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CHAPTER 1

FROM CICERO TO CAXTON

1.1 Introduction

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The English translation tradition, in its earliest manifestations, draws on Classical precedent, mainly on the Classical Latin translation, primarily from the Greek, as well as, of course, on Early Christian Latin Translation from the Scriptures, the Hebrew, Aramaic of the Hebrew Bible and from the Greek of the Gospels.

Clear and forceful as were the Roman writers (Cicero, Horace, Quintilian), their legacy was far from unambiguous and indeed the same oft-quoted remarks or statements of principle were mobilized in support of apparently contradictory positions. The most striking example perhaps is Cicero's famous dictum (in respect to his translation of the two most prominent Ancient Greek orators) promoting sense-for-sense rather than word-for-word translation. This 'free' approach becomes also a defence of *ad verbum* fidelity to the original, since it is taken to be distinct from literary imitation, *à la Romaine*. The 'Classical Latin and Early Christian Latin Translations' collage (Sect. 1.2, below) gives a panoramic view of these developments and controversies.

Nevertheless, while the numerous defensive or aggressive prefaces by translators are indication of strong opposition to Ciceronian freedom, the sense-for-sense approach prevailed, at least as far as non-Scriptural texts were concerned. This is particularly true of a period in which, as in Roman times, a national culture was being constructed, asserting itself, of course, in many ways, but significantly also in the naturalizing (the 'Englishing') of canonical works of Western literature.

With the Scriptures, it was a somewhat different story. The Septuagint or Alexandrian Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (*c.*285 BC), intended perhaps for the use of the Hellenistic Jews of Alexandria, was by legend held to have been completed in seventy-two days, the number of translators also being seventy-two, producing identical versions, this being proof sufficient of 'divine inspiration'. The intervention of God in the translation of His own Word was necessarily invoked, since without it the translation would be subject to endless questioning, in its turn leading inevitably to religious controversy and conflict.

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The Septuagint, then, became a canonical text for later translators, being preferred even to the source, which it would seem to have replaced. Jerome, however, approached this sacrosanct text with Ciceronian caution and returned for verification to the Hebrew and Aramaic. His Vulgate translation, which remained the official Bible of the Catholic Church for centuries, owed its authority not only to the scrupulousness of his scholarship but also to the excellence of his Latin style. His legacy was a dual one of respect for tradition and critical acumen. The Vulgate itself, by virtue of its adoption by the one and only Church, was a text of irreproachable canonicity. It substituted itself for the original until the need began to be widely felt for extension of the readership via translation into the European vernaculars.

The documented fourth-century controversy or debate between the two Church Fathers, Sts Jerome and Augustine, in which no ground was given, expressed irresolvable differences—of temperament, no doubt, as well as of opinion, these differences continuing to operate on into the Renaissance and beyond. One reason for these differences, no doubt, was the fact that Jerome was and Augustine was not a translator. Augustine, intent on establishing an orthodoxy, conscious of the overriding need to provide sure, unambiguous guidance for the faithful, was worried by Jerome's critical examination of hitherto supposedly inspired texts. For Augustine there could be only one true translation of God's word. Deferring to the Septuagint, whose translators had been led by the Holy Spirit, he favoured this translation and regarded it as more reliable and authentic even than the Hebrew and Aramaic originals. He could not approve of Jerome's new version which returned to these sources and which, confusingly and dangerously, he felt, drew attention as well to problematical passages or words therein. Politically more sophisticated than Jerome, Augustine foresaw, for instance, increased disagreement between the Roman and Greek churches, resulting from the existence of different versions of the Scriptures, threatening the unity of the Christian Church. (Of course, he approved of rather than objected to Jerome's translations of the Gospels from the Greek source text.) Two different concepts of scholarship, authenticity, accuracy are at loggerheads here, the prestige of these two great figures ensuring that their difference should continue to reverberate.

Translation into the vernacular (Old and Middle English) paralleled or preceded developments elsewhere in Europe. While early literary activity was mostly in Latin, King Alfred (871–99) initiated a policy of translation. Jonathan Wilcox's collage (Sect. 1.3, below) documents this development and activity, including the translation of important religious works, late Latin works (Boethius), the Bible itself, this being part of a process of education, for the use of those without or with insufficient Latin, in a period of decline in knowledge of the Classical language. Alfred's approach, as befits an educator, was pragmatic, sometimes opting for sense-for-sense, sometimes for the *ad verbum*. In the following

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century, the Benedictine monk and homilist Aelfric (*c*.990–*c*.1010) translated a part of *Genesis* insisting on the need for interpretation rather than unquestioning literalism.

However, conflict between clerical defenders of Latin and influential laymen persisted, viz the 'Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk upon Translation', from the translation by John of Trevisa (1326–1412) of Ralph Higden's 1387 world history, *Polychronicon*. The argument advanced by the Clerk is, in effect, an argument against all translation, a defence of the status quo, translation being seen as representing a danger to the fortress of learning, i.e to the exclusivism of those with Latin, mainly the clergy. Trevisa's translation, printed by Caxton, was among the first books to be made widely available. With printing, introduced by William Caxton (*c*.1422–91), texts could of course be far more broadly disseminated. Caxton, a prolific translator himself, also printed many works of translation. The technological revolution initiated by him made possible a great extension of Classical learning and literature, whether for pedagogical, practical purposes, or for entertainment, via vernacular translations, the demand for which of course increased just as the conditions giving rise to that demand also encouraged the expansion of printing. Caxton's last book, itself a translation (of Virgil's *Aeneid*) was based on an intermediary French version. Clearly, although there was a discernible impulse, as noted, to return to source texts, this was not regarded as obligatory. Caxton was undoubtedly the most important early champion of the English language, and translation had a key role in establishing the native language as central to the country's literary life, as a growing percentage of the population gained access to it.

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1.2 Classical Latin and Early Christian Latin Translation

Approaches to translation, in the Western tradition, have been seen as oscillating between an attachment to Classical learning, which stresses intellectual flexibility, and the Judaeo-Christian emphasis on the unchanging law of God, embodied in a language which also cannot be changed. The conflict between commitment to stylistic excellence, clarity of expression, and *ad verbum* exactness cannot be resolved, the terms having been established very early on. The principal arena has undoubtedly been the translation of the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity with the geographic spread of these world religions, as well as the gradual and then incrementally rapid spread of literacy, and self-assertion of the vernacular languages, especially with the disintegration of such supranational entities as the Roman and Holy Roman empires and concomitant rise of nation states.

In Roman times, of course, translation relates to the construction of a supranational culture, based on Rome, and becomes an assertion of Roman cultural independence from or parity with Attic Greece. To achieve this parity, a non-subservient stance was essential.

Late Roman translation from Biblical Greek—St Jerome's handling of the Greek Septuagint, for instance—reflected the high status of the source text. The translations of the Holy Scriptures were necessarily 'inspired' and might enjoy equal and, in the case of the Septuagint, for instance, even superior status to the source text itself. It was in this connection that the myth of the origin of the Septuagint developed, obscuring the reality of the situation (see Philo, below). The Septuagint was held to have been dictated by God, the seventy-two translators functioning as a kind of collective medium for him, the identity of the texts, according to the myth, further testifying to divine intervention.

Jerome, as a 'Ciceronian', even though he agonized over it (*vide* his famous dream) and even though he admitted that in translation of the Scriptures even the order of the words was sacrosanct, was not able to suppress his Classicist leanings, being too committed to the demands of clarity and stylistic excellence, which required a free, or sense-for-sense approach. The Latin legacy, similarly, embodies both pre-Christian and Christian components. It is profoundly ambiguous, and this ambiguity runs through the entire Western tradition of translation, being evident even today, in scarcely less stark a form than at the beginning.

Thanks are due to Professor Louis G. Kelly for his advice, and in particular for the translations of Latin texts which he generously contributed to the present volume.

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Eusebius Hieronymus, St Jerome (348?–420)

Jerome and Augustine (see below) were the most important of the Church Fathers, as far as translation theory is concerned. Author of the Vulgate Latin translation of the Bible, for centuries the official Bible of the Catholic Church, Jerome also commented in detail on the methods and aims of his translation work, viz. the celebrated letter to his friend Pammachius, which was prompted by the attack on him, in 395, by his former friend and fellow monk Rufinus, himself the author of numerous translations from the Greek.

Born in Dalmatia into a wealthy family, Jerome came to Rome as a boy where he was taught by the foremost grammarian of the age, Aelius Donatus. In a famous dream (375), Jerome was accused by God of being a Ciceronian rather than a Christian, symptom of an internal conflict between his Classical leanings towards free-ranging translation and literalist demands, which stressed the accurate transmission of meaning particularly in the case of Holy Scriptures. After the dream Jerome became a hermit for a while, learning Hebrew; later he was ordained and continued his theological studies in Antioch where he translated or adapted, revised and supplemented the *Chronicle* of the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea, which he discusses in the letter to Pammachius as well as in his Preface to the *Chronicles* (see below). The theoretical basis for Jerome's translation theory is elaborated in his preface to the translation of Eusebius and does not significantly change over the years. On his return to Rome in 382 he became secretary to Pope Damasus and under orders from him began his translation of the Bible, revising the many versions and stylistically improving the old Latin text of the Gospels.

Driven from Rome after Damasus' death in 384, Jerome went to Antioch, Jerusalem and Egypt to study the ascetic life at first hand, and subsequently to Bethlehem, where he founded a monastery and remained for the rest of his life, while continuing to polemicise vigorously. His Vulgate translation of the Bible (391–415), dating from this period, included revisions of earlier New Testament translations and a new translation of the Old Testament, based on Origen's *Hexapla*.

Of all Christian Latin writers Jerome most closely approaches the standards of Classical Rome, having thoroughly assimilated the works of Cicero, Virgil, Horace, and others. On the other hand his letters and controversial writings are extraordinarily irascible. The conflicting demands of Ciceronian aesthetics and Christian asceticism are dramatically exemplified in Jerome's life and work. The apparent contradictions, however, appear less marked if one bears in mind the distinction Jerome himself makes between translation of Holy Scriptures and that of non-sacred texts. He weighs in with devastating effect against

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the literalists, while at the same time affirming that in the case of the Scriptures the actual words and even their order and significance are to be observed.

From the Preface to *Chronicles* of Eusebius 1–2 (380), translated by L. G. Kelly

There is an old custom among men of letters of translating Greek books into Latin as an intellectual exercise, and also, what is more difficult, of translating fine poetry into Latin verse. The great Cicero translated whole books by Plato with rigorous closeness and, having translated the Roman, Aratus, into hexametres, he turned to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. In this, the golden flow of eloquence is sometimes muddied by some scabrous and turbulent shoals so that, those who do not realize that it is a translation, do not credit Cicero with such work. For it is difficult, when following the text of another language, not to overstep the mark in places, and hard to keep in the translation the grace of something well said in the original. Something is signified by the properties of a word: in my language I do not have anything to match, and when I try to render the full sense, I eat up the span of a respectably long life in the resulting sentence. [. . .] If I translate word for word, it sounds absurd; if from necessity, I change something in the word-order or in the language, I am seen to abdicate the responsibility of a translator. [. . .] I pray you that whatever you find disordered in this work, you read with the eye of a friend and not of a critic. And this is doubly important as you know that I dictated this at considerable speed to a secretary; and the difficulty of the task is attested to by the fact that the inspired volumes produced by the Septuagint translators have not kept their flavour in Greek. This consideration drove Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion [Theodosius] to produce almost a different book from the same work. Aquila tried to translate word for word, Symmachus preferred to follow the sense, and Theodotion did not want to go too far from the ancient versions. [. . .] Thus it came about that Sacred Scripture seemed so rough and uncouth that educated people, not knowing that it had been translated from the Hebrew, looked at the surface instead of the real meat and were put off by the unprepossessing clothing of its style rather than finding the beautiful body underneath. Finally, what is more melodious than the Book of Psalms, which can run in iambics like our Horace or the Greek Pindar, or have the resonance of Alcaeus, or the dignity of Sappho, or the flow of lyric metres. What is more beautiful than the canticle of Deuteronomy and Isaiah, what more dignified than Solomon, or more perfect than Job. Now these, as Josephus and Origen point out, all frame their poetry in hexameters and pentameters. When we read them in Greek, they have a particular sound, and when in Latin, they do not hang together. If there is anybody who does not believe that the power of a language is changed in translation, let him translate Homer literally into Latin—or rather, let him translate Homer into prose. Then he will see a laughable bit of work, and the greatest of poets scarcely able to speak.

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From Letter 57, To Pammachius, 'On the Best Method of Translating', translated by L. G. Kelly

[Jerome had been asked by Eusebius of Cremona, an associate who had no Greek, if he would translate into Latin a letter sent by Archbishop Epiphanius to John, Bishop of Jerusalem.]

> [...] Not only do I admit, but I proclaim at the top of my voice, that in translating from Greek, except from Sacred Scripture, where even the order of the words is of God's doing, I have not translated word by word, but sense for sense. [...]

[Jerome proceeds to cite various Classical authorities, quoting directly from Cicero's preface to his own translation of speeches by Aeschines and Demonsthenes as well as from his own translation of Eusebius' *Chronicles* (see above), after which Jerome moves on to a more contentious area, concerning the translation of Holy Scriptures, even the Septuagint containing passages problematical from the point of view of strict literality.]

> There is nothing extraordinary about this procedure in secular or ecclesiastical writers, when the translators of the Septuagint, the evangelists and the apostles, did the same thing in the sacred books. In St Mark, we read that the Lord said: 'Talitha cumi.' This is commented in the text: 'Which is translated: "My girl, I say to you, get up"' [Mark 5: 41]. Dare you accuse the evangelist of lying because he adds 'I say to you', when all we have in the Hebrew is, 'My girl, get up?' But to make it more emphatic and to translate the nuance of urgent command he added, 'I say to you.' [...]

[Jerome gives a number of such examples, stating that 'it is clear that, in their use of the Septuagint translation, the Apostles sought the sense, not words'.]

> The opening words of the Hebrew text of Psalm XXI are the very words Christ spoke on the cross: 'Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani.' This means: 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me' [Ps. 21: 2; cf. Matthew 27: 46]. Let them state the reason why the Septuagint intercalates 'look at me', for it reads: 'My God, my God, look at me, why have you abandoned me?' They will reply that there is no distortion in the sense if two or three words are added. Let them also realize that the stability of the Church is not threatened if, in the heat of dictation, I leave out a few words.
>
> It is a long job to detail how much the Septuagint adds, how much it leaves out. [...] However, it is not for nothing that the Septuagint has become the official church text: it was adopted either because it was the first and was produced before the coming of Christ, or because it was used by the apostles, at least where it did not differ from the Hebrew.

[Jerome then turns, with savage irony, on his critics who accuse him of taking too many liberties. Much later, Martin Luther was to do much the same, when confronting his critics.]

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I have gone beyond the length of a letter, but not beyond the measure of my anger. I have been called a fraud, and cackling women tear me to pieces between the shuttle and the loom. But I am content to counter the accusation, rather than to turn it against others. Thus, I leave everything to your judgement. Read the letter itself, in both Greek and Latin, and from it you will quickly judge the sort of cant indulged in by my accusers and the true value of their complaints. For my part, it is enough to have set things right with a very dear friend, and to await the day of judgement hiding in my cell. If possible, despite the raging of my enemies, I would rather comment the Scriptures, than write Philippics in the style of Demosthenes and Cicero.

Aurelius Augustinus, St Augustine (354–430)

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Augustine is the most influential of the Church Fathers. Born to a pagan father and Christian mother in Numidia (present-day Algeria), he was sent to Carthage for his education. Originally intending to enter government service he dedicated himself to philosophy, after reading Cicero. He was converted to Christianity in 386. Augustine taught rhetoric in Carthage, Rome and Milan. His masterpiece *Confessions* (397–8) outlines his spiritual development and elaborates a radical doctrine of grace. Augustine was spiritual leader of the Christian Church in Africa, appointed bishop of Hippo in 395. He continued the monastic community life with his clergy and became a dedicated preacher and literary protagonist, struggling doggedly against Manichaeism and other 'heresies'. So forceful was Augustine that he took the Church with him, disposing of rather than attempting to embrace what he saw as schismatic tendencies.

His major works include exegeses of Scriptural texts and, of course, polemics. *On The City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*, 413–26) laid down the basis for the medieval Church.

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Augustine regarded translation as a systematic undoing of the linguistic confusion following the destruction of the Tower of Babel. For him there could be only one true translation. In this area (as in others) he strove to establish an orthodoxy, not prevaricating like Jerome who was tormented by the distinction between translation as such and translation of the Word of God. Augustine was committed to establishing the authority of the Church, to this end even condoning persecution. The implications, as far as translation is concerned, are of the utmost significance. His concern for a single, united Church led him to favour the Septuagint translation over the Hebrew and Aramaic source texts, because the Greek translators at Alexandria, it had been held, were guided by the Holy Spirit. He expressed his concern in a respectful but strongly worded letter to Jerome on the latter's plans for a new translation (see below). Of course, Jerome's version of the

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Scriptures, the Vulgate, also came to be regarded as inspired and, as such, took precedence over the source or original Scriptural texts. Augustine's literary output, including letters, is vast and shows him to be, like Jerome, a versatile master of Latin style.

Letter 71. 3–4 and 6 (to Jerome on his plans for the Vulgate), translated by L. G. Kelly

I have further comment in this letter: I have just found out that you have translated the Book of Job from the Hebrew, even though we already have a Latin translation of yours from the Greek text. In that translation you marked Hebrew passages missing from the Greek text with asterisks, and with daggers, Greek passages missing in Hebrew. Your diligence was such that we can see in certain passages particular words signifying the stars are in the Hebrew, but not in the Greek. Furthermore, in this last version of yours taken from the Hebrew, we do not find the same fidelity to words. And a careful reader will have some trouble in working out why in your first version asterisks are marked in with such care that we know where even the most minor particles in Hebrew are missing in the Greek texts; and in your second from the Hebrew, this editorial work is so careless, that it seems that the same particles appear in both texts [. . .]

Honestly, I would rather you translate the Scriptures for us from the canonical texts which the seventy translators left us. For it will cause extreme difficulty if your translation is widely adopted: the Latin churches will then differ violently from the Greek churches. Most serious of all, as it is the best known, anybody who disagrees will easily prove you wrong on the strength of the Greek. For anybody who seizes on something he finds strange in a version taken from the Hebrew and accuses you of error, will hardly, if ever, pay regard to the Hebrew by which you defend your reading. And even if your version were to be adopted, who will stand to see the condemnation of so many Greek and Latin traditions? Because even experts in Hebrew can have other answers, it comes to this, that you seem to be the only one competent to prove them wrong. But before what judge, if you can find one perceptive enough?

And so I am immensely grateful to God for your labours in translating the Gospels from the Greek, because in almost no case is there difficulty when we have recourse to the Greek text. If then any controversialist argues for a hoary old false reading, we can bring out the books, compare them, and easily verify or refute. And if certain remarkable cases rightly call forth our assent, is there anybody stubborn enough not to recognize such a useful achievement, or give it its due praise? Would you be good enough to tell me why, in your view, there is so much disagreement between the Hebrew texts and the Greek of the Septuagint? For the Septuagint has so much authority that it has, with reason, been widely disseminated. As I remember, this fact is attested to by the custom of the Apostles, and also by your own testimony. And for this reason, you would have done better if you had given us an accurate translation of the Greek of the Septuagint. The present Latin

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versions differ so much from manuscript to manuscript that the situation is intolerable; and they are so suspect (it is not unlikely that there is something else in the Greek), that we can hardly expect to prove anything by quoting them.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480–524)

Boethius was a late Roman philosopher and statesman, from a family which had held high political office. He was consul in 510 and then political adviser to Theodoric, the Ostrogoth, rising to the rank of *magister officiorum*. He is best known as the author of the Neoplatonic *Consolation of Philosophy* (*De consolatione philosophiae*), a dialogue between himself and Philosophy, mixing prose and verse, written in prison a year before he was put to death for treason. As an outstanding Hellenist, his ambition had been to translate all of Aristotle and Plato. In addition, he wrote textbooks on other subjects, including theology. The *Consolation* was second only to Jerome's Vulgate in popularity during the Middle Ages, and in general Boethius's legacy was immense. His work was translated into Anglo-Saxon by Alfred the Great (see below).

Boethius wrote a Latin commentary on Victorinus' translation of Porphyrius' third century *Eisagoge*, an introduction to Aristotle's logic, which became the standard medieval textbook on the subject; he then retranslated it himself, adding a second volume to his commentary. In his opening to the second volume, he turns Horace on his head, making of him the champion of literalism. Boethius' remarks on translation became commonplaces in the continuing struggle between the word-for-word and sense-for-sense approaches. He extends the theological strictures against free translation to the translation of philosophy.

Introduction to the second edition of the Commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, in *Isagoge Porphyrii Commenta* (510 AD?), translated by L. G. Kelly

This reworking of my commentary is designed to shed light on the matter of our translation. For I am afraid that the translation might earn for me the condemnation due to the 'faithful translator', in that I have manifestly translated each word by one exactly matching it. My reason for this procedure is that, in those texts in which one seeks knowledge of things, it is not the grace of a beautiful style we are to seek, but the uncorrupted truth. Therefore I would seem to have accomplished more if, in philosophical texts written in Latin, the soundness of a close translation should assure that nothing from the Greek text is missing.

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