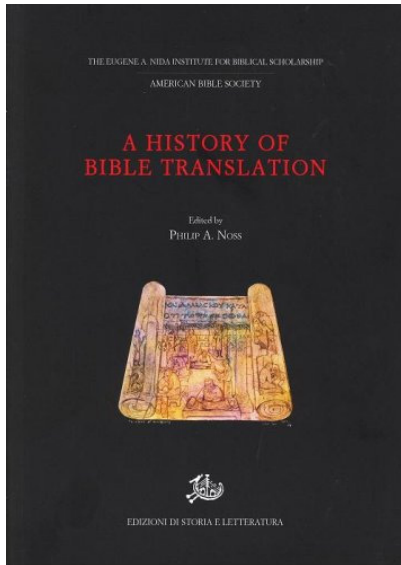


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Noss, Philip A., ed.

A History of Bible Translation

Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007. Pp. xx + 521. Paper. \$60.00. ISBN 8884983738.

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1. General

No other book has been translated over such a long period of time as the Bible, no other literary work has been rendered into so many languages, and no other document continues to be the object of such intense translation activity throughout the world. Although the practice of orally translating the Bible may date back to times before the first Hebrew Scriptures were committed to writing, the complex and engaging story of Bible translation began in earnest with the first major Bible translation, the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the centuries just before the Common Era.

In *A History of Bible Translation*, sixteen biblical scholars, linguists, theoreticians, and translation professionals have collaborated to present an overview of Bible translation from the time of the Septuagint, the Targums, and the Latin Vulgate through the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and into the present day, where mother-tongue speakers have replaced the missionary translators of the colonial era. Included in this survey are summaries of important secondary versions (including Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, and Slavonic), often neglected in other Bible translation histories. This historical overview is deepened by chapters addressing historical epistemologies, evolving and competing theories of translation, and discussions of

ancient and modern methodologies. Recognizing that the history of Bible translation is an unfinished story, the volume concludes with reports from Africa and Latin America that reveal what is being learned today as Bible translation thrives anew in a postmissionary world.

A History of Bible Translation is the inaugural volume in a series of monographs being prepared by the American Bible Society and its partners that will provide historical perspectives and address important issues relating to the history and practice of Bible translation. Through the insights and observations of their authors, these monographs will fill in their own small parts of the great story of Bible translation.

2. Particular

At the outset it may be noted that the thing that attracted this particular volume in the mind of the reviewer was the fact that it covers in one volume the subject matter that has previously been contained in many volumes. For example, it deals with the history of translation as well as the importance of the early versions of the Hebrew Bible, such as the Septuagint, the Targums, as well as that of the *Vetus Latina* and the Latin Vulgate; the latter subject is normally the province of volumes dealing with the twin subjects of text and versions. Nor can it be said that such matters are dealt with in a superficial way; on the contrary, these matters are dealt with in depth. As noted above, it also deals with the complex study of translation theory and methodology and again these matters are dealt with in a profound way. This attention to the history of translation is brought up to date by a helpful study entitled "From Martin Luther to the English Revised Version," so that the time period being covered is that from 1517 to 1885. It is here that one can register a measure of disappointment that the treatment was not extended to cover more modern version such as the New International Version, since an assessment of its translation techniques is urgently needed; however, it may be that this is planned for a future monograph in the series. It should be noted in favor of this survey that its scope is not limited in its coverage in the nineteenth century to those that were published in English, but coverage is also extended to include those published in the other European languages, such as French, Italian, and Finnish. In this connection it should be noted that the author seeks to draw reference to the translation of John Nelson Darby, whose widely read translation was published in 1885 and that he had also published a version of the Bible in German in 1871. Reference is also made to the lesser known fact that Darby's work also influenced a Dutch translation published in 1877 and a Swedish New Testament published in 1961. Also included in this survey is the development of Catholic translations of the Bible, usually of translations from the Vulgate, but also from the original languages of the Bible. By any judgment this must be evaluated as being a comprehensive and thorough history of Bible translation of the period it covers.

The other sections of this work must be judged as being equally as thoroughgoing and profound as the preceding sections are. In fact, one of the marks of excellence that one finds in this work is that the high quality one detects in one section is also to be found throughout the whole work. The usual judgment that reviewers make is that one section of a multiauthored work often is better than another, but this is not the case with his volume. In section 3, which deals with methodology, it is to be noted and stressed that the methodology of the modern translations is discussed in depth. The period in question is from that of Erasmus to that of the nineteenth-century Missions and Bible Societies. Once again this must be judged as being an in-depth and comprehensive presentation of the facts of the case. The work is rounded off with a section that deals with Bible translation in the field today, such as is to be found in Africa and South America.

3. Conclusion

Throughout this work the authors have supplied ample notes that refer to the immense bibliography (409–62) with which this work is concluded. Also provided for the attentive reader are three indexes: Scripture references; languages; and a comprehensive subject index. The work is also provided with sixteen color plates that illustrate editions of the sacred text, Bible translators, illustrations of Biblical stories, and a seventeenth-century map of the New Testament world that was published in the Vulgate.

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