



BIBLE VIII. TRANSLATIONS INTO OTHER MODERN IRANIAN LANGUAGES

BIBLE

viii. Translations of the Bible into other Modern Iranian Languages

The earliest known translations of the Bible into modern Iranian languages other than Persian were made in the early 19th century. John Leyden, a gifted Scottish linguist and poet who went to Calcutta in 1803 as a surgeon's assistant for the East India Company and subsequently became a professor at the College of Fort William, was involved in translating the Gospels into a number of languages, including both Pashto and Baluchi (Canton, I, pp. 278, 283, 284).

Pashto. Although only the Gospels of Matthew and Mark had been translated into Pashto by the time of Leyden's death in 1811, his Pashto-speaking co-workers completed translation of the entire New Testament, which was published in 1818. Subsequently a group in Serampore, led by William Carey, continued the project with translation of the Hebrew scriptures (British and Foreign Bible Society, *Report VII*, 1811, pp. 315, 507; XVIII, 1822, p. lxxvii). The Pentateuch was published in 1824 and the historical books (from Joshua through Esther) in 1832. The remainder of the translation was, however, never completed.



A few years later another translation project was begun in Peshawar by men who had no knowledge of the earlier work in Serampore (Canton, III, p. 395). In 1855 Isidore Löwenthal, an American Presbyterian, began translation of the New Testament, with the assistance of H. James, commissioner of the Punjab, and Robert Clark of the Church Missionary Society. The manuscripts of the original translations of the Gospels of Luke (by James) and John (by Clark) were destroyed in a fire at the press during the Sepoy Rebellion in 1857, but the entire New Testament was finally published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in Hertford, England, in 1863. Löwenthal himself was accidentally killed while work on a translation of the Old Testament was still in progress (Hooper and Culshaw, pp. 97f.).

A new Pashto translation was begun in Peshawar in 1874 by T. P. Hughes and T. J. Lee Mayer, both of the Church Missionary Society; ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān, an Afghan judge, subsequently joined the project. Their translation of Psalms was published in London in 1882 by the British and Foreign Bible Society. This team—with the addition of Worthington Jukes of the Church Missionary Society and a second Afghan, Aḥmad—also completed a translation of the Pentateuch, which was published in 1890. Meanwhile Mayer had made another translation of the New Testament, which was revised by Jukes and W. Thwaites; it was published in London the same year. In 1891 a new translation of Psalms, made by Ḥamīd-Allāh, an Afghan mullah, under the guidance of Jukes and revised by Mayer, was published in London. Mayer and ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān also translated the remainder of the Old Testament, which was revised by Thwaites and published in London in 1895, thus completing the Peshawar translation of the entire Bible into Pashto.

In 1932 a committee made up of Jens Christensen and F. Paulli, both of the Danish Pathan Mission in Mardan; Maidie Shearburn and Vera Studd, both of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society in Tank; K. B. Wazīr-al-Dīn of Peshawar; and M. K. Taib of Mardan began revision of the Pashto translation of the New Testament. Their work was published in Lahore by the Punjab Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1945. Still another revision of this translation was made by Christensen and W. J. Kane of the World Mission Prayer League and published in 1968 by the West Pakistan Bible Society in Lahore.

A translation of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke into colloquial Pashto by Jens Enevoldsen of the Danish Missionary Society and members of the Pashto Academy in Peshawar was published in 1981 by the Pakistan Bible Society in



Lahore.

Baluchi. Before he died John Leyden, with the help of Baluchi colleagues, completed a translation of the Gospel of Mark into Baluchi. His colleagues went on to translate the other three Gospels, as well as Acts, all of which were published in Serampore in 1815. In 1884 Arthur Lewis of the Church Missionary Society made a new translation of the Gospel of Matthew at Dera Ghazi Khan; it was published in Allahabad,

Toward the end of the 19th century, after completing his work on the Pashto translation, Mayer also began a systematic translation of the Bible into Baluchi, with the assistance of both Baluchis and Europeans. Between 1899 and 1903 all the books of the New Testament plus Genesis, Exodus, and Psalms were published in both Arabic and Roman characters in Allahabad, Ludhiana, and Agra. A translation of the historical books, Psalms, and Isaiah was never published.

A new translation of the Gospels of Luke and John by Irving W. Sylvia, an American professor of English, with Baluchi assistance, was published in the United States in 1983.

Kurdish. A Chaldean Catholic bishop, Shevriz, sponsored a translation of the Gospels into Kurdish from Arabic; it was completed in 1826 in Tabrīz and revised by Kurdish scholars. The people of Kurdistan, who speak several dialects, found it unintelligible, however, and it was never published (Canton, II, pp. 12-13; British and Foreign Bible Society, *Report XXI*, 1825, p. 62; *XXIII*, 1827, p. xliv).

Some years later an Armenian preacher in Haine, Turkey, named Stepan translated the Gospels into Kurmanji. In 1856 the British and Foreign Bible Society published in Constantinople his version of the Gospel of Matthew in Armenian characters, reportedly the first book ever published in the Kurdish language (*idem*, LIII, 1857, p. cxli). The following year all four Gospels were published. The remainder of the New Testament was translated by Tamo, an Armenian deacon, and published with the Gospels by the American Bible Society in Constantinople in 1872.

Another translation of the New Testament into Kurmanji was begun in 1891. Several Armenian pastors, including Bedros Amirkhanian, Bedros Effendi, and Kavine Aflakadian, translated the New Testament and Psalms. Matthew was



published in Armenian characters by the American Bible Society in Constantinople in 1891, and the other Gospels and Acts appeared in 1911. This project was under the general direction of James L. Barton, an American missionary in Harput. After revision of the translation and transliteration into Arabic characters by A. N. Andrus of Mardin and H. H. Riggs of Constantinople, both employed by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Matthew and Mark were published in 1922 and Luke in 1923 in Constantinople. A revision of the Gospel of Luke by Kamran Ali Bedir Khan (Kāmrān-‘Alī Badr Khan), a Kurdish scholar, and Thomas Bois, a Dominican priest working in Mosul, was published in Arabic and Roman characters in Beirut in 1947; in the same year they published a Kurmanji version of Proverbs, the only portion of the Hebrew scriptures yet translated into Kurdish.

The Gospel of John was translated into Kermānšāhi from Bruce’s Persian translation (see vii, above) by Mīrzā Yaḥyā Khan of Kermānšāh and published in Julfa in Arabic characters in 1894. W. St. Clair Tisdall of the Church Missionary Society in Isfahan, working with the Kurdish scholar Mīrzā Esmā‘īl, translated the other Gospels into Kermānšāhi and revised Mīrzā Yaḥyā’s translation of the Gospel of John; this work was published in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1900.

P. von Oertzen of the German Orient Mission in Kurdistan translated the New Testament into Mokrī. Only the Gospel of Mark was published, in Arabic characters, in Philippopolis, Bulgaria, in 1909. Shortly afterward, in 1914, L. O. Fossum of the Inter-Synodical Evangelical Lutheran Orient Mission Society in America, working in Sāvajbolāḡ, near Tehran, translated the Gospels into Mokrī, with the assistance of several colleagues. This version was published in Arabic characters in 1919 by the American Bible Society in New York.

A Sōrānī version of the Gospel of John was published in 1972 by Living Bibles International.

Ossetic. In 1822 a Georgian prince in Tiflis (Tbilisi) proposed to the British and Foreign Bible Society that he translate the Gospels into Ossetic for the use of his people in the Caucasus. Nothing more was heard of this proposal, but the Russian Bible Society sponsored such a translation, which was published in 1836 but never circulated (British Foreign and Bible Society, *Report*, XXXII, 1836, p. 44).



Beginning in 1848, the Society for the Reestablishment of Christianity in the Caucasus in Tiflis sponsored the translation and publication of the Bible in Ossetic. Psalms were translated by Russian missionaries and published in 1848. The Gospels were translated by G. Mjedloff of the theological seminary in Tiflis and published in 1861. A colleague at the seminary, V. Tsoraieff, translated the epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude, which were published in 1862. The Gospels were revised by Father Takaieff of Ordonsk and published in Vladikavkaz (Ordzhonikidze) in 1902. All these versions were published in Cyrillic characters.

A journalist and former mayor of Vladikavkaz, Georg-Gappo Baiew (see [Bayati, Gappo](#)), translated Daniel, which was published in Berlin in 1928. His translation of the New Testament from Acts to Revelation was never published. The Institute for Bible translation in Stockholm published a new Ossetic translation of the Gospel of John in 1984.

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