

**FROM PREFACE TO**  
***BIBLIA HEBRAICA CUM NOTIS CRITICIS ET VERSIONE LATINA***  
**(PARIS, 1753)**

(vol. I.clxxxj) Finally the method of translation that I have adopted is not extremely free (which everybody knows should be rigorously avoided), but midway between literal and free. For I believe that the task of the translator is to show Sacred Scripture exactly as it would have been if the writers had used Latin. He must represent these writers, when he presents them in Latin, as writing Latin, not Hebrew, and he must present their ideas, not their words, in as many words. My authority for this is Jesus ben Sirach, whose Greek version (of *Ecclesiasticus*) contains many things that show he did not translate word for word. To those who see it as dangerous to abandon the very shape of the words for fear that, once they leave aside the words, they depart from the sense, it is easy to answer. For the translator who translates word for word often arrives at a version that makes no sense at all, since a version which has no flavour of the target language through sticking too close to the source language, Hebrew, can not fail to be obscure. Hebrew texts should not offer any problems graver than other books, Latin or Greek, which nobody believes he can fully translate if he is fettered by the original words. In short, there can be no danger, if the Hebrew words are diligently weighed. For, when a translator does this, he need not fear that he will wander far from the sense. There are many sides to the task of showing forth the sense; but that is no reason for castigating a translator for taking the middle way, but ample cause for attacking one who wilfully leaves its good judgement and common sense....

For the Translator of Scripture faces a more difficult task than other translators. He who translates ancient Greek and Roman literature into his own language, fulfils his contract if he so translates that what the Greek and Roman authors wrote is fully understandable and graceful in style. They are not required to teach the language into which they are translating to beginners. But, on the other hand, most readers expect to learn Hebrew through a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and even to come to a deep knowledge of it. And they do not ask that the translation be of a style good enough not to disgrace the Sacred

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Writers, if they had written in the target language.

The translator of the Scriptures into Latin can hardly satisfy these two requirements, unless he takes special care to keep the properties of the Hebrew words and to show in his Latin text the very image of the style of the Sacred Authors. (vol. I.clxxxiv-v)

Therefore in the choice of the Latin words the translator must first see to it that he choose those Latin words which have the same sense as the Hebrew words and which are equivalent in sound to the Sacred Text. Second, he should take care that he choose Latin words that are easily understandable to readers who are not expert Latinists. For the translator of Scripture does not write for Romans, but for Christians who are not born and brought up in Latin. Therefore the words used must be those in frequent and common use. One must avoid those which are not widely known....Third, one must keep the Latin words consecrated by religious usage: and not easily assimilated by other languages.

So much for the choice of vocabulary. But, since the Translator is oft compelled to render sense for sense and not word for word, he must work out with the utmost care how to avoid going beyond the bounds laid down for him, even when he departs from the words. For this is the other part of his task: that he bring over into his Latin text, the very shape of the Hebrew Scriptures. For Holy Scripture must be held in such regard that the word of God must be presented as it is; the translator must fulfil the expectations of the Christian reader, who seeks to read the writings of God, not the translator. Therefore, even after they have been translated into Latin, the Sacred Writers, far from taking on a Classical Latin dress, like that of Livy or Cicero, should keep a taste of antiquity, so that the Reader should feel that the Divine message, the most ancient of all books, has been translated into Latin. Therefore one should retain not only the ancient words consecrated by religious usage, but also the ancient style of writing, to avoid shedding that venerable air of antiquity and taking on a ridiculous and false modernity.

(vol. I.clxxxvij) But a particular method must be adopted in translating the poetical books, because Hebrew poetry is bound by strict laws and the translator of Scripture must at least imitate metric composition in his Latin in the way that a secular translator shows a poet to be a poet and not a prose-writer. Hence since Hebrew poetry usually proceeds by single ideas

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in separate sentences and balances each by its contrary or by something similar, the same form of composition must be adopted in Latin, so that, through the stylistic peculiarities of the Latin, one perceives the divisions between the members of the sentences and the similar or opposed senses. In this way the flow of the verse will not be concealed under a movement proper to prose. Finally, the brevity and conciseness of Hebrew poetry should be matched by an equal brevity in the Latin.

But in both prose and verse the ancient forms of speech must be kept. This requirement must be strictly observed except in the most difficult circumstances.

There are three exceptions to this rule that I can see:

1. If the ancient Hebrew idioms cause obscurity or ambiguity in the Latin;
2. If the full force of the expressions is lost unless the translator paraphrases;
3. If a literal translation produces a meaning other than that of the Hebrew;...

If the Sacred Writings are translated with the fidelity and the reverence recommended above, there is considerable danger that the translator will use a style of translation than would do less than justice to a secular author. Therefore the translator of Scripture will avoid an artificial, rough, mannered or inconsistent style of writing, and use a plain, flowing, uniform style. In short, he will imitate the simplicity and evenness of the Scriptural style.... There is nothing worse a translator of Scripture can do than to show the Sacred Authors as slovenly writers, who always leave their style unpolished and unfinished.

Certainly, some things have to be added in the Latin. For Hebrew words have to be weighed out, not counted. But one must only add things implied in the Hebrew, things which are prepared by the context, things which resolve ambiguities. The addition must be such that their absence would make the Latin unclear, or the matter too unlike the original Hebrew. For it is impossible that the same things are always denoted by the same words in two languages. But, if such additions are made, the reader's attention is not to be drawn to them by italics or parentheses. For if one Hebrew, there is no danger that the Reader will sense any impropriety in the additions.

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scholar; Reputed to be best Hebraist in France during 18th century.