

# Current Developments in English Historical Linguistics

Studies in Honour of Rafał Molencki

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# To translate is human, to explain – divine<sup>\*</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to show four translations of the Psalter which represent different epochs, cultures, contexts, and even different religions, yet diverge in the same way from the generally accepted mode of biblical translation and transmission. In spite of that, they never faced any hostility or institutionalised opposition. Understanding the nature of this divergence and the surprising lack of sanction requires showing the broader context of biblical translation and interpretation, and the protocols of transmission of the two. Therefore, I will start with the origins of biblical interpretation and translation (Section 2) and show that although these two activities were inextricably linked, their products were consistently kept distinct to the effect that translations tended to acquire the status of an original so they were viewed as sacred, with their sanctity being extended to their material instantiations (Section 3). In contrast, no such treatment was accorded to works of an interpretative character. The perception of the biblical text as sacred naturally entailed its absolute inviolability, and in Section 4 I will discuss the ways in which this integrity was guarded. In effect, translation and exposition were clearly separated in a number of ways and, while the methods differed with time and between cultures, the separation of the two was always the rule (Section 5).

It is against this backdrop that I am going to introduce the four Psalters – the Aramaic Targum of the Psalter, the Old English Paris Psalter, the Latin glossed Psalter, and Walenty Wróbel's 16th-century Polish rendition of the Psalter (Section 6) – which seem to defy this rule and yet, while the history

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<sup>\*</sup> I would like to thank Professor Peter Trudgill for his invaluable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

of biblical translation is turbulent and abounds in accusations of heresy and burnings at the stake, none of these Psalters ever faced such threats. As my contribution to a better understating of the phenomenon of the reception of Psalter translations, in the Conclusions (Section 7) I will propose an answer to the question of why these texts emerged at all and why, in spite of defying the general rules, they were never charged with heresy.

## 2. Appropriating the biblical text

The Bible, as a text whose importance is matched only by its complexity, has been subject to explanation ever since its emergence. In other words, the tradition of biblical exegesis is as old as the Bible itself and is encapsulated in the very expression “the written Torah,” which presupposes the existence of the Oral Torah. This embodies the Jewish conviction that “the written Torah,” which was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, was supplemented by verbal instruction from God. The purpose of the Oral Torah was “to enable the Jewish people to apply the teachings and legal precepts of the ‘written Torah’ to new or changing circumstances” (Magonet 2006: 756).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the practice of explaining the Bible is described both in the Old and in the New Testament (cf. Nehemiah 8.8 and Acts 8.1 respectively). It is therefore not surprising to find it both in Jewish and in Christian liturgy: both in the synagogue, and in the ancient, medieval, and modern Christian liturgy: “the sacred text is not only read out loud or recited when the community gathers for worship; it is also explained, expounded and applied to present life in a sermon or homily, often by authorized interpreters” (Fodor 2015: 108).

Another form of appropriation of the Bible is via translation.<sup>2</sup> First oral and then written translations of the Bible emerged even before the definitive canon of the Hebrew Bible was established (Delisle and Woodsworth [1995]2012: 155). While Judaism pays great attention to the letter of the text, this does not preclude the possibility of translation. “Translation for non-Jews was considered legitimate, and translation for Jews who no longer spoke Hebrew was also permitted” (Delisle and Woodsworth [1995]2012: 155) because it was viewed

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Oral Torah, see also Cardozo ([1989]2004), Avrin (1991), Holdrege (1996: 362), and Chazan (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Clearly there is a significant overlap between translation and interpretation, in the sense that every translation is an act of interpretation, yet what is meant here by interpretation is exegetical activity, that is, a biblical commentary rather than a rendition of the biblical text. In this sense, translation and interpretation of the biblical texts are distinct activities, each with its own very different objective.

as one of the ways of diffusing the divine word. This was first necessitated by the Jews' loss of knowledge of the Hebrew (hence the Aramaic and Greek translations) and then by the same necessity of other believers to understand the sacred scriptures; hence Latin and vernacular translations of the Bible. The first significant translation of the Hebrew Bible was the Greek version known as the Septuagint. The Septuagint was viewed as an inspired biblical translation, which granted it the status of an original. The same happened to its later Latin rendition, generally referred to as the Vulgate.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Materiality of the biblical text

The Bible, either original or translated, as the divine Word of God, was revered even in its purely material form: the sanctity of the contents extended to its materiality both in Judaism and in Christianity. One obvious way of expressing this conviction was embodied in the way the sacred books were produced and treated.

#### 3.1 Hebrew tradition

In the Hebrew tradition the production of the liturgical scroll is guided by an elaborate protocol,<sup>4</sup> concerning both the process and the final product to an equal extent. Production regulations apply to the purely material aspects of

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<sup>3</sup> The term *Vulgate* is multiply ambiguous, and the ambiguity concerns both the medieval use of the term and its modern applications. In the Middle Ages, it was used indiscriminately with reference to the Septuagint and *Vetus Latina*, that is, its Latin pre-Jeromian rendition (in parallel to an equally ambiguous use of the term *Septuagint*, which was also applied to both; Linde [2012]2015: 8–23). This is (partly) due to the fact that the term *Vulgate* underwent an important change: from a common noun, denoting the common version – hence the double identification – to a proper noun, denoting the version of the Bible *associated* with Jerome's (ca. 347–420) revisions (Linde [2012]2015: 16) and translations. Interestingly, contrary to the general opinion, the term also incorporates books not revised or translated by Jerome but customarily circulating together with his works. The medieval attribution persisted into the modern period via the quoted authors, and gave rise to even more confusion as to what text is denoted by the term *Vulgate* (Charzyńska-Wójcik 2013: 17–21).

<sup>4</sup> It is expressed in various parts of the Talmud, but is mostly to be found in external treatises, such as *Soferim* and *Sefer Torah*. The rules were handed down orally for centuries before receiving a written form around the end of the 8th century CE (Avrin 1991: 107).

the Torah (the writing support, type of ink, the erasing tool, etc.), attributes of the scribes (their spiritual and intellectual disposition), and the strictures of the writing process as such. Furthermore, special rules apply to the treatment of the Torah scroll after its completion. The Torah is not to be touched with the bare hand: there is a pointer (*yad*) which is to be used instead. Special measures are taken when the Torah is dropped; and if a scroll is no longer fit for synagogue use, it is not discarded but is buried in a *genizah* (cf. Section 3).

These concerns reflect the belief that the Torah is the embodiment of God Himself (Langer 2005 and Tigay 2013, cf. also Holdrege 1996: 361 and Sacks 2000: 39). This conviction receives an expressive visual articulation in the treatment accorded to the Torah scroll at least since the post-exilic period (Tigay 2013: 325),<sup>5</sup> which underscores the metonymical identification of the scroll containing the words of God with God Himself. In particular, the Torah is kept in the Ark and when it is open, those present “are acting as if God is in the Ark, and when they carry the Torah in a procession dressed like a person, wearing a velvet or silken mantle, a breastplate and crown, and kiss it, they are treating it very much like others treat a king, a pope” (Tigay 2013: 323). Many rituals could be mentioned here which show that the Torah is seen as embodying God Himself, but considerations of space preclude a more detailed discussion.

As observed by Tigay (2013: 330), “the synonymy of Torah and God” stems from the nature of the contents of the Torah. Ceremonial oath taking is performed in front of the Torah in the same fashion as in its later well-known Christian parallel. In contrast to the Christian tradition, however, the Torah is not to be embellished with pictures of any type and it is only its outer cover and the accompanying liturgical accessories that receive majestic decoration. The text itself is not adorned since, as pointed out by Tigay (2013: 340), “[i]t is the text, the words, the content, that remain the primary link between the Jew and God.” In Christianity, the belief in the mystical identity of the Bible with God’s presence receives an additional expression in the form of exquisite decoration of biblical books, as shown in more detail in the next section.

### 3.2 Christian tradition

As just mentioned, in the Christian tradition, the Bible, either as a whole or its individual books – especially the Psalter (as it was one of the most widely copied books of the Bible) were splendid objects: decorated with gold, lavishly

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<sup>5</sup> The identification of the Torah scroll with God’s presence is still observable in *Sefat Emet* – a 20th-century commentary by the Polish Hassidic Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger.

illustrated, and covered by most exquisite bindings (especially those to be used liturgically; cf. Charzyńska-Wójcik 2016b). In contradistinction to the Hebrew tradition, Christianity lacks an elaborate protocol for Bible copying. Instead, the sanctity of the contents is reflected by the material expression of splendour – these impressive decorations were seen fit to emphasise the divine nature of the text. A biblical codex in its entirety was seen as infused with apotropaic and protective powers. This perspective was shared by the laypeople and church authorities alike, although it has to be emphasised that the exact practices did not always coincide.

Starting with the laypeople's view, small codices with religious content were often carried around the neck in late antiquity, because possession of the sacred text was believed to keep the devil away; so was the presence of the Bible in a household. The Bible was also thought to have the power to quell fires (cf. Rapp 2007: 199). Moreover, we have evidence of “the use of extracts from scripture, *pars pro toto*, to evoke the power of the *entire* Word of God in the recommendation to write psalm verses on storage jars to prevent wine from turning sour” (Rapp 2007: 202). Another instance is the production of guidebooks for the oracular use of scripture, which had appeared in Egypt by the time of St Anthony (ca. 251–356) (Frankfurter 1998).

These practices are very old and, importantly, they continued throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. As observed by Skemer (2006: 123), “some textual elements that appealed first to early Christians in the eastern Mediterranean then moved to the West with the expansion of the faith. Gospel readings [...] and psalms earned early acceptance by Christians for their efficacy” and were frequently used as textual amulets from antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages. This practice combines the laypeople's view with the Church's opinion (at least to some extent): it stems from St Augustine's belief that an act of copying the Bible spreads God's Word, thereby destroying demonic power. In effect, Christian amulets with brief quotations from scripture were very common already in late antiquity. A good example is a 4th/5th-century fever amulet containing twenty lines of the Greek text folded down and placed in a suspension cylinder. Beside two other passages, the papyrus contains a quotation from Psalm 89, which was very common in that function. Interestingly, and this is how the lay view differs from the official standpoint of the Church, the apotropaic power associated with these objects was embodied in the sheer materiality of the text rather than in its contents, as evidenced by the inattention to the exact text reported by Skemer (2006: 85).

Among biblical books, psalms were considered most powerful weapons against evil – they were recommended to be learnt by heart<sup>6</sup> but, as observed

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<sup>6</sup> This was an injunction officially articulated by the Church, which shows the difficulty in demarcating the lay view from the ecclesiastical one. The Church, however, focused on the



by Skemer (2006: 86), they featured less prominently in the relevant medieval practices than in antiquity. However, we still come across *philacteria* with psalm verses “to combat temptation and treat particular ailments” (Skemer 2006: 86). A 13th-century English manuscript of the Hebrew Psalter with words cut out to serve as textual amulets (Zier 1992: 103) for particular afflictions and a 14th-century English miscellany with instructions concerning the preparation of amulets based on particular psalms (Skemer 2006: 86) can serve as perfect examples. The custom was by no means restricted to England; it is also known to have been practised in Germany, Moravia, Italy, etc.

The use of *philacteria* and textual amulets was repeatedly forbidden by the Church. Pope Gelasius I (492–496) declared *philakteria non angelorum sed daemonum nominibus consecrata*. Textual amulets were also officially condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 692. Likewise, the Council of Ratisbon in 742 prohibited the use of *philacteria* (Skemer 2006: 45).<sup>7</sup> The proscriptions were recurrently reissued but the very fact that they had to be repeated indicates the continued use of textual amulets.

When it comes to the official standpoint of the Church, the belief in the physical depositories of the Word of God sharing in the sanctity of the divine message can be seen in a variety of rituals. Let me mention some of them here. First of all, a very expressive symbol – the enthroned Bible – “a frequent motif in church decorations from late antiquity and beyond” (Rapp 2007: 197), which started as a very literal procedure of inviting the Deity represented by the Bible to partake in procedures in this way. This is the essence of the swearing of oaths by the Bible, that is, by God. As mentioned in Section 2.1, it is a practice shared by Judaism and Christianity in reflection of the same belief in the presence of God in the sacred book containing His words. The same concept is re-enacted during the Eastern liturgy, where the bishop’s stole (*omophorion*) signals his role as a representative of Christ. The moment the Gospels are opened, however, the *omophorion* is removed in order to show that God Himself is present (Rapp 2007: 197).

The common ground between the official and the popular approach to the sacred power of the biblical text is to be observed in an expressive but much less well-known custom of reliquaries containing the Bible or its parts, especially the Psalter, rather than the bodily remains of the saints, which is what one tends to associate them with. These were carried into battle and believed to secure God’s protection. Skemer (2006: 52) notes that the most famous book shrine is the Cathach (or “Battler”) of St. Columba, or Columcille, of Iona (ca. 521–597). This relic contained half of the Psalter which had been

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contents, while the laity on the form; though it has to be admitted that there is a considerable overlap of practices here and, in effect, it is often difficult to distinguish the two standpoints.

<sup>7</sup> For a full review of ecclesiastical proscriptions against these practices, see Skemer (2006).

owned (and possibly even copied) by the saint himself.<sup>8</sup> In the 11th century, the Cathach was put in a silver-gilt shrine decorated with jewels. Legend has it that it survived undamaged several instances of immersion in water, which corroborated the sacred status of its contents in the eyes of the contemporaries. Enshrined Psalters were carried by marching armies to secure military victory and the practice is recorded in Ireland as late as the 17th century.<sup>9</sup> While many more examples of similar practices could be presented here, the ones already discussed are sufficient to illustrate the reverence with which the sacred text was approached even in its purely material instantiations.

## 4. Integrity of the sacred text

In view of this reverence to the very materiality of the biblical text, it is only to be expected that the textuality of the Bible be inviolable.<sup>10</sup> It is sacrosanct, so it is not to be interfered with but is to be guarded and protected by all possible means. This finds different expressions across cultures, religions, and times. But while the methods differ, they all point to a strong concern for the integrity of the text both in the Hebrew and in Christian tradition.

### 4.1 Hebrew text

Taking into consideration textual variability that generally characterises the manuscript culture (Cerquiglini 1999), the stability of the sacred text in Hebrew in comparison to Greek and Latin biblical texts is amazing (Avrin 1991: 124). The source of this stability is to be associated with the emphasis put in the Hebrew tradition on the whole process of copying the sacred text (cf. Section

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Toswell (2014: 19, 163) for more details concerning the Cathach.

<sup>9</sup> Another example, also from the battlefield, where the belief in the sacred power of the words of God finds a very literal expression, is represented by Psalm verses inscribed on parts of armour to protect the wearer. Toswell (2014: 151–153) reports a gold strip discovered in 2009 in the Staffordshire Hoard from the 7th century. The inscription on the strip shows a passage very close to that of Psalm 67.1, asking God to drive the enemies away, thus clearly representing the embodiment of the belief in the apotropaic power of the Psalter.

<sup>10</sup> Paradoxically, the inattention to the letter of the scriptural material in textual amulets (cf. Section 2.2) does not necessarily contradict this observation. Note that it was the text itself, though perceived by those with little literacy, that was seen as the embodiment of sacrality and power.

2.1). “No book of any other culture has survived with the same physical form and textual stability for so long a time as has the Jewish Torah” (Avrin 1991: 101). This stability, both in the purely material and textual layer, is motivated by the sacred contents of the book.

The concern for the correctness of the Hebrew text is best illustrated by the very term employed to denote a scribe, *Sofer*,<sup>11</sup> meaning ‘one who counts (letters)’ and is fully articulated in the rules which a *sofer* had to follow in copying the Torah. The injunction not to change the text in any way by additions or deletions (cf. Deut. 4:2) “proves the importance attached to textual integrity” (van der Toorn 2007: 145; cf. also Holdrege 1996: 362). No form of textual rectification was allowed from the moment the text was crystallised.<sup>12</sup> In effect, Hebrew scrolls have always presented an extremely uniform text: they were copied with utmost care and any divergence with respect to the source had to be corrected before the text was considered fit for liturgical use.<sup>13</sup>

Another sign of concern for the correctness of the Hebrew text, or rather its correct delivery, is embodied in the rise of the Masoretic text. The original Hebrew Bible was written in a consonantal script,<sup>14</sup> which generally did not pose a problem for a person proficient in the language for reading it aloud (Goshen-Gottstein 1979). However, as observed by Elwolde (2006: 139), the purely consonantal text is open to more than one vocalisation, which naturally induces changes in interpretation. The vocalisation was at first preserved orally (Norton 2006: 215) but in the 8th and 9th century AD in Palestine, there emerged a group of scribes – Masoretes<sup>15</sup> – who specialised in developing

<sup>11</sup> The root of the word: *sf*r means ‘to count’, probably reflecting the ancient practice when scribes additionally performed a book-keeping function (Avrin 1991: 117). It is, however, also indicative of the scribe’s habit of counting the 304,805 letters of the Torah in the process of copying the scroll as a way of safeguarding the correctness of the text (Avrin 1991: 123). Cf. also Tov (2008) for the details of copying biblical scrolls.

<sup>12</sup> Van der Toorn (2007: 146–147) remarks that some textual interventions in the Hebrew Bible at an early stage did occur. Nevertheless, they did not give rise to the emergence of early textual variants due to the control procedures executed over them. An underlying principle that secured the stability of the text (in view of the textual corrections) was, according to van der Toorn, the existence of a single master copy. This, van der Toorn (2007: 146–147) observes, renders impossible “the opportunities for a steady accumulation of slight changes, deletions, minor expansions, and the like.”

<sup>13</sup> If a mistake occurred in the Tetragrammaton, correction was prohibited and the whole scroll was considered unfit for synagogue use. Scrolls unfit for use, either for the reason just mentioned, or because they contained too many mistakes to be corrected, or were no longer legible, have always been treated with utmost reverence. They have been placed in a *genizah* (from Persian *ginzakh*, ‘treasury’) and meant to be preserved for an infinite time.

<sup>14</sup> The original Ancient Hebrew script was replaced with Aramaic, also referred to as square Hebrew, still lacking vocalisation.

<sup>15</sup> There were several schools of Masoretes and the emerging traditions differed substantially, but they were all based on the same source (Elwolde 2006: 138), which agrees with what has already been said about the stability of the consonantal text.

a notation system for vowels, accents, and cantillations (Avrin 1991: 123). They were motivated by a desire to preserve the proper form of oral delivery of the text (Norton 2006: 216) inherently prone to multiple interpretations.<sup>16</sup> So, the resulting Masorah did not innovate, on the contrary, it meant to conserve the traditional biblical text. The attempts of the Masoretes were recorded in codices, as opposed to the scrolls, which preserve the unaltered purely consonantal text of the Torah (cf. Section 5).

## 4.2 Christian text

When it comes to text preservation in Christianity, although the copying procedures of the Latin text of the Vulgate are not as striking as in the case of Hebrew, it needs to be stated clearly that Christian monastic scribes showed a lot of concern for textual accuracy. There were protocols for correction; the institution of the precentor, chancellor, and senior scribes played a significant part here (Wakelin 2014). It has to be emphasised that this anxiety for the correct text was not a sign of *general* concern for textual accuracy and invariance: special care was taken in the case of the Latin text of scriptures, but vernacular productions were not subjected to the same corrective procedures (Wakelin 2014). An interesting review of medieval attitudes to scriptural emendations is offered in Linde ([2012]2015). These attitudes range from accepting even purely linguistic ungrammaticality (an expression of the conviction that the rules of grammar do not apply to the sacred text) to associating the emergence of these corruptions with scribal errors and striving to correct them.

A striking parallel to the rise of the Masoretic text can be found in the Christian tradition, which shows the same concern for the correct oral delivery of the Latin text during the liturgy. What I mean in particular is the emphasis laid on the development of a writing system that would preclude multiple interpretations of the biblical text: the emergence of interword spaces and punctuation in Latin liturgical manuscripts.<sup>17</sup> The earliest manuscripts of the Latin Bible were written in *scriptura continua*, that is, they presented a continuous

<sup>16</sup> Goshen-Gottstein (1979: 156) remarks that “the invention of vowel signs is one of the instances where traditional inhibitions were overcome because of external danger. They were invented because Hebrew was in danger of being lost after the Muslim onslaught.” Observe, however, that the pragmatic motivation behind this invention did not encroach upon the ritual prescriptions in that the vocalised text never made it to the synagogue, as discussed in more detail in Section 4.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed account of the emergence of the modern system, see Saenger (1997) and Parkes ([1992]2012).

text without interword spaces. This naturally resulted in the text lending itself to more than one possibility of word division. However, the genuine difficulty and danger associated with *scriptura continua* was the accompanying absence of punctuation. In effect, the Bible was open to multiple interpretations – certainly an unwelcome effect in a text of such importance. Church authorities were aware of this problem and various measures were undertaken to avoid it. Jerome’s solution to the problem was the arrangement of the text *per cola et commata*, where the layout reflected sentence structure. Likewise, Alcuin (ca. 735–804 AD) recognised the need for proper punctuation of liturgical books and devoted a lot of attention to the issue. Generally speaking, “[f]rom the seventh century onwards copies of liturgical texts often contain more punctuation than those of other contemporary texts” (Parkes [1992]2012: 35) in recognition of the importance of stabilising the interpretation of the text.

## 5. Separation

The embodiment of the preservation of the sacred integrity of the text was the clear separation of the two text types, that is, original (which could very well be a translation that has received that status, cf. Section 2) vs. ancillary material (explanation or vocalisation). The separation was expressed both in the written form, in which case it was purely visual, and in the oral form, in which case it was both visual and aural.

### 5.1 The written form

The separation of the two text types in the written form occurs both in Judaism and the Christian tradition. When it comes to the separation of the sacred text of the Bible from its ancillary material in the Jewish tradition, here the scroll with the original consonantal text both coexists and contrasts with the codex. The latter, as mentioned in Section 4.1, records the text with all indications as to its proper oral delivery. And we have a very vivid functional (and visual) separation between the scroll and the codex. The former is the only form permitted in synagogue worship (Avrin 1991: 117, 123; Holdrege 1996: 361), while the latter, namely, the Masoretic text with the whole apparatus, is to be studied and the correct pronunciation committed to memory to be retrieved when the sacred text is to be read aloud from a scroll. In a similar fashion, the products

of all exegetical activity are clearly separated and distinguished from the sacred original: they are not produced according to the same principles and are used in a different way.

The Christian tradition, as has already been noted, places less emphasis on the exact production of the Bible in the sense of prescriptions restricting and guiding the scribal process. In view of that, it is all the more noteworthy that in Christianity the separation of the two text types is consistently preserved by the *mise-en-page*, both in the case of the manuscript and the early printed editions of the Bible. It was expressed by the relative placement of the two texts on the page, script type, size, colour, and other paratextual elements. The sacred text, as opposed to the exegetical comments, was written in the script of highest authority (e.g., *Bastard Anglicana* – a display script vs. *Anglicana formata* – one of the script types employed for ordinary uses, Parkes 2008: 61); it was placed in the centre of the page and usually written in a larger hand. In contrast to the main text, the glosses were situated in the margins, which occasionally occupied a better part of the page. The glosses, apart from being marginal, could also be interlinear; or both systems could be used at the same time. Sometimes an elaborate system was used to point to commentaries (cf. Parkes 2008: 71), especially when there was more commentary than biblical text. These conventions were adopted wholesale to the early printed page (Parkes [1992]2012: 50; Hotchkiss and Robinson 2008: 1). In short, the text and commentary coexisted on the same page but the hierarchy of the two texts – the sacred one and the one subservient to it – was elaborately expressed by a several-hundred-year-old system of paratextual conventions (Caie 2008: 18; Irvine 1992: 89–90).

## 5.2 The oral form

For centuries, the distinction between the written original and the oral interpretation was given precise expression in both traditions. Particularly meaningful in this respect is the synagogue ritual, where the distinction between the two text types was both visual and aural. This ritual was characteristic of the Talmudic period during the 2nd to the 4th centuries AD. The prominence of the Hebrew original (written text) was very vividly articulated: a reader situated in an elevated position, which was meant to reflect the status of the text, read the Torah from a scroll. The reader's voice was to be loud and he was not to lift his eyes from the scroll, lest those present should get the impression that he was speaking rather than reading the words of God. The text was incomprehensible for the majority of Jews so it had to be rendered into Aramaic. This was the

task of the *meturgeman*, who would be standing away from the Torah and in a lower position. He was not to read, to avoid giving the impression that he was delivering the words of God and his voice was to be audibly weaker than that of the Torah reader (Delisle and Woodworth [1995]2012: 162).

When it comes to Christianity, there is a whole corpus of exegetical texts that never enjoyed liturgical status, so they never made it inside the church. No texts, either high-level Latin academic exegesis (e.g., highly respected patristic commentaries and their medieval voluminous expansions, cf. van Liere 2014), or popularised exegesis for the uneducated in vernaculars (rhyming Bibles from the 12th and 13th centuries, vernacular mystery and miracle plays<sup>18</sup>) were read out inside the church. However, they were extremely popular outside it: scholarly Latin exegesis was read and discussed in more educated (academic) settings, while rhyming Bibles and mystery plays were enjoyed by those with a weaker educational background. In effect, the two text types – the original and exegesis – were delivered in contrasting environments and were thus very clearly kept apart.

In conclusion so far, as we have seen, different religions and cultures across the passage of time resorted to different methods of separating the biblical text from exegesis in order to preserve the sacred integrity of the Bible, that is, of the text which was itself believed to be sacred even in its material instantiation. In view of this, it is rather surprising to find productions which not only intentionally mix the two but are also not criticised for it.

## 6. Non-criticised offenders

The first of these texts is the Aramaic Targum of the Psalter (TgPs).<sup>19</sup> As implied in the Introduction, Targumim are the fruit of a particular sociolinguistic situation in Palestine: the sacred text of Jews was written in a language which they were no longer familiar with, so it needed to be translated (Ribera 1994: 225, cf. also Wróbel 2014). TgPs consists of a literal translation interspersed with expansions and commentary. The two elements – translation and explanation – are combined in a way which often allows bracketing out the commentary. This leaves us with the translation per se, but divergences from this pattern do occur, that is, “some passages are translated periphrastically, with many aggadic

<sup>18</sup> Originally, these were Latin productions and were actually performed inside the church but with time they were vernacularised and moved outside the church.

<sup>19</sup> The dating of the text is difficult to establish; it probably circulated orally for some time before crystallising into the written form, which makes the dating more difficult, as the written form will have preserved some earlier stages of the language (Stec 2014).



traditions, and from which the expansive elements cannot be readily extracted so as to leave a linguistically viable base text” (Stec 2014: 163). So TgPs offers us the product of a double process: translation and interpretation, the two being interwoven in a way which makes them difficult (if not impossible at places) to separate.

The second Psalter that represents the same mixture of traditions, which are on the whole kept so clearly distinct, is a 9th-century translation of the Psalter produced by King Alfred the Great (Bately 1982 and O’Neill 2001). In a Viking-ridden country, with knowledge of Latin in decline, Alfred sees his people in a position slightly parallel to that of the Jewish community losing their grasp of the language of the Bible (though he is obviously not aware of the existence of TgPs). Therefore, he himself translates the Latin Psalter into Old English. But as the literal sense of the Psalter is not sufficient for the people to understand its message, he resorts to Psalter commentaries, which he freely interpolates into the translation. He does that because the existing biblical commentaries are also in Latin, that is, the language which he sees as a barrier for his people to access the Psalter. By offering the translation combined with the explanation of the text in the common language of the people, Alfred’s production overcomes the two barriers simultaneously.

The third text which belongs here is a Latin Psalter with a commentary seamlessly incorporated into it,<sup>20</sup> that is, again completely against the well-established practice of Latin texts, which would place the glosses in the margin or between the lines. The author of this commentary is unknown (cf. Bülbring 1891, Paues 1902: lviii, and Reuter 1938: 4) and so is the composition date. We know, however, that it must have been composed around the first part of the 14th century, as it received three translations around mid-14th century: into Anglo-Norman, French, and Middle English.<sup>21</sup> In fact, we only learn about this Latin Psalter through its vernacular translations, as the Latin source is not preserved outside those manuscripts in which it accompanies the above-mentioned renditions (cf. Black and St-Jacques 2012).

The final text representing the same intentional conglomeration of translation and exegesis is a 16th-century Polish Psalter translation made by Walenty Wróbel. To place his enterprise in its proper context, we need to realise that in Reformation-swept Europe, Wróbel provided a vernacular translation of the Psalter which mixed the sacred text with exegesis. In spite of that, his produc-

<sup>20</sup> Two of the four existing manuscripts of the Middle English translation of this Psalter (the Cambridge and the London manuscripts) mark most of the glosses by underlining, which may suggest that this might also be the practice in the now lost Latin original. This, however, is not certain and, more importantly, it still means that the two texts are interwoven in a way which transgresses the long-established tradition.

<sup>21</sup> The translation procedures applied in these renditions are a fascinating consequence of this transgression, but cannot be discussed within the confines of this paper.



tion was approved of by the orthodox authorities of the Catholic Church, as evidenced by the number of editions it ran through and the ecclesiastical approval it received before being sent to print.<sup>22</sup>

The four texts just mentioned represent different religions, cultures, and contexts, and it is clear that they could not have influenced one another – a conclusion which is supported by the data concerning their circulation, which, for reasons of space, cannot be presented here. At this point some irresistible questions emerge. Why did the authors of these texts do what they did? And why did they not face any persecution? It seems that these questions need to be answered individually for each text, though some generalisations will be possible to draw for all of them.

Observe that TgPs was never intended as a replacement of the Hebrew text for liturgical purposes. The liturgy in its various local forms centred around the reading of the Torah. The translation, that is, the targum, and interpretation were additional elements of the service which “developed gradually and did not reach a fixed form until the Middle Ages” (Hezser 2006: 128). On the whole, then, the targum only supplemented the reading of the Hebrew text. So, it was not meant to displace the original and never acquired this status itself. It had a purely educational function – to convey the sense of the text to the believers and to offer instruction to them.

The Old English Psalter translation was part of Alfred’s plan to counteract educational decline: the Psalter is the King’s book,<sup>23</sup> in which he instructs his people in the language they understand. Highly skilled in Latin, Alfred translates the text and infuses it with explanations – he is familiar with Latin exegetical commentaries (cf. Charzyńska-Wójcik 2013). Just like TgPs, this Psalter was not meant for liturgical use, where only Latin was unquestionably accepted.

The glossed Latin Psalter was never copied extensively unlike the unglossed Latin Psalters, which were intended for liturgical use.<sup>24</sup> The purpose of this glossed Psalter was, once again, to explain but, being an exclusively Latin production, it was accessible only to those who already had access to the unglossed Latin Psalter and the whole Latin exegetical output devoted to it. In fact, it did not present any functional advantage to its prospective readership: it merely doubled the existing sources, which may explain its lack of popularity.

Walenty Wróbel’s early 16th-century Polish translation of the Psalter was (as the introductory matter to the printed edition informs us) meant for nuns, to

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Pietkiewicz (2002) for these details.

<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps worth adding here that King Alfred identified himself with the biblical King David to a great extent (Stanton 2002: 127).

<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, its Anglo-Norman, French, and English translations never received wide circulation either, in contrast to an immensely popular contemporaneous Psalter translation into English by Richard Rolle and equally popular (Anglo-)French renditions of the Psalter circulating widely in England (Rector 2010).

facilitate their understanding of the Psalter, which they sang daily. As mentioned above, it received ecclesiastical approval and, like the three Psalters just discussed, it was not meant to be used liturgically – the Latin text (cf. Charzyńska-Wójcik 2016a) was not present in full in the manuscripts Wróbel prepared.<sup>25</sup>

We may conclude that the lack of any hostility and opposition against these offending productions can in each case be ascribed to the non-liturgical function of these Psalters. Moreover, with the exception of the Latin glossed Psalter, the remaining Psalters discussed here show the same pedagogical concern – they are intended to convey not only the sense of the text but also to explain its deeper message to those who lack familiarity with the language of the original (Hebrew or Latin, respectively).

## 7. Conclusions

The written text of the Bible was viewed as divine in origin in both traditions: it was believed to be inherently infused with multiple (layers of) meaning. The Torah “could not possibly be contained within a single meaning” (Magonet 2006: 760). Likewise, the belief in multiple layers of meaning of the Christian Bible is expressed by the manifold levels of exegesis<sup>26</sup> and embodied in the notion expressed by St Jerome that even the order of the words in the Bible matters and has its own significance.

The Bible as a whole, and the Psalter in particular, have been translated ever since they took shape. The translations were driven by linguistic necessity, that is, by the lack of familiarity with the language in which they were written. So translation was dictated by the pragmatic needs of the believers, and, in particular, by their linguistic deficiencies. The *products* of translation have, occasionally, been granted the status of divinely inspired texts, but that status was not extended to many biblical translations.

In contrast, when it comes to explanation, the whole exegetical process was viewed both in Judaism and in Christianity as being prescribed by the Bible, so divinely inspired. Yet, paradoxically, none of the actual products of exegesis enjoyed a status which would reflect that belief. Moreover, the *explanation*, no matter how indispensable and ubiquitous, was never part of the *written* liturgical canon. And it was never mixed with the biblical text per se (the original or the

<sup>25</sup> The printed edition prepared by Andrzej Glaber from Kobylin did contain the full Latin text, an addition accounted for in Charzyńska-Wójcik (2016a).

<sup>26</sup> There are two basic senses of the Bible: the literal and the spiritual. However, by the Middle Ages, the latter had developed into three distinct types: the allegorical sense, the tropological sense, and the anagogic sense.

translation). The popularity of the mixture observed in the case of three of the four texts examined here, and the tolerance with which all four were received in the two traditions, is thus to be associated with the functional, pedagogical gains of these productions on the one hand, and their non-liturgical character on the other.

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