

LOOKING OVER JEROME'S SHOULDER –
THE VULGATE AS A STARTING POINT
TO DETERMINE JEROME'S HEBREW TEXT¹

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ABSTRACT Jerome's translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, constitutes a verbatim copy of a Hebrew original now lost; there are marked differences between the *textus receptus* currently considered the most reliable source (BHS) and the text Jerome chose as his point of departure. In this paper I want to demonstrate how a detailed look into what must have been Jerome's Hebrew text can be opened up.

KEYWORDS Vulgate – Weber and Gryson – translation into German – LXX – Psalm 22 (Ps 21 vulg) – Psalm 23 (Ps 22 vulg)

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG Die Übersetzung der Bibel von Hieronymus, bekannt als die Vulgata, ist eine wörtliche Kopie eines hebräischen Originals, das jetzt verloren ist. Es gibt deutliche Unterschiede zwischen dem *Textus receptus*, der derzeit als zuverlässigste Quelle (BHS) gilt, und dem Text, den Hieronymus als Ausgangspunkt gewählt hat. In diesem Artikel möchte ich zeigen, wie man einen detaillierten Blick auf den hebräischen Text, der Hieronymus vorgelegen haben muss, werfen kann.

SCHLAGWORTE Vulgata – Weber und Gryson – Übersetzung ins Deutsche – LXX – Psalm 22 (Ps 21 vulg) – Psalm 23 (Ps 22 vulg)

The text commonly known as the Vulgate is a corpus of textual traditions with far-reaching discrepancies; after an attempt to find some kind of order in this chaos, the Latin Vulgate published by Weber and Gryson in their 5th edition in 2007 offers the text most probably put to paper by Jerome himself. It is to this edition that my reasoning refers and it is also this edition that was used as a starting point for our translation of the complete Vulgate into German.

One of the main aims and objectives of our edition is to make the Latin text a regular source of research for a wider group of biblical scholars. Biblical research is not typically associated with Latin. Other languages – the original languages – clearly play the first fiddle here; I am not trying to question this. At the

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2019 IOSOT reunion of biblical researchers, papers referring to Latin sources were clearly a faint minority.

However, given the availability of a complete verbatim copy of all biblical books in the order then assumed to be the correct one from the year 400, it is surprising how little attention it has so far been granted in this respect. I would like to emphasize that this makes the Latin text the oldest complete copy (in the literal sense of the word) of the biblical books since the LXX. If this does not constitute an unaccountably huge advantage in the eternal question of how original these texts are, please let me know what else is? What more could we desire than a photographic image of what Jerome had made the point of departure for his work?

I have chosen the book of Psalms for my argument, as this book – like few others – shows Jerome’s constant and surprisingly accurate endeavours to render the Hebrew into Latin in a rigorously (or even slavishly) verbal way; the advantage being, of course, the fact that Latin is as flexible regarding word order as he could wish and like no other language. He did this, clearly, in order to show the marked differences between what tradition (starting out from the LXX) had made of the Psalms by his time and what he was able to identify in the text he had before him.

In many places (most notably in his Letter 57, but also in his prefaces to some of the biblical books) he stresses that translating means rendering a text accurately by avoiding the three mortal sins of translators: *Adding* something which is not contained in the text, *omitting* something which is contained, and *changing* the text; he emphatically adds that even the word order must not be changed, as this is also a *mysterium* (explicitly limiting this last point to *biblical* texts).

Assuming, therefore, that these rules must apply in an especially unmitigated way to the Psalms, my argument puts forward that Jerome’s text can be used to reconstruct what he must have had in front of him when undertaking this task; unmitigated, as it is well known that his translation e.g. of Leviticus is of an entirely different quality.

I have done this here for Ps 23 (Ps 22 Vulg), taking Jerome’s method of translating *verbum e verbo* literally:

מְזֹמֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רָעִי לֹא אֶחְסֹר:	CANTICUM DAVID Dominus <i>pascit</i> me nihil mihi deerit
בְּנֵאֹת דְּשֵׂא יִרְבִּיצָנִי עַל־מֵי מְגַחֹת יְנַהֲלָנִי:	in pascuis herbarum adclinavit me super aquas refectionis <i>enutrivit</i> me
נִפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יְנַחֲנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי־צְדָק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:	animam meam refecit duxit me per semitas iustitiae propter nomen suum
גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶּךְ בְּגִיא צְלָמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטֶךָ וּמַשְׁעֲנֹתֶךָ הַמָּה יְנַחֲמָנִי:	sed et si ambulavero in valle mortis non timebo malum quoniam tu mecum es virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa consolabuntur me
תַּעֲרֹף לְפָנַי שְׁלֹחַן נֶגֶד צַרְרִי דִּשְׁנָת בְּשֶׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רַנִּיָּה:	pones coram me mensam ex adverso hostium meorum inpinguasti oleo caput meum calix meus <i>inebrians</i>
אֵף טוֹב וְחַסֵּד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:	sed et benignitas et misericordia subsequetur me omnibus diebus vitae meae et habitabo in domo Domini in longitudine dierum

Note: word sequence obsequiously followed

Differences (marked above): *pascit* – verb for noun; *enutrivit* – rather loose translation; *inebrians* – participle for noun

I contend that all these discrepancies can be explained in terms of loose translation without stretching the term too much. Most importantly, nothing has been omitted or added.

Conclusion: For Ps 23 (Ps 22 Vulg) the text followed by Jerome is *most probably* identical with the text known to us (BHS).

For my second example I have chosen Psalm 22 (Ps 21 Vulg), where the situation is quite different. I have deliberately chosen a text in close vicinity to my first example in order to refute explanations for these differences in terms of a different scroll being used, e.g., and in order to dispel allegations of arbitrary choice on my part. – Whereas a great majority of the text again shows a verbatim correspondence with the Hebrew text known to us, in some verses there are differences; I have marked these:

סָבּוּנֵי פְּרִים רַבִּים אַבִּירֵי בָּשָׂן פְּתוּוּנֵי:	13	circumdederunt me <i>vituli</i> multi <i>tauri</i> pingues vallaverunt me
פִּי סָבּוּנֵי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הַקִּיפּוּנֵי כְּאַרְי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי:	17	circumdederunt me <i>venatores</i> concilium pessimorum vallavit me <i>vinxerunt</i> manus meas et pedes meos
וְלֹא שִׁקֵּץ עֲנוּת עָנִי	25	neque contempsit <i>modestiam pauperis</i>
יֹאכְלוּ עֲנָוִים וְיִשְׁבְּעוּ יְהַלְלוּ יְהוָה דֹּרְשָׁיו יַחֲי לְבַבְכֶם לְעַד:	27	comedent <i>mites</i> et saturabuntur laudabunt Dominum quaerentes eum

Explanations:

13	<i>vituli</i> is certainly a verbal translation for פְּרִים, but why is <i>tauri</i> preferred to an adjective for אַבִּירֵי ?	usually a noun is rendered with a noun, an adjective with an adjective	change
17	כִּי is omitted	<i>quia</i> could easily have been inserted	omission
	כְּלָבִים is usually translated as „dogs“ (as in LXX)	... so why <i>venatores</i> ?	change
	כְּאַרְי is usually translated as „to pierce“ (as in LXX)	against Jerome’s Christological convictions this term is translated to give the verse a completely different meaning	change
25	עֲנוּת usually “poverty”	unmotivated <i>lectio difficilior</i>	change
27	עֲנָוִים usually “poor”	unmotivated <i>lectio difficilior</i>	change

I contend that these discrepancies *cannot* be explained in terms of loose translation without stretching the term too much. In addition, a word was omitted which could easily have been inserted – if it had been there. I therefore assume it was not there and that Jerome is following a different text which is not known to us now but which seems to have been available to him as the starting point

for his translation. Furthermore, Jerome was well aware of the fact that his new translation based on the Hebrew text could (and would) cause controversy; he must therefore have applied a very strict and methodical discipline for his work, which in turn makes it unlikely that his text was the same as the one we now have.

Conclusion: For Ps 22 (Ps 21 Vulg) the text followed by Jerome is *most probably not identical* with the text known to us (BHS).

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I am aware of the limitations of this approach; as I have pointed out above, some biblical texts (Leviticus being the most well-known example) would not stand up to this confrontation. However, as far as my experience extends, I am convinced that it constitutes a viable method for reconstructing the text that was considered original by Jerome around the year 400 AD.

