

Booklist

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★ **The Murderous History of Bible Translations: Power, Conflict, and the Quest for Meaning.**

Freedman, Harry (Author)

Nov 2016. 256 p. Bloomsbury, hardcover, \$28. (9781632866011).

For readers who take for granted the easy availability of the Bible in every library—in every hotel room!—Freedman’s engrossing history of Bible translating documents the high human cost of such availability. Freedman devotes particular attention to William Tyndale, the brilliant sixteenth-century polyglot strangled and then burned as a heretic by clerics outraged by his challenge to their control of Holy Writ in England. But readers encounter all too many other bold translators—including Jan Hus of Bohemia and Jacob van Liesveldt of Holland—who paid the same price for similar offenses. Merely reading from the Bible in vernacular Gallic sent the medieval beguine Marguerite Ponte to the stake. Such martyrdom underscores the tensions running throughout a narrative stretching from ancient fights between Jewish and Christian scholars wrangling over the Hebrew word *almah*, through Reformation-era disputes between Protestant and Catholic exegetes arguing over the Greek word *ecclesia*, to modern debates between progressives and conservatives split over masculine scriptural pronouns. Despite the rancor, Freedman recognizes that the best Bible translations—including the one Luther delivered in painstakingly wrought sixteenth-century German and the one James I commissioned in poetic seventeenth-century English—have forever enriched world literature. A fascinating look at the tangled backstory of the Western world’s Good Book.

— *Bryce Christensen*