



FURTHER THOUGHTS ON TRANSLATING ST CUTHMAN'S "LIFE"

While translating the Latin text of the *Life* of the anglo-saxon Saint Cuthman, I have taken to googling for fragments of the Latin, or even whole sentences. The results are often interesting, and not infrequently important.

One reason that I do this is to identify biblical references. Often a tortured phrase turns out to be an allusion. Indeed I came across a reference to Tobit 10:4 half an hour ago.

Strangely Google does not prioritise the Latin bible in a search for Latin text, although it is hard to see why not. What you DO get back is endless 16th and 17th century texts, most of which I have never heard of. I don't know why this should be so. Occasionally these are useful; usually they are not.

One such search produced a snippet result in a journal called *Sussex Archaeological Collections*. Looking at the handful of words, I gained the impression that whatever paper this was might be a modern edition of the Latin text. So far I have been working with the Bollandist text of 1658. I have, indeed, found some suspect text in the Latin text. At one point there is reference to *trabale unicum* where I wonder whether it should be *trabale iugum*. There is, otherwise, no noun in the sentence. The reference would be to a ridge-beam.

Of course I was unable to see what the paper was, but it proved to be John Blair, "Saint Cuthman, Steyning and Bosham" in SAC 135 (1997), 173-92. I was unable to access this; but an offprint was for sale on Amazon, at a high price, but rather less than the cost of the petrol to get a copy; and this arrived today.

The Blair paper does indeed contain an edition of the text - indeed a critical edition, with apparatus of the two extant manuscripts, plus the Bollandist edition. It also contains what the author describes as a "paraphrase" translation. This is nearly full length, and, had I known that it existed, I might not have troubled to make a translation myself.

Why paraphrase? Well, it's considerably easier to get the sense of the text than it is to identify each and every Latin construction and pin down precisely what that last word means. It also avoids the risk of some snooty person critiquing your translation! Since the precise wording is generally less important than the idea, these kinds of things are quite serviceable and they seem very common in modern versions of hagiographical literature. But all the same, they are an abomination. The reader should be given a proper translation.

I've been learning a great deal about Latin syntax from struggling with Cuthman. I've been processing much of it into context-sensitive help-materials in QuickLatin 2, which is a double benefit: I learn the stuff, and there are reminders for the future.

I've worked harder on Cuthman than any Latin text that I have ever translated. I've been proceeding as follows:

1. Create an electronic text.
2. Split it into chapters, each in a separate file.

3. Split each chapter into sentences, translate this in Google Translate and interleave the two in the document. The Google translation is generally useless, but it can sometimes highlight that the words are a set phrase of some sort, which you can therefore search for. This is most obvious when the Google output drops into Jacobean English!

4. Now skim-read the text in PDF, to get a sense of what the chapter says. Ignore any difficult bits. Speed is all. At the head of the chapter, write down this skim-read synopsis. This acts as a kind of guide when doing the detailed translation.

5. First pass. Now translate each sentence in the chapter, one by one, looking out for correlatives like *vel... vel*, etc. Leave difficult bits. Highlight in bold and red stuff of which you are uncertain. Add a note of any Latin constructions that you recognise, and say *why* you chose those words. Wherever the text feels “stiff”, then you need to document what you did. Pay lots of attention to the verb tenses, etc.

6. Go through the whole text until you have done the first pass. Then copy this to a folder for later.

7. Second pass. Now go through the chapters again, making sure that you understand the Latin construction in every single case. Google for them! There’s a huge amount of information out there on syntax. Fix whatever you can. By the end of this, you should have satisfactory translations of the lot, with a huge amount of notes, quotes, links to external websites, and changes of mind marked with strike-out. At this stage I tend to make most the notes grey, if I have finished with them, but want to be able to refer to them. Then copy all these files to a new folder.

This is where I am at the moment. The next stage will be:

1. Third pass. Go through the files again, removing the grey stuff, writing real footnotes; but also rechecking. Harmonise common words. Then save copies of this lot.

2. Fourth pass. Combine the sentences into groups, then into paragraphs. Read the lot and see if it makes sense. Sometimes you will realise that two sentences together each mean something rather different to what you thought.

3. Create a single file with the whole translation in it.

It’s a lot of work; but it’s like solving a jigsaw puzzle. It’s quite rewarding really!
