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Hepzibah Israel. *Religious Transactions in Colonial South India. Language, Translation, and the Making of Protestant Identity.* Palgrave Studies in Cultural and Intellectual History. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 286 p.

This work, the result of research carried out for a doctoral degree at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, examines the translation of the Protestant Bible into Tamil in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Tamil, a Dravidian language of South India, is one of the official languages of India, and a language with an especially long and developed literary history. Indeed, the author notes, “Tamil is both the first Indian language and the first non-European language in print [...]” (p. 19). Of particular interest to the author is the way certain choices regarding the translation of the Bible were made with a view to constructing Protestant Tamil identities, as both related to and yet distinct from other—in particular Hindu, but also Roman Catholic and Muslim—Tamil identities. Producers of translations of the Bible into Tamil were faced with the same dilemma missionaries elsewhere had been confronted with, most notably in the famous 17th-century controversy between the Dominicans and the Jesuits over the question of the Chinese rites, i.e., to what extent should they adapt Christian religion to local customs, practices and rituals? In the case of the translation of the Bible into Tamil, the author shows that this question played itself out predominantly in three areas: the choice of appropriate terminology, in particular the terms to be used to refer to the Christian God; the choice of appropriate registers of language, a question of some importance in Indian languages, in which literary language is clearly distinguished from the language of everyday use; and finally, the importance of the selection of an appropriate genre for the translation. In all three cases—a chapter is devoted to each—the challenge was essentially the same: to formulate a text that would be adapted to Tamil linguistic and literary conventions, as well as social practices, at the same time as it would emphasize the novelty and importance of the message being conveyed and of the new Christian community being established. The author sums up her work as follows: “[...] my aim is to study precisely how the Bible has been constructed as ‘scripture’ for Tamils; how translation processes by challenging

the power ascribed to textual traditions make visible the nontextual discourses that seek to construct religious power; and finally, examine how Protestant Tamils challenge or appropriate particular translations by mobilizing ‘popular’ forms of Christian devotion and practices” (p. 12).

Chapter 1, “The Terms of the Debate,” focuses on the translation of the Bible in the 19th century, since this was when there was “[...] a wider and more systematic debate on translation strategies for Protestant purposes [...]” (p. 37). Bible translation boomed during the period, across many Indian languages, largely due to the Baptist Society in Serampore (Bengal) and the British and Foreign Bible Society, based in Madras, and debates on the issues took place in the public sphere, due in large part to the development of printing. The author’s argument is that the discussion around the translation of the Bible fulfilled a function in defining Protestant literary culture, in forging a Protestant textual community, and in establishing a uniform Protestant reading community (pp. 41-42). Five principal elements of the Protestant missionary discourse on translation are identified: 1) should existing religious terminology be used, or new terms constructed?; 2) should a translation be idiomatic or literal?; 3) should the level of language of the translation be literary, or that of common speech?; 4) in cases of ambiguity or difficulty in interpretation, what should be the text of reference?; and 5) what role should “native” informants play, and how reliable should they be considered? On these various issues there were debate and difference of opinion in the 19th century, rather than a monolithic point of view. As the author points out, and explores more fully in the following three chapters in relation to terminology, register, and genre,

[...] the translation project was to involve three main but contradictory objectives: one, culturally make familiar or ‘domesticate’ the translated Bible for its Indian audiences; two, simultaneously offer the Bible as unique to Indian religious cultures, infallible in its teachings and ultimately unrecognizable or ‘foreignized’ from all existing scriptures; and three, effect an appropriate ‘Protestant’ identity for those who would convert. (p. 53)

The following three chapters extend the time period beyond the 19th century, to include both early 19th-century and late 20th-century translations of the Bible. Chapter 2, “Locating the Sacred in Terminology,” examines the terminological difficulties involved in translating the Bible, especially the problem of providing terms whose meaning would be *stable*—in the sense of designating precisely and unequivocally the religious concepts to be transmitted—but also which would be *acceptable* to the community for whom the translation was being produced. The use of pre-existing Tamil terms presented problems in relation to stability; the creation of new terms was often a problem in terms of acceptance. These questions are discussed in particular with regards the translation of the notion of “sacrifice” in a Christian, as opposed to Hindu, context, and the words used to designate the Christian God. The author argues that the choices made were less important in themselves than for what they revealed or concealed about the nature of the community being created.

Chapter 3, “Symbolic Versions: The Power of Language Registers,” deals with the relation between the choice of linguistic registers and the constitution of the text as “sacred.” The author argues that “a distinct Protestant Tamil register” (p. 127) developed in the 19th century and that it was characterized by a mixture of spoken and written forms. For certain groups such a mixture was considered unacceptable, on both linguistic and social grounds, whereas for others it was a part of their identity as Protestants. Two significant protests relating to register in translations of the Bible are examined in the chapter: the first in the 19th century, criticizing the mixing of spoken and written registers, led by Vedanayaka Sastri, an Evangelical Lutheran and Tamil poet; the second in the late 20th century, involving an attempt to have the language of the translation correspond to the criteria of the Pure Tamil Movement, a movement of linguistic purism rejecting the use of foreign loanwords in Tamil. The author links the two moments of protest, separated by more than one hundred years and with contradictory attitudes towards 19th-century revisions of the translation of the Bible, through two recurring elements: 1) in both cases “Tamil was undergoing important and fundamental changes [...]” (p. 166), and 2) “[...] in both instances, the location of the right register of language use becomes central to the wider discourse on Protestant identity in Tamil-speaking South India” (p. 166).

The final chapter, “Prose Truth versus Poetic Fiction,” looks at the question of genre in relation to the translation of the Bible, the question being whether the Bible should be translated into verse or prose. The chapter examines “[...] how at different historical moments either Tamil poetic or prose genres were harnessed by three different sections of the Tamil community—Protestant, Catholic, and Saivite—to construct their religious identities in response to changing attitudes to literary and sacred texts” (p. 171). The Protestant Tamil Bible predominantly used a form of prose “[...] that hitherto had not been ascribed high place in Tamil literary and religious cultures” (p. 171). This was a conscious choice on the part of Protestant missionaries, who wished to distinguish their text from rival Catholic and Hindu texts in verse, characterizing these as purely literary, as well as to produce a text that would be accessible to a wide and socially diverse population.

The way in which the author links debates over translation choices in Tamil to how the Protestant community was defining itself are convincing and well-documented; they explore a relatively untouched area, in particular from the perspective of Translation Studies, that is important for an understanding of the evolution of Tamil language and society, and more generally, for the understanding of translation as a social and historical phenomenon. My principal reservation is that the corpus selected for analysis is at once too narrow and too wide: too narrow, in that the exclusive focus on Tamil—apart for some vague references to what was happening in “several Indian languages” (e.g., pp. 36 and 38)—makes it impossible to have a sense of the way in which what is being described was typical of or different from other languages on the sub-continent, or even other South Indian languages; too wide, in that the discussion of Tamil translations of the Bible published between 1714 and 1995 in terms of three types of linguistic choices has a tendency to flatten the historical differences between the different periods. In both cases the problem is one of a lack of contextualization, which leads to a discussion that at times (e.g., pp. 61 and 185) switches back and forth between different centuries in a way that seems to imply that the issues exist outside any specific historical context. All in all, a more narrowly defined time period—such as that adopted

in Chapter 1—would have produced a clearer historical sense of the projects of translation and of the debates surrounding them. And although the author does refer to tracts and other Christian publications, a more temporally focused approach would have made it possible to make greater use of them. John Murdoch, in his *Catalogue of the Christian Vernacular Literature of India* (1870; not 1970 as indicated in the bibliography), listed for Tamil 738 tracts, 248 books and 19 periodicals—a rich trove that still largely remains to be explored and whose analysis would most certainly have given even greater substance and depth to the author’s study.

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Jiří Levý. *The Art of Translation*. Trans. Patrick Corness. Edited with a critical foreword by Zuzana Jettmarová. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2011, xxviii, 322 p.

I first bought a copy of Jiří Levý’s *Umění překladu* [*The Art of Translation*] at the Academia bookshop in Prague in 1998, the year it was re-issued in the Czech Republic after the fall of Communism. A classic Czech text on translation, first published in 1963, the issues it enunciated seemed metaphorically akin to the bookshop, whose first floor bustled with tourists skirting around the Czech literature section (in many languages) and whose second-floor was devoted to scientific and theoretical literature for the arts and sciences. Levý produced a book that was not “dry-as-dust theory,” thanks to his well-illustrated explanations that were not “addressed to experts but to a broad community of interested readers” (Hausenblas, cited in Levý, p. ix). Yet Levý’s functionalist and erudite approach also appealed to cultural and translation scholars, including Itamar Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury and José Lambert (p. xvii), and impacted their thinking about new and contemporary translation theories. *The Art of Translation* has now been translated into English, excellently, by Patrick Corness for John Benjamins, with a lucid introduction by Zuzana Jettmarová, who emphasizes its importance not only for understanding the “international historiography of the discipline” but also for what it can still contribute to “current discussion” (p. xxv).