# *Translaticia Translatio* – brief script about non-translation

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**Abstract**: This article sets out to present a situation which is unconventional, yet frequent in the real act of translation, namely, resorting to clarification, as Saint Jerome chooses to do in the case of certain Hebrew terms impossible to translate in accordance with the Jeromian translational method and not only; the phrase "translaticia translation" is contrived so as to synthesize a situation and implicitly a solution, with specific references and examples from the Jeromian epistolary text, the latter becoming a possible guide for non-translation as a sensible choice.

**Keywords**: translation, transposition, metaphor as a result of tradition, the ten names of God, non-translation..

**Résumé :** Cet article se propose de présenter une situation non conventionnelle et pourtant fréquente dans le processus réel de la traduction : le recours à l'explicitation. C'est ce que choisit de faire Saint Jérôme dans le cas de certains termes hébreux impossibles à traduire par sa propre méthode ou par d'autres méthodes. Le syntagme « translaticia translation » est conçu de manière à synthétiser une situation et, implicitement, une solution et elle est accompagnée de références et d'exemples du texte épistolaire de Saint Jérôme, devenu un possible argument en faveur de la non traduction comme option justifiable.

**Mots-clés :** traduction, transposition, métaphore comme résultat de la tradition, les dix noms de Dieu, non traduction.

In keeping with the Jeromian cultural tradition of more than a millennium and a half ago described in a previous article the meaning of "translation" was conferred to *translatio* by the "lion of Bethlehem" himself (Negrescu 2009, 9). Evidently, the verb he used when referring to the process of translation was *transferre*, with the supine form *translatum*. I draw attention to these details because, in what follows, we shall observe that Jerome – by virtue of his intellectual humility – finds himself in the situation in which certain terms cannot be *transposed*, that is to say really translated, transferred *structuraliter* and *intellectualiter* into Latin.

In the ensuing examples, we shall notice that translation is not always a transfer of meaning in the Jeromian sense, but an attempt to verbally equate *verbum pro verbo*. This is due to the fact that not



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everything can be translated, the translational transferal reaching a point somewhere in between the two languages and thus becoming an *interlatio*. Having said that, the translator is not bothered by the suffix, in this case *inter*, but resorts to that which is transmitted through tradition, customarily, and which has thus become usual, common, metaphorical, *translaticia*.

In this case, in the same line of thought pertaining to the Jeromian endeavours , whilst acknowledging the merit of the creator that coined the term, we shall however accept that we are dealing with a situation not only special, but also specious, which can be referred to as *translatio translaticia*. The determiner obviously points to the same root, only, if we take into account the Jeromian vocabulary, we shall notice that there is no translating, but *calling, naming, denominating*, the terms which are used being thus *transpositional* (metaphorical terms transmitted through tradition), but which do not generate a *translatio vera,* by analogy with the *Hebraica vera* that Jerome yearned to command. The most relevant, in the sense of what I argue above, is undoubtedly *Letter XXV*, sent as a reply to Marcella, also known as *The Ten names of God* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 428-430)[1].

The editor, by the name of Migne, starts by pointing out that Jerome *Decem nomina Dei, quibus apud Hebreos Deus vocatur, Marcellae, id ab se postulanti, explicat* (Hieronymus 1883, col.428)[2]. Already, this observation leads us to find out that, in Latin, there is only one term: *Deus* (God).

Jerome begins his clarification with **Psalm XC** in which *Deus coeli* (the God of the skies) would be an equivalent for the Hebrew term SADDAI *quod Aquila interpretatur,* but which, Jerome continues, *nos robustum et sufficientem ad omnia perpetranda accipere posumus* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[3]. It is apparent that this is not even by far the case of a translation, but of an interpretation, a clarification in two stages, where the verb *transferre* is nonexistent, being replaced by *interpretari* (**explaining, clarifying, conveying a certain sense,** and only thereafter **translating certain meanings**).

Subsequently, Jerome starts in an order pioneered by the name considered to be the first EL *id est fortem interpretatur* (Hieronymus 1883, col.429)[4]; again, the verb is *interpretari.* In fact, before explaining this first name, Jerome informs Marcella that he will present her *universa nomina*

[1] The translation of the Latin texts into Romanian is ours entirely.
[2] "explains to Marcella, upon her request, the ten names whereby God is invoked in Hebrew".
[3] "which is explicated as Aquila, can be understood as the vigorous, he who is enough on his own in order to carry anything out".
[4] "which is explicated as the powerful".



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*cum sua interpretatione* (Hieronymus 1883, col.429)[5] and not his own translation.

He goes on to employ *ELOIM et ELOE, quod et ipsum Deus dicitur* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[6]; once more we observe a verb – *dicere* – of clarification and not of translation.

The fourth name is SABAOTH, which, it is to be noted, *virtutum, Aquila, exercituum transtulerunt* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[7]*;* it is the only case in which the verb used is *transferre*.

*Quintum ELION, quem nos excelsum, dicimus* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[8]. The intention of transposing is absent in this case, being certainly impossible.

*Sextum ESER IEJE, quod in Exodo legitur: „Qui est, misit me"* (Hieronymus 1883, col.429)[9]; i.e. in the text translated by Jerome which calls for … further **reading**, not **transposition**.

*Septimum ADONAI, quem nos Dominum generaliter appellamus* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[10]. This may as well be the case where the aforenamed *translaticia translatio* works best, Jerome himself suggesting the same through *generaliter appellamus*.

*Octavum IA, quod in Deo tantum ponitur: et in ALLELUIA extrema quoque sylaba sonat* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[11]. The impossibility of a true translation is obvious, the explanation in itself becoming almost irrelevant.

*Nonum … ineffabile putaverunt, quod his litteris scribitur, JOD, HE, VAV, HE* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[12]. This is self-evident, for it goes without saying that what is **unutterable** is perforce **untranslatable**.

The tenth name gives Jerome the opportunity to go back to his first explanation, further specifying that the explanation itself is in fact missing: *Decimum, quod superius dictum est, SADDAI, et in Ezechiel non interpretatum ponitur* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 429)[13].

We can observe, judging by the ten explanations given to Marcella and intended as elucidative, that, in essence, translation per se is not the case here; rather, we are dealing with attempts towards equivalence that

[5] "all of the names, explained one by one".
[6] "ELOHIM and ELOE, which are the names of God himself".
[7] "has been translated as the Aquila of virtues and armies".
[8] "The fifth is ELION whom we refer to as the distinguished (from above)".
[9] "The sixth, ESER IEJE, who appears as „He who is, sent me", in the Exodus.
[10] "The seventh, ADONAI, whom we generally refer to as the Lord".
[11] "The eight, IA, which only refers to God, can be heard echoing in the last syllable of Hallelujah".
[12] "The ninth … was deemed the unutterable and is composed of the letters JOD, HE, VAV, HE".
[13] "The tenth, which was mentioned above, SADDAI, and who, in Ezekiel, is considered vague".



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make recourse to tradition and metaphor, i.e. generate what we have referred to as *translaticiae translationes* in the title. Even though they are not accepted by some theoreticians, and what is more, by **translators and interpreters**, their existence is objectively necessary, for not everything yields to translatability, as we have shown. Jerome himself employed some of the names as such, and considered or clarified others.

Furthermore, the fact that there is one single word in Latin, DEUS, reveals the Romanian pragmatism in this case as well; even more so as the efforts implied by a *vera translation* would have probably been useless since HE has no name. In certain situations, even this *translaticia* translation, a metaphorical one, resorting to the meanings conveyed through tradition, loses all sense or meaning, as Jerome avows in another letter to the same curious Marcella, whose thirst for knowledge is insatiable: *quid ea verba, quae ex Hebreo in Latinum non habemus expressa, apud suos sonarent; curque sine intrepretatione sint posita ut est illud Alleluia, Amen, Maran atha, Ephod, et caetera* (Hieronymus 1883, col. 430)[14]. But this is where we enter the realm of outright non-translation.

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[14] "how can those Hebrew words, for which we do not have equivalents, sound the same in Latin; why were they used without being clarified, as in the case of Hallelujah, Amen, Maran atha, Ephod and other" (Letter XXVI, To the same Marcella, "About certain Hebrew words").



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