desirable) for the Tuvan translation team to avoid a wholesale import of Russian name spellings into the Tuvan Bible, even though this is what most Tuvan Christians explicitly requested of the translation team. The main source of difficulty was that the Synodal transliterations exhibited the simultaneous influence of several strands of biblical tradition. So in the Old Testament, for example, the RST shows signs of having in different places followed the Hebrew text, the Septuagint, the Church Slavonic translation, and also possibly the Latin Vulgate. These competing traditions, compounded by the fact that different Synodal translators were working on different books and did not have recourse to consistency checks by computer, led to a certain amount of inconsistency in the rendering of transliterated names. Thus, we have the name of Queen Esther's father rendered as *Абихаил* (Abihail) in Est 9.29 based on the Masoretic Text, but as *Аминадав* (Aminadav) in Est 2.15 based on the Septuagint. Likewise, the prophetess Huldah is called *Олдама* (Oldama) in 2 Kgs 22.14 but *Олдана* (Oldana) in 2 Chr 34.22. Nimrod is called *Нимрод* (Nimrod) in Gen 10.9 and 1 Chr 1.10 but *Немврод* (Nemvrod) in Mic 5.6. The place name Zobah [צובה] is rendered in various OT texts as *Цова* (Tsova), *Цоба* (Tsoba), *Сува* (Suva), and *Сова* (Sova).

My personal compilation of such inconsistencies in name transliteration in the Synodal Old Testament totals more than 300 Hebrew names. For the most part, however, such spelling inconsistencies do not seem to be noticed by average readers of the RST, since only the names of minor characters are affected, and many of these occur in less frequently read texts such as the Chronicles genealogies or the Ezra/Nehemiah name lists. If a different spelling of the same name is noticed by a reader of the RST, it may be interpreted not as an inconsistency in the translation but rather as something that must have already been present in the source text, based on well-known cases of the same person having multiple names (e.g., Jacob/Israel, Peter/Cephas, Matthew/Levi, etc.)

Some might object that it does not really matter how a translator transliterates such names, and that one should not waste valuable time on a pedantic dotting of i's and crossing of t's. Thus, T. E. Lawrence reveals in the preface to his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935) that he has intentionally kept different transliterations of the same Arabic names in his work because he considers official transliteration systems to be “rot.”⁴ But whereas a mother-tongue speaker of ancient Hebrew living in the surroundings described in the Old Testament could of course be expected to know that the pronunciations Tsova, Tsoba, Sova, and Suva must all in fact refer to the same place, the modern reader of the Bible is, to the contrary, completely justified in concluding that if these names are spelled differently, they are likely referring to different places. Thus, transliterating inconsistently may lead to diminished accuracy in a Bible translation and place unnecessary extra obstacles on the path of coherence in the translated text.

Another type of inconsistency found in the RST was conditioned by historical linguistic change and phonological adaptation in borrowed words; certain letters/sounds that were distinct in the Hebrew and Greek original texts of the Bible collapsed into a single letter/sound when transferred into the Russian language. Specifically, the labial plosive *pe* (פ) and the dental plosive *taw* (ת) were separate phonemes in Hebrew, as were their counterparts (transliteration equivalents) *phi* (φ) and *theta* (θ) in classical Greek. By the late Byzantine period, the Greek *phi* and *theta* had become fricatives (respectively equivalent to English *f* in “foot” and *th* in “think”). When the first Bible translations into Church Slavonic were done in the late first millennium A.D., it seems that the Slavic speakers were not able to pronounce the *theta* quite like the Byzantines did because the dental fricative was not part of their language’s sound inventory. Even though the letter θ was added to the Slavonic alphabet to represent this sound/letter in the Slavonic Bible’s source texts, it was pronounced as a labial fricative [f] instead of as a dental fricative. When the Russian orthography was revised and simplified following the Russian Revolution of 1917, *theta* was dropped from the alphabet and replaced by the Russian letter ф [f] everywhere.⁵ Thanks to this process, Hebrew and Greek names spelled with labial *pe/phi* were rendered with Russian labial ф [f], and Hebrew and Greek names spelled with dental *taw/theta* were now also rendered with Russian labial ф [f]. This historical process is represented by the diagram below:

4 “Arabic names won’t go into English, exactly, for their consonants are not the same as ours, and their vowels, like ours, vary from district to district. There are some ‘scientific systems’ of transliteration, helpful to people who know enough Arabic not to need helping, but a wash-out for the world. I spell my names anyhow, to show what rot the systems are” (Lawrence 1935, xxvii).

5 Thanks are due to Andrei Desnitsky (personal correspondence) for pointing out that the labial /f/ itself was originally not part of the Russian/Slavic phonemic system. Its status as an independent phoneme in Russian was brought about by language-internal sound changes coupled with the influence of lexical borrowing from late Byzantine Greek.

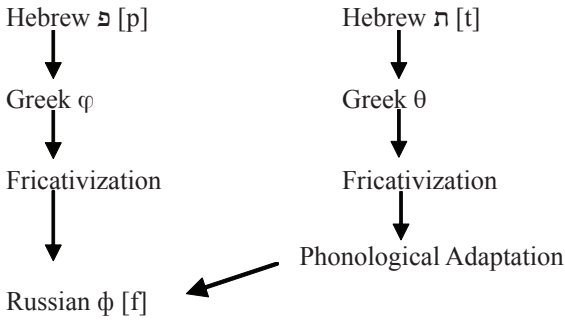


Diagram 1: Collapse of labial and dental consonants
in the Russian Synodal Translation

Thus, Hebrew/Greek names such as *Peor* (Num 23.28) and *Paran* (Gen 21.21) maintained the labial (though now fricativized) consonant to become Russian *Fegor* and *Faran*. But Hebrew/Greek *Nathaniel* became Russian *Nafanail* (e.g., 1 Chr 2.14, John 1.45), Hebrew/Greek *Bethlehem* became Russian *Vifleem* (e.g., Gen 35.19, Matt 2.1), Hebrew/Greek *Talmi* became *Falmai* (e.g., Jos 15.14), and so on. In other words, a sound distinction present in the source texts was lost in the Russian receptor text, a tangible inconsistency in applying the strict one-to-one mapping principle typically aimed for by transliteration systems.

The Tuvan translation team therefore had two major competing factors to consider in deciding how to make use of the transliteration system inherited from the Russian Synodal Translation: 1) Tuvan Christians, who are used to the RST as Holy Scripture, wanted maximal continuity between the RST and the new Tuvan Bible, including the same transliteration of biblical names (that is, they want these names to be simply copied from the RST into the Tuvan Bible); 2) the translation team wanted the Tuvan translation to be a maximally accurate representation of the original source language texts (i.e., the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, not the Russian intermediate source text with its amalgamation of disparate traditions), to be euphonic to the Tuvan ear if possible, and to have consistency of spelling within the translation, something that the RST fails to do in many cases.

As in so many other areas of Bible translation, here too we settled on a compromise solution, as I suspect many other Bible translation projects have done in the past or will do in the future. For the names of major Bible characters (Abraham, David, Mary, Paul, etc.) and place names that are well known even to people who never read the Bible (such as Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jerusalem, etc.), we decided to leave the name spellings intact just as we found them in the RST. For less well known characters and place names, we left the Russian transliteration intact if it was already consistently rendered in the Russian text and did not grate too hard against the fabric of Tuvan pronunciation and orthographic conventions. If these two conditions were not met in the existing Russian transliteration of a name, we felt justified in tweaking (or less frequently, totally replacing) this transliteration.

Thus, all four of the Russian Synodal variants of Zobah (Tsova, Tsoba, Sova, and Suva) were regularized in the Tuvan translation as *Tsova*. The name of the Assyrian king who attacked Israel and sided with Judah in 2 Kgs 15.29 and other passages was re-rendered in Tuvan as *Tiglat-Pileser*, a fairly drastic change from the Synodal transliteration *Feglaḡfellasar* (itself sometimes inconsistently spelled as *Feglaḡellasar*). As a Russian colleague pointed out, the Synodal transliteration of this name makes the character sound more like a mythical monster than a royal personage!

It must be admitted that while consistency of spelling is an important goal in Bible translations, the Hebrew source texts themselves frequently differ in how they spell the names of the same character in different places (for example, Tiglat-Pileser/Tiglat-Pilneser, Nebuchadnezzar/Nebuchadrezzar and many others). Likewise, although complete spelling consistency can to a large degree be achieved nowadays due to computer technology, in certain special cases total faithfulness to the source text names may be less than desirable. Thus, in the books of Kings and Chronicles, the names of several overlapping kings of Judah and Israel are sometimes spelled the same in Hebrew, and sometimes differently. Thus, we see both the short and long forms of the names Joram/Jehoram (see 2 Kgs 3.1, 8.16) and Joash/Jehoash (see 2 Kgs 13.10) applied to both the king of Israel and the king of Judah. Keeping track of which king is doing what in the narrative can get fairly confusing when there are two different kings with the same name in the same passage, and even this name is sometimes written in its short form and sometimes in its long form. Recognizing this problem, some translations, such as NIV and GNB, intentionally disambiguate these kings by picking the short form for one of the kings and the long form for the other, and using them consistently, regardless of the specific form used in the original at every mention. The Tuvan translation adopted the same practice in these special cases. While this tactic may seem somewhat artificial and may be accused of diminishing faithfulness to the source text, it does make participant reference to these kings a whole lot less murky for the average reader, and (arguably) helps to achieve the original narrator's goal in telling the stories of these kings fluidly.⁶

Disliteration

A potentially interesting variation of transliteration in which total consistency is intentionally violated can be somewhat playfully termed *disliteration*. In this approach, the translator keeps the letters of words in the target text close to a one-to-one correspondence with the source language letters, but deliberately avoids chance correspondences that may be associated with an unwanted concept in the recipient language. Nida succinctly points out that “the translator must be careful that [transliterations] do not turn out to be homophonous to some native word,” and briefly mentions a couple of languages in Latin America and Africa where a vowel had to be changed in the transliterated word in order to avoid confusing or offending Bible readers (Nida 1947, 246).

6 These and other double names are discussed in Pattermore 2007.

In the Tuvan Bible translation project, the official policy (as already mentioned above) was to keep the spelling of names of major characters the same as in the Russian Synodal Translation. However, the translation team and representatives of local Tuvan churches agreed that deviation in proper name spelling from the RST would be allowed on a case-by-case basis if there was a concrete need to do so. Such a need arose with the name of Noah's son Ham (חם) in Genesis and elsewhere in the Old Testament. In Russian, as in English, this is transliterated with three letters—Хам (Kham). In Russian, the name of this character has entered the language with the meaning of “boorish lout, impudent person” because of how Ham treated his father; in Tuvan, however, the word *xam* (*kham*) already means “shaman.”

Since the Tuvan people continue to practice their traditional religion in which shamans play a major role, the translation team felt that leaving the transliteration of this name with the exact spelling as in Russian might cause needless offense to Tuvan sensibilities by unwittingly causing the text of Gen 9.20-27 to portray shamans as the targets of Noah's curse. Therefore, the translation team chose to avoid this potential stumbling block while continuing to maintain a close sound correspondence with the name of the biblical character as Tuvan Christians already knew it from the RST text. This was done by doubling the vowel—Xaam. Tuvan has long vowel phonemes that are written with a double vowel, so this is perfectly acceptable from the point of view of Tuvan orthographic conventions. The correspondence of the Tuvan version of the name to the Russian Synodal spelling is still recognizable, but hopefully, the wrath of Tuvan shamans and their supporters has been averted by this small disliteration. The rationale behind such an approach to spelling changes in names is concisely described in the foreword to the Tuvan Bible for the sake of transparency.

Apparently, the similarity of the English version of this name to the food item (as in “I'll have a *ham* and cheese sandwich”) is not deemed offensive enough to the meat-packing industry for a similar disliteration to be performed in English Bible translations. However, cases like this should make us realize that it is only partially true that transliterations “do not dramatically carry meaning ‘across’” (Messick 1992, 180). In the case of Ham, both in English and in Tuvan, an unintentional meaning is produced, although this meaning originates not in the source text but in the sound relations internal to the recipient language (homonymy or similarity between the transliterated name and an existing term in the language).

Other cases of disliteration used in the Tuvan Bible translation mostly have to do with the names of ethnic groups. In the Tuvan language, ethnonyms usually (but not always) take the same form as the name of the country or place where the people live. Thus, since the land of the Tuvan people is called *Tyva*, Tuvans are called *tyva chon* “Tuvan nation” and a Tuvan individual is called *tyva kizhi* “Tuvan person,” while the neighboring Mongolians are called *mool chon* and *mool kizhi* because their country is called *Mool*. Some of the ethnonyms of the nations surrounding Israel, however, have unwanted associations in Tuvan if spelled the same way as in the Russian Bible. A case in point is *Khanaan* (Canaan). When it

stands alone as a place name, there is nothing noteworthy about this word in Tuvan. But when this word serves as a descriptive modifier to the word *chon* “nation” or *kizhi* “person,” as in *khanaan chon* and *khanaan kizhi*, it looks and sounds almost exactly like the Tuvan verb *khannaan* “reigning as king,” which differs graphically from the ethnonym only in the doubling of the medial *n*. Thus, comprehension testing of various passages showed that Tuvan readers often interpreted this spelling of the intended ethnonym as indicating that the person or nation under discussion was wielding royal power. To avoid this problem, the translation team agreed to disliterate the ethnonym by making it the same as the existing Russian form *khananei* (itself a more or less direct transliteration of the Hebrew כְּנַעֲנִי). Even though this is not a natural Tuvan way of forming ethnonyms, it has the advantages of not being confused with the “reigning as king” verb and of being something that at least Tuvan Christians who are used to reading the RST will immediately recognize as an ethnonym.

Unexpected semantic development of transliterated key terms

Whereas transliteration is a regular tool for rendering proper and place names in most Bible translations, a third category of words—key concepts—is also sometimes rendered by transliteration, as noted in the introduction to this article. Thus, Bible translators occasionally employ transliteration to create important new terms that are intended to be completely free of semantic baggage in the recipient language and thus to be filled perfectly by the meaning of a difficult-to-translate word in the source language. Key terms for which the transliteration approach has (at least historically) been frequently chosen over translation include ancient Near Eastern religious practices or cult items that are unknown or misunderstood in the recipient culture (such as baptize, circumcision, Sabbath, synagogue), meaningful titles whose usage approaches that of proper names (such as Christ, Pharisee, Levite, Satan), or words whose precise nature is not really well understood, even among Bible scholars (such as ephod, seraphim, Urim and Thummim).

In practice, however, when translators choose this route in order to maintain a “close as possible” meaning correspondence to the source term, the result may turn out quite the opposite of their objective—the transliterated word, being originally semantically empty in the recipient language, may end up metamorphosing into something different from what either the original author or the translator intended. As Beekman and Callow point out, “a borrowed term often receives a meaning from the particular situation(s) in which it is used that is quite different from its original meaning” (1974, 198). Thus, some key biblical terms that were directly transliterated from the Hebrew have ended up with unforeseen meanings in the lexicons of various recipient languages. Take, for example, the English word “cherub,” from Hebrew *kērûb*. Whereas the original Hebrew term meant something like “angelic being that is represented as part human, part animal” (cf. *TWOT* I:1036), the English word now means something like “a person, especially a child, with an innocent or chubby face.” Semantic shift has been conditioned in English by the Renaissance artistic tradition that portrayed cherubim in the guise

of cute little Greek Cupids. This development was of course impossible to foresee at the time when the first English translations borrowed this Hebrew word into the English Bible tradition, following the pattern of borrowing set by the Greek and Latin translations of the Old Testament.

In Russian, the semantic shift of this transliteration was somewhat different: the *-im* ending of *kērūbīm*, originally signifying plurality in Hebrew, has been reanalyzed as merely the final part of the lexical item, so that the term херувим (*kheruvim*) in Russian is a *singular* count noun, not a plural one.⁷ Apparently, this degrammaticalization of the Hebrew ending is what led the Russian Synodal translator of Gen 3.24 to mistakenly render the Hebrew as saying that the Lord God placed a *kheruvim* (accusative masculine singular in Russian) to the east of the garden of Eden, instead of indicating a plural number of such beings.

Another often transliterated biblical term is *bēhēmôt*, taken from Job 40.15—“Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox” (RSV). The Hebrew noun *bēhēmâ* typically means “beast, animal, cattle” (BDB), while the *-ôt* feminine plural ending here seems to indicate something like a “plural of majesty,” since in the context of Job 40, this creature is obviously singular in number. Countless tons of ink have been spilled in arguments over whether this creature is a hippopotamus, an elephant, a dinosaur, or a mythical amalgam of large powerful land animals. The point that is of interest to us here is that in modern English, at least the U.S. variety which I speak, the commonly recognized meaning of the term *behemoth* has become the following: “any monstrous or grotesque creature or thing” (*RHD*), “something of oppressive or monstrous size or power” (*WNCD*). This word is usually applied as a description of inanimate entities, such as “a *behemoth* car” or “the *behemoth* government agency,” but can occasionally also be used to refer to animate creatures. A quick search through a corpus of contemporary American English, such as COCA (<http://corpus.byu.edu/coca>), shows that the term is often used with a negative connotation approximating “more trouble than it’s worth.” So when an English reader who has not had much contact with Christian teaching or the Bible reads this passage in Job for the first time, it is quite likely that associations of oppressiveness or inutility will color this reader’s initial mental image of the creature, even though the context of the verse does not contain any such connotations, but rather the opposite connotation of appreciative wonder.

The Russian Synodal Translation has transliterated this word from the Hebrew as беремот (*begemot*), apparently borrowing this rendering from the Russian scholar/poet M. Lomonosov in his poetic translation of the Job 40 passage (c. 1750 A.D.). What is of interest is that this very transliteration has become the main term meaning “hippopotamus” in modern Russian. There is another Russian term with an almost completely synonymous meaning, *gippopotam*, derived from ancient Greek, but in contemporary Russian usage this latter term is becoming more and more obsolete, or at least restricted to scientific contexts. An informal corpus

⁷ A similar degrammaticalization is seen in English writers who render the Hebrew plural *kērūbīm* as “cherubims.”

study of the use of the word *begemot* in Russian texts indicates that prior to the publication of the RST, it was used to refer to monstrously large animals (such as a mythological giant bird in Mikhail Chulkov's *Slavenskie skazki* of 1766-1768), but not specifically to the hippopotamus. Thus, it seems that what gave the meaning of "hippopotamus" to the transliterated word *begemot* was the tradition of scriptural interpretation in favor at the time of the translation of the RST. Even though the transliteration *begemot* was originally introduced into the Russian text of Job ostensibly because the translators were not quite sure what this creature was, the new word eventually came to refer unambiguously to the hippopotamus and nothing else.

What should the Tuvan translation team have done with this term? The Russian Synodal translation, which all Tuvan believers currently read as their main Bible version, specifically states in Job 40.15 that this animal is a *begemot*, which in contemporary Russian is completely unambiguous as meaning "hippopotamus." This is the meaning with which the Russian word has already been borrowed into the Tuvan language. Maintaining this transliteration would mean affirming this specific interpretation of the Hebrew term *bēhēmōt*. Although the explicit "hippopotamus" interpretation is found in some other modern translations (e.g., CEV, La Bible en français courant, Louis Segond, Conferenza Episcopala Italiana), the Tuvan translation team did not want to commit themselves wholeheartedly to this interpretation. So we decide to *re*-transliterate the Hebrew word using a different medial consonant—*бехемот* (*bekhemot*), with a footnote explaining this decision as an attempt to remain open-minded concerning the exact nature of this beast. This new transliteration created a word that did not have any pre-existing semantic associations transferred from the Russian language. Only time will tell how exactly future generations of Tuvan Bible readers will react to the new transliteration of this term, and whether or not they will imbue it with the same "hippopotamus" sense as in the RST or with something completely unforeseen by our translation team.

Conclusion

The bottom line of this discussion is that language-specific semantic development of transliterated biblical words is largely unpredictable, so translators should be aware that they may get more than they bargained for when choosing to transliterate (or disliterate or re-transliterate!). Translating a difficult key term may be time-consuming and nerve-wracking, but at least you know what you are getting. Transliterating, on the other hand, is quick and easy, but in some cases may eventually become a pitfall for unsuspecting Bible readers.

As Messick points out, "transliterations might be thought of analytically as the scaffolding for translation, which must drop away or be hidden in the finished product" (1992, 180). However, as anyone who reads a translation of Scripture in any language knows, some of this scaffolding remains and becomes an integral part of the finished text which the reader then has the task of deciphering. It is the responsibility of the translator or translation team to thoroughly think through the

potentially weak spots in the transliterations that remain in the completed text, to make sure that Queen Esther does not end up with two fathers as in the Russian Synodal translation, and that unintentional offense is not given to non-churched readers as almost happened in Tuvan with the transliteration of Ham's name.

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