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Book Reviews

Joanna Kulwicka-Kamińska, *Przekład terminologii religijnej islamu w polskich tłumaczeniach Koranu na tle biblijnej tradycji translatorycznej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2013), 357 pp. with attached CD-Rom.

Translation—the communication of meaning from one cultural-linguistic environment to another—is always a difficult undertaking even if the text or message is relatively simple, and the source and target languages are closely related in grammatical structure and lexical formation. When the act of translation involves the transmission of esoteric doctrine and core beliefs from one religion to another, from one canonical language to another, it poses even greater challenges. In such cases it is often impossible to find appropriate formal (literal) equivalences in the target language, shaped and honed by specific philosophic traditions and cultural practices. Consequently, there is usually a need for creative paraphrasing, i.e. the use of "dynamic" equivalences that convey the sense of the original text by using terms and conceptual references that resonate in the target language without distorting the implicit and explicit meaning of the source-text. There is a growing body of scholarship on this topic with particular regard to the foundation texts of the credal religions of the world. It is a huge and complex subject, requiring knowledge of such subjects as religious history, comparative philology, semantics, textual criticism and cultural studies as well as the appropriate languages and, in some cases, calligraphic skills.

This new work by Joanna Kulwicka-Kamińska fits within this discipline. Her main focus is Polish renderings of Islamic terminology. To contextualize this study, she compares Polish translations of the Quran, to Polish translations of the Bible. It is an ambitious undertaking, since these Polish texts-in-translation are the products of very different traditions. Christianity was brought to Poland through the Czech and German lands in the mid-10th century. The first surviving text in Polish, part of a trilingual Latin-German-Polish Psalter, dates from the mid-14th century. There were further translations of the Psalms and other Biblical extracts in the following century, but the first full translation of the Polish Bible to appear in print was the Brest Bible of 1563, which drew on Hebrew and Aramaic sources for the Old Testament, Greek and Latin for the New Testament. By this time the Reformation was in full swing and two more translations, reflecting different theological positions and hence different terminological nuances, were published a few years later, followed by another, the Danzig Bible, in 1632. All these translations were undertaken by highly educated scholars, well versed in Christian theology.

Translations of the Quran into Polish were undertaken in very different circumstances. There were two distinct strands. The first was the manuscript literature of the Tatar emigrants from the Golden Horde, who began to settle in the Kingdom of Poland and adjacent territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th century. They were relatively new converts to Islam, but nevertheless deeply devoted to their faith. Within a century or so they had largely forgotten their native languages and spoke only Polish and Belarusian (the official language of the Grand Duchy). At around this time (probably in the early 16th century) they began to produce handwritten Islamic texts in these languages, which they transcribed phonetically into the Arabic script—a script

which has great symbolic significance for Muslims around the world. This religious literature comprises a number of genres, the main categories being the *kitab*—collections of prayers, homiletic texts, sayings of the Prophet and short passages from the Quran), and *tefsir*—the complete Arabic text of the Quran, with interlinear explanations (translations of the Quran are not canonically acceptable, since it is regarded as a divinely revealed text) into Polish-Belarusian, likewise written in the Arabic script. The scribes who copied these works may sometimes have been working from models that had originally been written by erudite scholars, but quite often they reveal a weak grasp of Islamic doctrine and law, and in sections where Arabic is used it is frequently grammatically incorrect.

The second strand in the introduction of the Quran into Polish was via Latin (the earliest extant Latin translation dates from 1143) and other European languages (Italian, French, Spanish, and English); some of these versions portrayed Islam in an extremely negative light, especially during the Reformation. By the 19th century, however, more accurate translations and commentaries were produced by scholars who had a sound knowledge of Arabic and of Islamic teachings. The first printed text of the Quran in Polish was published in 1858. Other translations appeared in the 20th century, some of which reflected sectarian divisions within the Muslim community (for example, the version produced by the Ahmadiyya movement).

This huge corpus of scriptural literature provides source material for the present study. It is, by any standards, a brave and ambitious undertaking. As the title of the work indicates, the primary aim is to select essential semantic concepts and to compare and contrast the way in which they have been transmitted from the source languages—i.e. the Arabic of the Quran and the polyglot origins of the Bible—into Polish. The result is a painstaking, diligent compilation of a great mass of comparative lexical material. There is some attempt to establish the intellectual and cultural aspects of the different "schools" of translation, but this is secondary to the main endeavor and is somewhat obscured by the weight of illustrative textual references. Thus, as an exploration of the wider topic of the transmission of ideas it is of limited value. However, as a terminological study, it will doubtless be of considerable assistance to scholars of Polish lexicology, likewise to students of inter-linguistic communication. There is an excellent Bibliography. The work is completed by the accompanying CD-ROM, which compares fundamental Quranic and Biblical tenets of faith, such as belief in God, the Prophets, the Angels and the Last Judgement.

Shirin Akiner