LOOKING OVER JEROME’S SHOULDER –
THE VULGATE AS A STARTING POINT
TO DETERMINE JEROME’S HEBREW TEXT

Andreas Beriger

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)


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:
LOOKING OVER JEROME’S SHOULDER

CANTICUM DAVID

Dominus pascit me nihil mihi deert

in pascuis herbarum adclinavit me
super aquas refectonis enutrivit me

animam meam refecit
duxit me per semitas iustitiae propter nomen suum

sed et si ambulavero in valle mortis
non timebo malum quoniam tu mecum es
virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa consolabuntur me

pones coram me mensam
ex adverso hostium meorum
inpinguasti oleo caput meum
calix meus inebrans

sed et benignitas et misericordia subseuetur 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; inebrans – 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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>סֶבְבֹנֵי פָרִים רֶכְים</td>
<td>circumdederunt me <em>vituli</em> multi <em>tauri</em> pingues vallaverunt me</td>
<td>a verbal translation for פָרִים is certainly preferred, but why is <em>tauri</em> preferred?</td>
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<td>circumdederunt me <em>venatores</em></td>
<td>concilium pessimorum vallavit me</td>
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<td>פָרִים סֶבְבֹנֵי</td>
<td>vinxerunt manus meas et pedes meos</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>כַּלַּת שַׂדָּקָה וּנְנוֹת</td>
<td>neque contempsit <em>modestiam pauperis</em></td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>כַּלַּת הָנָּהִים וְיִשְׁכְּבֹת</td>
<td>comedent <em>mites</em> et saturabuntur</td>
<td>laudabant Dominum quaerentes eum</td>
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Explanations:

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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).

* 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.