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## ST CUTHMAN, THE VULGATE, THE SACRAMENTARY, AND SO FORTH

Translating the Latin text of the *Life* of St Cuthman, printed by the Bollandists, is an interesting exercise. I find that the text quite often uses the approach of the Latin Vulgate bible, where *quia* means “that” rather than “because”. This means that you can often get something from simply googling a passage – it may well bring up a translation, or at least highlight that the wording is very close to that of a biblical passage in Latin.

I’m not quite sure about the text that I am working with. Today while googling I accidentally came across signs that someone has produced a modern edition of all or part of it; in an article to which I have no access, unfortunately. It is J. Blair, “Saint Cuthman, Steyning and Bosham”, in: *Sussex Archaeological Collections, Relating to the History & Antiquities of the County* (= SAC), 135, p.173-192. If anybody has access to this, do drop me a line.

One example of the text is where St Cuthman is pushing his handcart, the rear end supported by a rope hanging from his shoulders. Suddenly the rope breaks! But he spies a “sambucus” lying by the way, takes a length from it, twists it, and remakes his rope.

Now “Sambucus” is an exotic form of harp. Just the thing you’d find at random in Anglo-saxon England? Well... maybe not. The Oxford Latin Dictionary kindly directs me to “sabucus”, which is an elder tree. That makes more sense. It looks like Cuthman grabbed a branch from an elder tree and used that.

It’s not just the vulgate bible that gets used either. I’ve reached chapter seven. Most of this consists of a long and boring prayer. But I came across this phrase:

*hic tibi gratiarum referat actiones.*

This, I confess, baffled me. What on earth does “referat” mean here, and “actiones gratiarum”. But some serious time on Google led me to

*Ut reddita sibi sanitate, gratiarum Tibi in Ecclesia Tua referant actiones, per DNJC.*

It turned out that this was a chunk of the prayer for the sick from the Roman missal or sacramentary. I then undertook a search for an English translation, but in fact Google Translate gave me the clue. It turned out that “actiones gratiarum” are “thanks”, and “refero” in this context is “give”. The idea is “let them give thanks to You in Your church, through our Lord Jesus Christ”. There was no way that you could work that out from a dictionary.

It does make sense, tho. The medieval author of the *Life* of St Cuthman knew two Latin texts intimately, and used them every day – the vulgate bible, and the missal. Both would inevitably enter his composition.

For those working with Latin Saints’ *Lives*, then, a knowledge of both texts is clearly

essential.

I have found that Bible Gateway will allow me to display the Latin with parallel Douai English translation, such as [this example from Psalms 15](#). [This 1815 edition of the missal](#) has a lot of English versions in it. Both are useful tools.

Translating Cuthman, I have found it useful to skim-read each chapter, on my mobile phone, while lying on the sofa, and just get some idea of what it is about. Once done, I write down some sort of summary, ignoring hard bits, at the top of each Word document - I do one per chapter - as a guide to what ought to be coming out. This does seem to ease the process of translation, curiously.

Onward!

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