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Pius translator et optimus

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Résumé : Nous proposons de montrer dans cet article quelle est la direction empruntée par les traducteurs chrétiens au cours des premiers siècles de christianisme. Parallèlement, nous esquissons leur manière de répondre aux exigences de la traduction, aux attentes des mécènes, et de concilier l'esthétique et l'éthique de la traduction.

Mots-clés : moralité et objectivité du traducteur, la traduction à l'aube du christianisme

Abstract: In this article, we aim at showing the direction taken by Christian translators during the first centuries of Christianity. In parallel, we sketch the manner in which they answered the demands of translation and the expectations of patrons as well as their reconciling of the aesthetics and the ethics of translation.

Keywords: morality and objectivity of the translator; translation at the dawn of Christianity

Unlike the pagan antiquity that was not concerned with the translator's morality or even with the translator himself in general, maybe because the only imperial languages and implicitly (almost) universal were Latin and (to a lesser extent) Greek (Romance languages compared to the poor and unique Neo-Greek), the developing Christian culture has paid special attention to those with a gift for translation since its first centuries (III-VI).

The person who translated from one language (Greek, Syriac) into another, usually into Latin, had to be *pius* (*piare* – to purify), "pure", as the translator had access to texts written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; in this respect, there already exists the classical statement of Saint John of Damascus "nothing of what I shall render is mine" (Negrescu 2004, 14). Saint Augustine's assertion, "I have only given him my name, God, You have given him all the rest!" (Negrescu 2004, 15), made at his son's Adeodatus (the one given by God) birth, whom he acknowledges in a moment of morality, is equally important to remember. While the examples could go on, for the translator or interpreter, the ultimate model remains

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Dionysius Exiguus, highly and justly praised by the senator Aurelius Cassiodorus, the future abbot of the Vivarium Monastery.

In *De institutione divinarum litterarum* (On the teachings of the divine writings), the author, who is tributary to the pagan cultural education, gives the first place *to the skill and implicitly to the esthetics of the translator* and not to his ethics, so that Dionysius is firstly a translation nobleman. He

> tanta latinitatis et graecitatis peritia fungebatur, ut quoscumque libros Graecos in manibus acciperet, Latine sine offensione transcurreret, iterumque Latinos Attico sermone relegeret, ut crederes hoc esse conscriptum, quod os eius inoffensa velocitate fundebat (Aurelius Cassiodorus, în Migne, *Patrologia Latina,* tomus LX, col. 1137)[1].

In what concerns official translation at that time, group or clique affiliation was not relevant, given that this person from afar, „Dionisius, Schyta natione sed moribus omnino Romanus, in utraque lingua valde doctissimus" (Cassiodorus, *De institutione…,* col.1137)[2] had been summoned to Rome by Pope Gelasius. He turned out to be a true encyclopedic spirit, prefiguring the Renaissance model: unrivalled translator, author of prefaces for his translations (thus, *with full knowledge of the case and the text*), editor and chronicler of the pontifical decrees (for ten popes, from Pope Atanasius the Second to Pope Vigilius). He did all these at the highest level of translation and writing (for more details, see Negrescu 2004, 178-180).

As previously suggested, in what concerns the translator, *optimus* had to be governed by human piety in order to be credible for those whom he was translating. One might say that the translator's aestheticism, who writes not only *optime*, but also *pulchre*, (meaning "sacredly beautiful") must be accompanied by the aestheticism of everyday life. And thus, Dionysius, the Humble, as he was called, "cum se totum Deo tradidisset, non aspernaretur saecularium conversationibus interesse" (Cassiodorus, *De*

[1] „Era dăruit cu o atât de mare pricepere a spiritului latinei şi a limbii greceşti, încât orice cărţi greceşti îi cădeau în mână le traducea în latină fără poticnire, pentru ca apoi, din nou, pe cele latine deja, să le recitească în greacă; încât credeai că sunt scrise la un loc versiunile pe care gura sa, cu o neştirbită iuţeală, le lăsa să curgă." (tradus de Dan Negrescu 2002, 33) ["He had such great knowledge of Latin and Greek, that he easily translated into Latin any Greek book and, after that, he would re-read the books in Greek; so that one could think that the two versions he was reading quickly were identical."]

[2] „Dionisie, de neam scit, dar cu totul roman prin obiceiuri şi întru totul învăţat în ambele limbi." (tradus de Negrescu 2002, 32).["Dionysius, a Scythian, but Roman in customs and fully learned in both languages."]

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institutione…, col. 1138)[3]. Moreover, the translator perfectly combines (precisely because translation implies a balanced passage) the requirements of the faith he belongs to with those of the (pagan) culture to which he is tributary according to Terentius' principle in *Heautontimorumenos:* "I am a human being, so nothing human is strange to me." (*The Self-Tormentor*, act 1, scene 2, verse 25). It is precisely in this way that Cassiodor presents Dionysius the translator: "castus nimium cum alienas videret uxores, mitis cum furentium vaesano turbine pulsaretur. Fundebat lacrimas motus compunctione cum audiret garrula verba laetitiae, ieiunabat sine exprobratione prandentium; et adeo conviviis gratanter intererat ut inter epulas corporales inquisitus spiritales semper copias exhiberet. Quod si tamen aliquando comederet, parvo quidem cibo sed tamen escis communibus utebatur. Unde summum genus aestimo patientiae inter humanas esse delicias et abstinentiae custodire mensuram". (Cassiodorus, *De institutione…,* col.1138)[4].

Nonetheless, the translator is equally affected by human malice; Saint Jerome, the father of translation (who is the first to give the term *translatio* the meaning of "translation") didn't elude the criticism of Saint Augustine, somewhat envious, who did not know either Greek, or Hebrew, just as Dionysius did not escape that of malicious people eager to "aliqua calumniose ingerere, unde sua videantur errata aliquatenus excusare." (Cassiodorus, *De institutione…*col. 1138.)[5]. In the end, we have to accept

[3]„ Încredinţat întreg lui Dumnezeu, fără să respingă însă a fi părtaş la convorbirile despre cele lumeşti." (tradus de Negrescu 2002, 33)["Fully entrusted to God, but having nothing against taking part in worldly talks."]

[4] „Cast peste măsură, ori de câte ori le vedea pe soţiile altora, era blând când se simţea izbit de vârtejul nebun al celor furioşi. Vărsa lacrimi mişcat de căinţă când auzea cuvintele flecare ale veseliei; postea fără a le aduce reproşuri celor ce-şi luau prânzul. De altfel le era spre plăcere comesenilor, căci printre bucatele hărăzite trupului, dădea mereu la iveală bogăţii ale spiritului, când era întrebat. Dacă mânca totuşi puţin în acele ocazii, se atingea doar de bucatele obişnuite. De aceea consider şi eu (i.e. Cassiodor) că supremul fel al puterii de a îndura se află printre plăcerile omeneşti, precum şi în a păstra măsura cumpătării." (tradus de Negrescu 2002, 34). ["Overly chaste, every time he saw other men's wives he was gentle when hit by the whirl of the furious. He shed tears of repentance upon hearing the gossipy words of cheerfulness; he fasted without blaming those who didn't. He was a joy to his companions at table as he always unveiled riches of the mind when asked. If he did eat a little on those occasions, he would only eat regular food. This is why I (i.e. Cassiodorus) also think the supreme power to bear is amongst human pleasures, as well as being able to keep temperance."]

[5] „Să-i impună în mod ruşinos unele lucruri care să pară că ar trebui să-i fie scuzate, până la un punct, ca greşeli." (tradus de Negrescu 2002, 34). ["To shamefully impose certain things that could be pardonned as mistakes up to a certain point."]

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that any father is prone to error: even more so when you are the "father of the Christian era".

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