

Dynamic Equivalence and the Translation of the Metz Psalter of 1370

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Introduction

The titles "Metz Psalter" and "Le Psautier Lorraine" have been used since the 1880s to refer to a liturgical psalter translated from Latin into French of the Lorraine dialect; it was intended for use by a woman. The names of neither the translator nor the intended user are known to us. For the sake of greater precision, the date of composition, 1370, is here added to the traditional titles.

A noteworthy feature of this psalter is that the translator has provided a preface which considers at some length the *principles of translation* employed in producing the French text from the Latin original. This distinguishes it from the type of preface that tells *why* and *for whom* a translation is made. This preface is the focus of our attention here. First, however, further information is given about the text.

The Text

The Metz psalter or le psautier lorraine is found, in whole or in part, in the following three manuscripts:

London, British Museum [Library], Harley 4327

Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine 798

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 9572

It has been published in the following editions:

François Bonnardot, *Le Psautier de Metz: Texte du XIVe siècle*. Paris: F. Vieweg, 1884

Friedrich Apfelstedt, *Lothringischer Psalter* (Bibl. Mazarine No. 798): Altfranzösische Übersetzung des XIV. Jahrhunderts. Heilbronn: Verlag Von Gerr. Henninger 1881

A thorough description was published in:

Samuel Berger, "Le Psautier Lorrain," pp 270-280. In *La Bible Française au Moyen Age: Etude sur les plus anciennes versions de la Bible écrites en prose de langue d'oïl*. Originally printed in Paris 1884; Reprint Geneva: Slatkine Reprints 1967.

A casual reference to this translation is found in:

Raymond C. St-Jacques, "The *Middle English Glossed Psalter* and its French Source," pp 135-154. [Metz Psalter 144, 154]. In Jennette Beer, ed., *Medieval Translators and their Craft*. Studies in Medieval Culture XXV. Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications. 1989

It is not mentioned in a wider survey of medieval biblical translations:

C. A. Robson, "Vernacular Scriptures in France," pp 436-452. In G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation. Cambridge: University Press 1969

Translation in Medieval Theory and Practice

A number of contemporary studies of translation in Antiquity and the Middle Ages have been used in considering the preface of the Metz psalter, including the following:

Roger Ellis, ed., *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 1989

Roger Ellis, ed., *The Medieval Translator II*. London: Centre for Medieval Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1991

Roger Ellis and Rene Tixier, eds., *The Medieval Translator: Traduire au Moyen Age*

Turnholt: Brepols 1996

Jeanette Beer, ed., *Medieval Translators and their Craft*. Studies in Medieval Culture, XXV. Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University 1989

Jeanette Beer, ed., *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages*. Studies in Medieval Culture XXXVIII. Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1997

Louis G. Kelly, "Medieval Psalm Translation and Literality," pp 161-172. In Jeanette Beer, ed., *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages*. Studies in Medieval Culture XXXVIII. Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1997

Douglas Kelly, "The *Fidus interpres*: Aid or Impediment to Medieval Translation and *Translatio*?" In Jeanette Beer, ed., *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* Studies in Medieval Culture XXXVIII. Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1997

Rita Copeland, "The Fortunes of 'Non Verbum Pro Verbo': or, Why Jerome is not a Ciceronian," pp 15-35. In Roger Ellis, ed., *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer 1989

Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1991

The Preface

The translator believed that the preface was important for readers to study; he or she therefore asked that it be included in all copies of the psalter. The principles of translation enunciated in it would not only aid the reader, but true appreciation of these principles were necessary to achieve the desired depth of understanding.

One has the impression that knowledgeable people of the late 14th century were aware that there was more than one way to approach translation of a work such as a liturgical psalter and indeed, that the relative merits of alternative approaches may be discussed and debated.

Dynamic and Formal Equivalence

The translator was not simplistic in his or her work, but recognized that different words, phrases or sentences needed different approaches. In general he or she appears to have favored sentence by sentence (dynamic equivalence) rather than word for word (formal equivalence) translation. This was qualified by the recognition that certain words and phrases had acquired a technical meaning in Christian theology and required more individual attention.

Rita Copeland has demonstrated, however, that the meaning and significance of dynamic equivalence – and other approaches – depended on practices, modes of thinking and epistemologies of particular times and places (see, for example, her *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation*, above). An assessment of this preface from these broader perspectives seems best left to others.

Translator's Preface: Original French Text

François Bonnardot, *Le Psautier de Metz: Texte du XIVe siècle*. Paris: F. Vieweg, 1884, pp 1-10

PROLOGUE

Cilz qui ait cest Psaultier de latin translateit en romans prie et requierit a touz ceulz qui lou vorront transcrire et copier, que il metient ou faicent mettre tout devant lou Psaultier ceste preface et prologue qui s'ensuit, our entendre plus cleirement tout lou romans trait dou latin, au moins ceu qu'ens en puet entendre, et pour savoir aici queil peril est de translateir la Saincte Escripiture en romans et queil profit puet venir a celui qui devotement se welt acostumeir a dire lou Psaultier, soit en romans pour les gens laye, soit en latin pour ceulz qui l'entendent.

Veze ci lou Psaultier dou latin trait et translateit en romans en laingue lorenne, selonc la veriteit commune et selonc lou commun laingaige, au plus pres dou latin qu'en puet bonnement: aucune fois de mot a mot, aucune foiz sentence pour sentence, aucune fois un mot et une parolle pour une aultre a ce meismes sens pour donner l'entendement des parolles que on dit.

Quar pour tant que laingue romance et especiaulment de Lorene est imperfaite, et plus asseiz que nulle aultre entre les langaiges perfaiz, il n'est nulz, tant soit boin clerc ne bien parlans romans, qui lou latin puisse translateir n romans quant a plusour mos dou latin; mais couvient que, per corruption et per diseite des mos françois, que en disse lou romans selonc lou latin, si com: *iniquitas* "iniquiteit", *redemptio* "redemption", *miser cordia* "miser corde"; et ainsi de mains et

plusours aultres telz mos, que il couvient ainsi dire en romans comme on dit en latin.

Aucune fois li latins ait plusours mos que en romans nous ne poions exprimeir ne dire proprement, tant est imperfecte nostre laingue, si com on dit on latin: *erue, eripe, libera me*, pour les quelz. iii. mos en latin nous disons un soul mot en romans: “delivre moi”; et ainsi de maint et plusours aultres telz mos, des quelz je me coise quant a present pour cause de briesteit.

Aucune fois li latin warde ses rigles de gramaire et ses congruiteiz et ordenances en figures, en qualiteiz, en comparaison, en persones, en nombres, en temps, en declinesons, en causes, en muf, et en perfection: que en romans ne en françoiz on ne puet proprement wardeit, pour les varieteiz et diversiteiz des lainguaiges et lou deffault d’entendement de maint et plusour, qui plus souvent forment lour mos et lour parler a lour volenteit et a lour guise que a veriteit et au commun entendement. Et pour ceu que nulz ne tient en son parlier ne rigle certenne, mesure ne raison, est laingue romance si corumpue qu’a poinne li uns entent l’aultre, et a poinne puet on trouver a jour d’ieu persone qui saiche escrire, anteur ne prononclieur en une meismes semblant meniere; mais escript, ante et prononce il uns en une guise et li aultre en une aultre.

Auci est il a savoir que li latins ait plusour mos que nullement on romans on ne puet dire maiques per circonlocution et exposition; et qui les vorroit dire selonc lou latin en romant, il ne dit ne latin boin ne romans, mais aucune foiz moitieit latin moitieit romans. Et per une vaine curiouseteit, et per aventure, per ignorance, wellent dire lou romans selonc lou latin de mot a mot, si com dient aucuns: *negocia ardua* “negoces ardues”, et: *Effunde frameam et conclude adversus eos* “Effunt ta frame et conclut encontre eulz”; si n’ait ne sentence ne construction ne parfait entendement. Et quant Nostre Sires dit en l’evangeile saint Jehans: *Nisi palmes manserit in vite*,” qui diroit lou romans selonc lou latin de mot a mot il diroit ainsi: “Se li palme ne demoret en la vis”, et si n’ait point de vrai ne de parfait entendement selonc lou senz de la lettre; quar si mot si “palme” signifie plusour chose, quar: ou la palme de la main, ou l’arbre dou paumieir, ou lou getons et rains de la vigne on de chescun aultre arbres. Et tout ainsi puet on dire de ce mot “vis” qui signifie plusour choses: ou vigne, ou visaige, ou une vis tournant. Et toute ansi puet on dire de se mot “fornication”, que aucune fois signifiet: lou pechieit de luxure, ou en fait ou en consentement; aucune fois: ydolatrie, selons ceu qu’il est escript: *Fornicans fornicabitur terra a Domino*”; et David “: *Fornicati sunt in adinventionibus suis*”; et en un aultre lieu dit l’Escripture: *Quamodo tu dicis: Non sum fornicata cum ydolis, et post Baalim non ambulavi:*”. Et com il soit fornication esperitueile et corporeile, il apert don’t asseiz cleirement que aucune foiz dire lou romans mot a mot selonc lou latini est chose corumpue et imperfecte, et que teile translation aucune foiz faulce la sentence et destruit l’entendement des perolles, et mue et change

l'entention de la letre et dou texte.

Et pour ceu dont est ce trop perillouse chose de translateir la Sainte Escripiture dou latin en romans, quar li Escripiture Sainte est plainne de plusours sens et de plusour entendemens que, qui la welt mettre de latin en romans, se il n'i ait lonc temps estudiet et se il na'ait l'usage et l'entendement de li, il ne la puet veritablement translateir senz erreir.

Dont il avient plusour fois que, en metant un mot pour un aultre, ou une lettre pour une aultre, ou une persone pour une aultre, ou un adjectif pour uns substantif, li sens et l'entendement de l'Escripiture est fauceiz et corrumplus, et pervertie est l'entention dou Saint Esperit, per queil inspiration et enseignement li sains Prophets, Apostres et Euvangelistres ont eut parleit en Saintctes Escripures; et contient teile translation errour et heresie: et en ceu git li peril de ceulz qui s'entremettent de translateir escriptures de latin en romans, especiaulment la Saint Escripiture et les dis de Sains.

Quar nulz purs gramariens ne aultre clers, j'ai soir ceu que des simple gens laies et mondaines soit reputeiz boins clers et bien apers ou qu'en aucune science soit bien fondeiz, pour ceu n'ait il mie grace ne science de translateir, quar c'est dons especial dou Saint Esperit, qui n'est mies a tous donneit mais a bien poc de gent.

Toutes ces choses ai je dit pour tant que, com bien teil grace ne teil dons ne soit mies en mi n'en suis mies digne, toute voie de ma presumption et de mon outrage j'ai translateit cest Psaultier de latin en romans, au plus pres, a mon avis, que j'ai peut selonc la veriteit dou latin, au plus pres de la sentence selonc la lettre et selonc la gloze, et de la veriteit des Hebreu selonc la translation saint Jerome, et au plus commun entendement que j'ai peut; ne reins n'i ai mis ne ajosteit dou mien.

Bien est voir qui li Psaultier, qui est obscurs en son senz et malaisieit a entendre en maint et plusour psaulmes pour la hautesse des mysteires et des propheties que il contient, tout ainsi com li latin demoustrer son obscurteit, ainsi convient il que li romans lou contiengne: quar en aucuns lieu il parle de Jhesu Crist cleirement, en aucun lieu bien obscurement; aucune foiz perle David en la persone de Jhesu Crist, aucune foiz en sa persone; aucune foiz des boins tous ensemble, aucune foiz de chescuns prodome per li et dou juste; et aici fait il des mauvais et des pechour en semblant menieire.

Et est aici a savoir que quant David en maint et plusour psaulmes raconte "comment sui anemins queroient l'arme de lui", per "l'arme", selonc l'istoire de la lettre, il entent "la vie dou corps". Et lai ou est escript "generation et generation", est entendue "succession d'enfans et de lignie l'une apres l'autre et tous jour outre sens nulle fin". Et lai ou Daivd dit "comment il confesse a Dieu",

et dit a son arme “qu’elle benissoisse a Dieu”, c’est a dire que “il rent graice et merci a Dieu et lou recognoit comme son Dieu et son Sauveur, et welt que l’arme de lui looisse Dieu”: et tout ainsi doit faire chescun boin crestien. Et lai ou il dit “de siecle en siecle”, j’ai mis et translateit “a touz jour”, quar aultre chose n’emportet il a dire. Et la ou il dit ses “miserations”, il entens ses “pitieiz et les merci qu’il fait”. Et lai ou il dit ses “tesmoingnaiges”, il entent ses “ordenences et cerimonies” que sunt, comme li consoil de l’Evangile, per dessus les commandemens; et cest meismes entendement ont ses “justifications”, des queilles David perle en plusour lieu dou Psaultier. Et lai ou il parle des “aitres de Dieu”, il entent les “lieux saint ou Dieux est aoreiz”, soit on temple de Dieu s’aval en terre, soit lassus en paradix. Et ainsi de maint et plusour aultres mos qui sont on Psaultier doit on avoir boin et vrai entendement et jugement, non mie soi aresteir au rude entendement de la lettre, quar sainz Polz dit que “li lettre occit l’arme, et li esperis la vivifie de donne vie”. Et pour ceu parle David en son escripture, maintenant selon l’ystoire de la lettre, maintenant au senz moral et esperitueil; aucune foys parle per menieire de prophetie qui est jai passeie, si com il apert quant il parle de li et de Jhesu Crist, de son incarnation, de son humaniteit, de ses persecutions, de sa mort et passion, resurrection et ascension; aucune foys parle per menieire de prophetie a avenir quant au senz esperitueil et moral, pour retraire la creature de pechieit et enstrure et enformeir en bonne mours. Si ques pertout David en son Psaultier parle generalment a la loenge de Dieu et au profit esperitueil de toute creature: et ce mot yci “psaulme” enporte loenge a Dieu en certenne perolles a Dieu loeir per menieire de chanson deputeie et appliqueie, et per menieire de devote prieire qui est contenue en maint et plusour psaulmes ou il pechour puelent panre grant confort, esperance et certenne fiance de la misericorde de Dieu et de sa tres grant pitieit.

Si que dont, soit en romans soit en latin, tres devote prieire et orison et que moult plait a Dieu est de dire lou Psaultier, ou chesques jour or bien souvent. Et queil profit il puet porteur a l’arme, saint Augustin lou dit en un prologue qu’il fait sus lon Psaultier, ou il dit ainsi....

Translator’s Preface: English Translation by Christine McWebb

The person who translated this Psalter from Latin into the vernacular asks and requests of all those who wish to transcribe and copy it, that the Psalter be preceded by the preface and the prologue which follow, in order to have a clearer understanding of all the vernacular translated from Latin, at least those who can understand it, and in order to understand the danger of translating the Holy Scripture into the vernacular and the gain to be obtained by those who want to piously take up the habit of saying the Psalter, either in the vernacular for lay people or in Latin for those who understand it.

Here is the Psalter translated as closely as possible from Latin into the vernacular language of Lorraine spoken by the common people: one word for another, one phrase for another, and one expression for another, which have the same meaning in order to render the words spoken comprehensible.

Since the French language and in particular the Lorraine dialect are imperfect, and even more so since no other language is perfect, there is nobody, not even a good cleric, who speaks the vernacular well, who would be able to translate certain Latin words into the vernacular. However, it is necessary to translate literally from Latin into the vernacular because of the degeneracy of or lack of words in French, such as: *iniquitas* “inequity” *redemptio* “redemption”, *misericordia* “misericordia”;¹ and there are many more words like this where it is necessary to say them in the vernacular as they are said in Latin.

Sometimes there are several words in Latin which we cannot express properly in the vernacular. That is how imperfect our language is, such as the Latin: *erue, eripe, libera me*. For all three expressions in Latin we use only one word in the vernacular: “Save me”. And there are many more such words which I will not mention at present for sake of brevity.

Sometimes the Latin language words its grammatical rules and its congruities and syntax in figures of speech, in qualities, in comparisons, in personal pronouns, numbers, tenses, in declinations and causes, in transformations and in perfection which neither in the vernacular nor in French can be properly worded, because of the variations in the diverse languages and lack of understanding by many who very often create their words and their speech as they please rather than in conformity with the truth and common understanding. And for those who do not stick to any rule, measure or reason in their speech, the vernacular is so degenerated that one person can barely understand the other and today one can hardly find people who write or pronounce in the same way, but everybody writes and pronounces as they please .

¹ I chose to translate literally from Latin to English, even though it might not be the best translation, in order to underline the author’s argument that sometimes the same word exists in the vernacular as it does in Latin, but might not always convey the correct meaning.

One also ought to be aware that in Latin there are several words which one cannot say in the vernacular except for paraphrasing and describing. And who would like to translate them literally from Latin into the vernacular, does neither the Latin nor the vernacular justice, but will say them half in Latin half in the vernacular. And out of mere eagerness, chance or ignorance certain people want to translate word for word from Latin into the vernacular, such as some say: *negocia ardua* “violent affairs” and *Effunde frameam et conclude adversus eos* “Destroy your spear and make peace with them”.² Neither meaning nor syntax are perfectly understood here. And when Our Lord says in the Gospel of Saint John: *Nisi palmes manserit in vite*, which translates word for word into the vernacular: “If the branch stays on the vine”, it does not render the truth according to the meaning of the message, since the word “palme” has several meanings: either the palm of the hand or the palm tree or the off-shoots of a vine or any other tree. The same can be said for the word “vis” which has several meanings: either vine or face or screw. The same can be said for the word “fornication”, which sometimes means the sin of lust either in deed or will, sometimes it means idolatry as in: *Fornicans fornicabitur terra a Domino* and David says: *Fornicati sunt in adinventionibus suis* and elsewhere in the Scripture: *Quamodo tu dicis: Non sum fornicata cum ydolis, et post Baalim non ambulavi*. And since there is spiritual and corporal fornication, it follows therefore quite clearly that sometimes translating literally from Latin into the vernacular results in alterations and imperfections and that such a translation sometimes renders the sentence incorrect and destroys the meaning of the words transforming the intended message of the letter or the text.

And for those who have neither studied Latin thoroughly nor have the practice or understanding of it, it is dangerous to translate the Holy Scripture from Latin into the vernacular without committing errors, because the Holy Scripture is full of multiple meanings.

It therefore often happens that by translating a word for another or a sentence for another, or a personal pronoun for another, or an adjective for a noun, the meaning of the Scripture is altered and the intention of the Holy Spirit perverted, whose inspiration and teaching the holy prophets, apostles and evangelists have expressed in the Holy Scriptures. And such a translation contains errors and heresy. This is where the danger lies for those who attempt to translate texts from Latin into the vernacular, in particular the Holy Scripture and the words of the Saints.

Because no grammarian nor any other cleric, not even those who amongst lay people have a reputation of being a good and capable cleric and well-versed in a

² In the English translation the point of the author’s argument is lost, because a literal translation was impossible in the above examples.

certain discipline, are knowledgeable enough to translate because this ability is a special gift from the Holy Spirit which is not given to everybody, but only to very few people.

I have said all these things because, although such aptitude or talent has not been instilled in me and I am not worthy of it, with my conviction and my courage, I translated this psalter from Latin into the vernacular as closely as possible, in my opinion, to the truth of the Latin text and the gloss and to the truth of the Hebrews according to St. Jerome's translation and to my best understanding. I have not added anything of my own.

It is easy to see that the Latin version of the Psalter is obscure in its meaning and difficult to understand in several psalms because of the complexity of the mysteries and prophecies it contains. Therefore, the same should be the case in the vernacular. Because sometimes the text speaks explicitly of Jesus Christ, sometimes in an obscure fashion. Sometimes David speaks in the person of Jesus Christ, sometimes as himself. Sometimes all the good people speak together, and sometimes each wise man speaks just for himself. And the same goes for the bad people and the sinners.

One also ought to know that when David says in several psalms "how his enemies wanted his soul³", that "l'arme", according to the history of the word, means "the life of his body". And where it is written "generation and generation", it means "the succession of children and lineage one after the other and always". And where David says "how he confesses himself to God", and says to his soul "that it is blessed in God", it means that "he thanks God and that he acknowledges him as his God and Savior and that he wants his soul to praise God". And every good Christian ought to do the same. And where he says "from century to century", I translated it as "always", because nothing else could have been said in its stead. And where he says his "compassion"⁴, he means his "pity and pardon". And where he says his "testimonies", he means his "orders and ceremonies" which, as suggested in the Gospel, are added to the commandments. This is also the case with his "justifications" which David mentions repeatedly in the psalter. And where he speaks of the "places of God" he means the "holy places where God can be praised", either in the temples here on earth or in paradise. And there are a lot more words like this which one has to understand properly. Otherwise, one will arrive at a false meaning of the word, because St. Paul says that "the word kills the soul and the spirit revives it and gives it life." And that is why David at times simply tells the story of the scripture and at times he refers to its moral and spiritual meaning. Sometimes he

³ "L'arme de lui".

⁴ "Miserations"

speaks in terms of prophecy about a past event, as is evident when he speaks of himself and of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, human life, his persecutions, his death and passion, resurrection and ascension. Sometimes he speaks in terms of prophecy of the future with regards to the spiritual and moral meaning in order to save mortal creatures from sin and to instruct them in good virtues.

Everywhere in his Psalter, David generally speaks of the praise of God and of the spiritual good of every human being. And the word “psalm” praises God with certain expressions and through song and pious prayer contained in a lot of psalms where the sinners can find great comfort, hope and faith in God’s grace and forgiveness.

Therefore, it pleases God very much when one says this psalter as a very pious prayer, either in the vernacular or in Latin either everyday or very often. And the gain it can bring to the soul, Saint Augustine talks about it in a prologue of another psalter, where he says the following....