
Jewish translation history: a bibliography of bibliographies and studies. Robert Singerman. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2002, 420 pp.

For someone outside the field of Jewish translation, a fitting subtitle for this bibliography might be “A Guide for the Perplexed” (or “Moreh Nevukhim”), a title that itself pops up over 40 times in this book. And just as Moses Maimonides’ Guide strove to bring some semblance of order to the chaos of 12th Century life, this book tries to impose some order on the narrower realm of scholar-

ship on Jewish translation, understood to include translations both into and out of Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, and various other languages of the Jewish Diaspora. That’s an awful lot of ground to cover, even leaving out translation before 900AD, which the compiler does in order to maintain the book’s manageable size.

This book is Volume 44 in the Benjamins Translation Library, whose general editor, Gideon Toury of Tel Aviv University, provides a 23-page introduction to “translation in the Jewish context” to start the book. This is followed by a three page introduction by the compiler, Robert Singerman of the University of Florida. The bulk of the book, consisting of 2620 bibliographical entries, is divided into

thirteen chapters. The first is a collection of general works, including “rabbinical literature and the modern period”. The next four chapters treat different historical periods covering the last 1100 years. This is followed by chapters grouping individual entries by language or country, from Hebrew Israeli literature to the various colloquial ‘creoles’ first spoken, then written by Jews in a variety of host nations: Yiddish, Judezmo (Ladino), Judeo-Italian, Judeo-Persian, Arabic and Judeo-Arabic. The final two chapters are “Modern Bible translations” and “Liturgies and prayerbooks”. The book concludes with 56 pages of indexing, arranged by both author and subject.

This book is primarily for those who work professionally in the intersection of the fields of translation and Judaica. Yet a leisurely stroll through the entries provides a number of distractions for the more casual reader. While there is no specific entry in the Subject Index for “translation” or “problems of translation”, many such articles are scattered throughout the book, from an article on the Hebrew poetry of medieval Spain which asks “How does one translate?” [Item 97], in the first chapter, to a comparison of Buber’s and Luther’s Bible trans-

lations in the next to last chapter with the subtitle “If we all translate the same text into the same language – how can our translations be different?” [Item 2586]

Other entries recount translation’s role as a political weapon, from the Middle Ages to the present. There is a reference to the 1565 Portuguese edition of Hieronymus de Sancta Fide’s “De Judaicis erroribus ex Talmut”, “a compilation of rabbinical texts carefully selected and translated into Latin in a way that achieves a biased representation of the essence of the Talmud...”. [Item 1106] But withholding of translation can be a weapon as well, as in the refusal of Egyptian Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid to allow a Hebrew version of his book, “No one sleeps in Alexandria”. [Item 1319] Finally, another author argues that translation of contemporary Arab writing into Hebrew can be a tool for political reconciliation, “a bridge over troubled water”. [Item 1301]

One finds classics of world literature and national literatures well represented in this book’s entries. In English, for example, one finds the traditional canon– “Vilyam Shekspir” [Item 1743] –as well as other varieties of classics, such as “Vini-der-Pu” [Item 1991], Dr. Seuss [Item 1632], Tolkien [Item

1464], and science fiction [Item 1644]. One even finds Broadway, with Lerner and Loewe's linguistic drill from "My Fair Lady" — "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain" — falling as "Barad varad bidrom sfarad" in the land of Israel. [Item 1295]

This book is clearly intended for the specialist, for whom it would appear to provide a valuable resource. It is generously indexed, with 24 pages of Author Index and a 32 page Subject Index. Happily, the Author Index includes those sources which appear only in the marginal notes of the 2620 numbered entries. The Subject Index is thoroughly cross-indexed, with translations of the work of Shakespeare (55 entries) referenced under both the author's name and under "English literature". One might quibble that the works listed under "English literature" appear to be exclusively British literature, with a separate heading for "American literature". One might also quibble that works by political figures — Lincoln, Lenin, Stalin — are

listed only by author's name in the Subject Index, but not also under the American or Russian Literature headings.

This volume is the intellectual grandchild of Moritz Steinschneider's 1897 bibliography of Jewish translation in the Middle Ages [Item 887], which has been long out of print and hard to locate. But this book clearly updates and extends Steinschneider's work. This bibliography will clearly be a valuable addition for the library of any institution or individual with an active interest in Jewish history, comparative translation studies, or both, and, together with the Steinschneider Bibliographical Database being compiled online by the Maryland Institute of Technology in the Humanities, will do much to bring order to the field. Whether any library will take up Toury's proposal of gathering all this book's cited materials in one location to create a world-class "center for translation studies in the Jewish context" remains to be seen.

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