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Gothic Texts. Translations, Audiences, Readers

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Authors and Readers

Gothic Texts

Translations, Audiences, Readers

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The oldest translation of the Bible into a Germanic language comes from the Goths, specifically the Visigoths. In this essay, I investigate the reasons for translating the sacred text and how readers and audiences approached this work from the fourth century, when the Bible was translated into Gothic, up to the Carolingian age, when the translation was last used.¹ I will first consider the relationship between the Christianization of the Goths and their resulting liturgical needs, then examine some earlier translations and the connections between translation, audience, and oral tradition, before concluding with the role of the Gothic version in the study of the Bible and the subsequent transfer from public audiences to private readings, as the Gothic Bible was no longer used for liturgical purposes after the vanishing of Arianism.

Christianization of the Goths and the Reason for the Translation

During the fourth century, the Goths were divided into two main groups: the Tervingi (which later became the Visigoths) and the Greuthungi (the future Ostrogoths).² The Tervingi, who were settled along the Danube, were in direct contact with the Roman Empire, to which they were bound in an alliance whereby the Romans paid the barbarians tributes. The Tervingi, for their part, had to defend the Empire from any external attacks or raids.³ It is obvious that the Goths and the Greeks of the Eastern Roman Empire were in touch with each other. Such was the case of the Gothic community, as it existed in Constantinople during the fourth century (it is worth remembering how many barbarians were already in the Roman army) and some of its members were Christian.⁴

The Christian period for the Goths began in the third century, when some Goths dwelling along the Danube shores not far from the Black Sea were converted to Christianity as a result of contacts with inhabitants of the Empire and some Christian captives whom the Goths

¹ In 2015 Andrei Vinogradov and Maksim Korobov published five inscriptions in Gothic letters and language engraved as graffiti discovered in Magup (Crimea). They dated them between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, but the question is still open. See Vinogradov and Korobov, 'Gotskie graffiti iz Mangupskoj baziliki' pp. 57–75; Korobov and Vinogradov, 'Gotische Graffito-Inschriften aus der Bergkrim', pp. 141–57; Zironi, 'La letteratura gotica', pp. 46–48; Dolcetti Corazza and Falluomini, *I Goti*, pp. 158–59.

² Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 52–53.

³ Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 62.

⁴ Schäferdiek, 'Germanenmission', col. 496.

kept during raids and pillages in the Roman provinces.⁵ The existence of some structured Christian communities at the very beginning of the fourth century is confirmed by the presence of the Gothic Bishop Theophilus at the First Council of Nicaea in 325.⁶ Very soon afterwards, the large majority of the Christianized Goths turned to the Arian heresy. Arianism was professed by influential members of the Church who encouraged missions among the Germanic tribes on the other side of the Roman *limes*.⁷ Inside the borders of the Roman Empire, some orthodox Gothic communities were well rooted. Arian or orthodox, the Goths had the same needs. With the spread of Christianity among the Goths, many of them living beyond the frontier, there was a need for non-Greek speakers to understand the word of God. The greatest obstacle was the liturgy, conducted in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written.⁸

In the last decades of the fourth century, two surviving documents evidence the interest in the Christian Gothic community of Constantinople by the Patriarch John Chrysostom. Intent on suppressing the Arian heresy largely adopted by the Goths, John himself tried to convert them to orthodoxy with the help of a translator and assigned a church to the Goths of Constantinople in which Gothic-speaking priests could preach and people could worship in their own language:

It was perceived by John that the Scythians were involved with the Arian net; he therefore devised counter contrivances and discovered a means of winning them over. Appointing presbyters and deacons and readers of the divine oracles who spoke the Scythian tongue, he assigned a church to them, and by their means won many from their error. He used frequently himself to visit it and preach there, using an interpreter who was skilled in both languages, and he got other good speakers do the same. This was his constant practice in the city, and many of those who had been deceived he rescued by pointing out to them the truth of the apostolic preaching.⁹

In a letter probably written in 404, John refers to the *Ἐκκλησίᾳ τῶν Γότθων* ('the Church of the Goths').¹⁰ The granting of a specific church to the Gothic community seems to have started in the year 399; on the occasion of the Eastern liturgy, a Gothic homily was given, followed by a sermon delivered by Patriarch John.¹¹

Can we infer that during the liturgy in the Gothic church in Constantinople the scriptures were read in a language other than Greek?¹² And was it Gothic? We cannot be sure, but it would sound a little odd if the Gothic language were not used in a church attended by Goths.¹³ Two other pieces of data must also be considered. First, Pope Damasus (366–84) decided that Latin could be used as a liturgical language.¹⁴ Second, in the same years, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians was the topic of a theological discussion, in particular Chapter 14, in which the Apostle exhorts preachers to be readily understandable by using the language spoken by the congregation. Commenting on that passage, a still anonymous author known as Ambrosiaster asserted that foreign languages did not permit the union of the community, as the biblical text

⁵ Schäferdiek, 'Germanenmission', col. 498.

⁶ *Patrum Nicaenorum nomina Latine, Graece, Coptice, Syriace, Arabice, Armeniace*, ed. by Gelzer and others, p. lxiv.

⁷ Schäferdiek, 'Germanenmission', cols 503–04; Gheller, *'Identità' e 'arianesimo gotico'*, pp. 111–12.

⁸ Greek was for a long time the only liturgical language; Latin was adopted during the papacy of Damasus (d. 384): Klauser, 'Der Übergang der römischen Kirche', p. 473.

⁹ Theodoret of Cyrus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Jackson, p. 152.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Epistulae*, ed. by Migne, col. 727.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae*, ed. by Migne, cols 499–510.

¹² Mayer, *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom*, pp. 493–94.

¹³ Gros, *Les Wisigoths et les liturgies occidentales*, p. 126.

¹⁴ Klauser, 'Der Übergang der römischen Kirche', p. 473.

remained obscure and thus called for the presence of a translator.¹⁵ To summarize, in the second half of the fourth century, the growth in the number of Christians urged for solutions regarding the linguistic gap between the biblical text in Greek and people speaking and understanding other languages, such as Gothic.¹⁶ In some communities Gothic probably became the language of at least part of the liturgy.¹⁷

Gothic Translation and its Antecedents

It is widely known that Arian Visigothic Bishop Wulfila and his assistants undertook the translation of the Bible into Gothic in the last decades of the fourth century, but the path that led to this translation began earlier and was closely linked to oral tradition.¹⁸ The Goths, like all other Germanic groups, transmitted their literature orally.¹⁹ This cultural attitude facilitated the approach to the new faith, which practised evangelization by way of direct verbal contact

¹⁵ ‘Si ergo nesciero virtutem vocis, ero ei cui loquor barbarus, et is qui loquitur mihi barbarus. non utique id studendum monet, ut invicem per incognitam linguam barbari sibi videantur; sed quia concordiae res est, his nitendum est, ut per unanimitatem intellectus communi laetitia glorientur’; Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius*, XIV. 11, ed. by Vogels, p. 152 (‘but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. Paul is saying that people should not appear as strangers to one another by using unknown tongues, but in the search of harmony should rejoice with a shared joy in a common understanding’; Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries*, ed. and trans. by Bray, p. 185). ‘Sive enim lingua quis loquitur, per duos, ut multum tres; et in particulatim, ut unus interpretetur. hoc est duo aut tres, plus non linguis loquantur, sed singuli, non simul omnes, ne insanire viderentur; ideo ergo ut multum tres, ne occuparent diem linguis loquentes et interpretes illorum et non haberent profetae tempus scripturas disserendi, qui sunt totius ecclesiae inluminatores’; Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius*, XIV. 27, ed. by Vogels, pp. 158–59 (‘If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. Two or three people may speak in tongues, but not more, and each one must speak in turn, so as not to appear to be mad. In limiting the number to three at the most, Paul is saying that he does not want these people to take up the whole day and leave insufficient time for prophets, who are the sources of illumination for the whole church, to expound the Scriptures’; Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries*, ed. and trans. by Bray, p. 185). Klauser, ‘Der Übergang der römischen Kirche’, p. 476.

¹⁶ Vogel, *Introduction aux sources*, ed. by Botte, pp. 243–45.

¹⁷ Traces of liturgies in Gothic language are scant and can be deduced logically. This is the case of a passage from an altercation between Augustine and Pascentius, a *comes domus regiae* about Arianism, and here reference is made to the uses in the barbarian church of the Vandals, which was presumably the same as that of the Goths: ‘Latine enim dicitur, *Domine, miserere*. Sola ergo haec Misericordia ab ipso uno Deo Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto lingua debet hebraea vel graeca, aut ipsa ad postremum postulari latina, non autem et barbara? Si enim licet dicere, non solum Barbaris lingua sua, sed etiam Romanis, *Sihora armen*, quod interpretatur, *Domine, miserere*’; Auctor incertus (Vigilius Tapsensis?), *Epistola XX*, ed. by Migne, col. 1162 (‘In fact, in Latin it is said: *Domine, miserere*. Therefore, should this mercy be requested in the Hebrew or Greek language to one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or can this same mercy be asked in Latin and also in a barbarous language? If, in fact, it is permissible for the Romans to speak in their own language, then in the barbarian language the expression *Domine miserere* corresponds to *Sihora armen*’). About the *altercatio*: Sumruld, *Augustine and the Arians*, pp. 78–84. Salvian of Marseilles remembers in a passage of his *De gubernatione Dei* that the Visigoths during the Eucharistic rite read three lectures, one from the Prophets, one from the Apostles and one from the Gospels: ‘Etiam si a paganis lex diuina non exigit ut mandata faciant quae non sciunt, certe ab haereticis exigit, qui sciunt. Eadem enim etiam illos legere, quae nos legimus, eosdem apud illos prophetas Dei, eosdem apostolos, eosdem euangelistas esse’; Salvien de Marseille, *Du gouvernement de Dieu* V. II. 5, ed. and trans. by Lagarrigue, p. 314 (‘Even if the divine law does not exact of the pagans that they keep commandments they do not know, it certainly does exact this of the heretics who know them; for they read the same books we do; they have the same prophets, the same apostles, the same evangelists’; Salvian of Marseilles, *On the government of God*, trans. by Sanford, p. 134). On the Vandalic words: Tiefenbach, ‘Das wandalische “Domine miserere”’, pp. 251–68.

¹⁸ The bibliography on Wulfila and the Gothic translation of the Bible is copious and can be found in Petersen, *Bibliographia gotica amplificata*. The question can be approached through a book by Scardigli, *Die Goten*, pp. 95–132, followed by Stutz, *Gotische Literaturdenkmäler*, pp. 9–14 and more recently Gheller, ‘*Identità e ‘arianesimo gotico*’, pp. 77–110.

¹⁹ Dunphy, ‘Oral Traditions’, pp. 103–18.

as its first approach to Christianizing people. For instance, Philostorgius reported that Arius, the founder of the heresy many Goths followed, composed strophes and songs to be sung by the simple folk of Constantinople:

He says that Arius, after his secession from the church, composed several songs to be sung by sailors, and by millers, and by travellers along the high road, and others of the same kind, which he adapted to certain tunes, as he thought suitable in each separate case, and thus by degrees seduced the minds of the unlearned by the attractiveness of his songs to the adoption of his own impiety.²⁰

We do not know exactly what happened, but perhaps the popularity of the passage referring to the Apostles who went along the streets of Jerusalem speaking all languages after receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2. 4–11) influenced Philostorgius.

The Case of the *Pater Noster*

We know that the first experiences of Christian faith come through daily prayers, like the *Pater Noster*, which is one of the first texts to be translated into many Germanic languages. The Lord's Prayer is a clear example of the relationship between a translated text and its audience. The translation of the *Pater Noster* immediately reveals the problem with any new version of the Holy Scriptures; fidelity to the prayer taught by Jesus and the double effort to respect the syntactic rules of the Gothic language while at the same time having a text which the audience can easily learn by heart. The Greek version surely facilitates memorization by closing lines 2–4 with the possessive pronoun σου ('your') and the same mnemonic practice is repeated by the Gothic text (*þein*). Though the Greek version is colloquial, in Gothic the oral approach is emphasized in order to have a more personal relationship with God. In the first line, the Greek article *ὁ* used with a pronominal function ('him') is substituted by the personal pronoun *þu*:

Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς·

ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου·

¹⁰ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου·

γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου²¹

Atta unsar **þu** in himinam,

weihnai namo **þein**.

¹⁰Qimai þiudinassus **þeins**.

Wairþai wilja **þeins**²²

Obviously, we are not sure about the oral form of the Gothic *Pater Noster* before the linguistic features it assumed in the written translation by Wulfila, but we certainly suspect a previous circulation of an oral version of the text. After all, the conversion of the Goths to Christianity had begun earlier than the translation activity undertaken by Wulfila. Some Goths were already in the Roman army from at least the end of the third century, as in the following century the Goths had reached high military ranks.²³ Christianity reached the barbarians in the same years as a result of contacts between soldiers, and among Goths, captives, merchants, and deserters.²⁴ As this happened, the first engagement with the new religion occurred with the learning of the

²⁰ Philostorgius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. by Walford, p. 434.

²¹ Matthew 6. 9–10: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. by Nestle and others, p. 13.

²² Matthew 6. 9–10: *Die gotische Bibel*, I, ed. by Streitberg, p. 7.

²³ Scardigli and Scardigli, 'I rapporti fra Goti e Romani', p. 263 and p. 287.

²⁴ Scardigli and Scardigli, 'I rapporti fra Goti e Romani', p. 283. Some loanwords from Gothic into Latin confirm those contacts: Restelli, 'I più antichi prestiti gotici del latino', pp. 229–46. The contrary can also have happened: some Latin words particularly used in military context were loaned by Germans: examples can be Gothic *kapillon* (I Corinthians 11. 6), **militon* (Luke 3. 14), etc. It is doubtful that such words can evoke the influence of Latin on the translation of the Bible into Gothic. Germanic speakers could have adopted words pertaining to the military semantic field during the contacts with the Roman Empire before the fourth century and many of them were already used in Greek: Scardigli, *Die Goten*, pp. 84–86. Moreover, the large majority of Latin loanwords in Gothic should have been adopted by Goths in the first three centuries of the Christian era, so before the translation of the Bible: cf. Corazza, *Le parole latine in gotico*, pp. 8–72.

principal prayers, the first being the *Pater Noster*. Moreover, in Wulfila's time, the conversion of the Goths to Christianity was very recent and still needed to be confirmed. Hence, the translators' group directed by the Visigothic bishop knew very well that it was impossible to imagine an individual reading the Bible, because of the almost complete illiteracy among the Germanic tribes and the high cost of manuscripts, so a largely oral version of the biblical text also had to be considered. At the same time, the evangelic texts presented some difficulties for languages like Gothic, which did not have a sufficient lexicon in specific semantic fields such as philosophy, religious speculation, or the environment and culture of countries of the Near East which had customs, plants, animals and so on mentioned in the Bible but unknown to the majority of the Germanic people.²⁵

The Question of Orality

There was also a communicative question to be solved: how could fidelity to the Greek text (which comes from God) be squared with avoidance of obscurity in the Gothic translation? In other words, if you must respect the voice of God manifest even in the order of the words, you are in danger of producing a translation that will be largely obscure for an audience which has to follow the text by ear alone, without any written help. Imagine hearing this:

¹Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ²And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.²⁶

If we were Goths, we would immediately have some difficulties in understanding what is meant by 'cymbal', 'mystery', and 'knowledge', which in Greek here is *gnosis*. Moreover, the second verse is syntactically complex:

1 Ἐὰν ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαλῶ καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, γέγονα χαλκὸς ἡχῶν ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον.

2 καὶ ἐὰν ἔχω προφητείαν καὶ εἰδῶ τὰ μυστήρια πάντα καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γνῶσιν, καὶ ἐὰν ἔχω πᾶσαν τὴν πίστιν ὥστε ὅρη μεθιστάναι, ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, οὐθέν εἰμι.²⁷

In Greek, three hypothetical clauses introduced by *ἐὰν* ('though') are used together with a consecutive introduced by *ὥστε* ('so that') and a hypothetical clause of reality with an adversative value by *δὲ* ('and have'), and finally, the main clause that ends the sentence by *οὐθέν εἰμι* ('I am nothing'). We should also remember that this passage from Paul is defined as a hymn and therefore has almost poetic patterns that are revealed in Greek by the adoption of a cumulative technique adding clauses introduced by the conjunction *καὶ* ('and'). The Gothic translation adopts this anaphora but to more fluent effect:

1 [...] aiþþau klismo klismjandei.²⁸

2. jah jabai habau praufetjans jah witjau allaize runos jah all kunþi jah habau alla galaubein, swaswe fairgunja miþsatjau, iþ friarþwa ni habau, in waihts im.²⁹

²⁵ For a useful list of semantic domains in the Old and New Testament, see De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, pp. 178–81; see also Zironi, 'The Evangelic Text as Translation and Interpretative Experience', pp. 124–25.

²⁶ I Corinthians 13. 1–2: *The Bible*, ed. by Stirling, p. 183.

²⁷ I Corinthians 13. 1–2: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. by Nestle and others, pp. 462–63.

²⁸ The first part of the verse in the Gothic translation is lost.

²⁹ I Corinthians 13. 1–2: *Die gotische Bibel*, I, ed. by Streitberg, p. 267.

This solution avoids in one case the use of the subordinating conjunction *ēāv / jabai* ('though') and prefers in every circumstance the present optative form of the verb (endings in *-au*), repeating five times *habau* ('have'), three times *witjau* ('understand'), and *miþsatjau* ('remove'), thus giving rhythm to the verse. This choice meets the requirements of oral communication so that the assembly attending the liturgy could easily follow the reading.³⁰ Particular emphasis is also given to the text by the conjunction *iþ* ('if'): breaking the rhythm given by the succession of the conjunction *jah* ('and') plus the optative verbs, the attention of the audience converges upon the main clause, which reveals the answer to all the previous sentences. At the same time, the presence of the two negative adverbs *ni* produces a double trisyllabic expression, *ni habau* and then *in waihts im*, that definitively closes the verse. It has already been suggested that many choices made by Wulfila in his translation took into account the finalities of the text, which had to be read in front of an assembly, whence the use of alliteration and other linguistic devices which could help the 'acoustical substance' of words.³¹ Therefore, the alliteration of *klismo klismjandei* is not casual but rather normative, in the metrics of Germanic poetry, and also in many poetical formulaic expressions.

The centrality of the audience in the production of the translation is also demonstrated by many individual words, especially those which do not have a clear counterpart in Gothic. The intention of the translators is to make the meaning clear, so that on many occasions they rejected the possibility of using loanwords which ran the high risk of remaining obscure and instead they enlarged the meaning of the Gothic lexicon so that the sense of the Greek term can be comprehensible through a common word. I would like to present two examples. The first one concerns the couple *μυστήρια* – *runos* in the previous passage by Paul, which has been already discussed.³² In that passage, with the word *μυστήρια* the Apostle speaks of 'the secrecy of God's plans'. A very difficult theological concept, which is made comprehensible by choosing the word *runa*. Why? Because the composition of a runic text was rather complex and required the presence of an expert: the runic text could be read right-to-left and vice-versa; at the same time, every single rune could stand for its phonetic value or for its name. For instance, the rune Þ means the unvoiced fricative dental sound /θ/ or its name, Germanic **þurisaz* ('giant', 'monster') (*þurs* in Old Norse) but *þorn* ('thorn') in Old English.³³ Consequently, the reader has to choose between the two interpretations. It is evident that such competence was acquired by few and perceived as a sort of secret knowledge, which one could gain only after an initiatory experience. As a result of using the word *runa*, the Goths linked the idea that even if a man had a secret store of knowledge, without charity he was nothing, and thus the understanding would not have been so different from the meaning of Greek *mysterion*.

Another example can be taken from another passage of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 10.19–21), in which Paul warns his disciples not to sacrifice to idols as Gentiles do, because you cannot partake of Jesus's Eucharistic table and idolatry:

¹⁹ What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? ²⁰ But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. ²¹ Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.³⁴

The difficulty in this group of verses lies in some complex concepts. In particular, since the Germans performed sacrifices in their pagan rites, few problems should have arisen in comprehension; it was more complicated to decode what the word 'idol' means. Finally, the idea of evil spirits must be explained. Here is the Greek version and the translation into Gothic:

³⁰ De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, pp. 25–30; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 64–68.

³¹ Scardigli, *Die Goten*, p. 124.

³² Meli, *Alamannia Runica*, pp. 64–69.

³³ Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, p. 67; Düwel, *Runenkunde*, p. 198.

³⁴ I Corinthians 10. 19–21: *The Bible*, ed. by Stirling, p. 181.

¹⁹ τί οὖν φημι; ὅτι εἰδωλόθυτόν τί ἐστίν, ἢ ὅτι εἰδωλόν τί ἐστίν; ²⁰ ἀλλ' ὅτι ἃ θύουσιν, δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ θύουσιν, οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι. ²¹ οὐ δύνασθε ποτήριον κυρίου πίνειν καὶ ποτήριον δαιμονίων· οὐ δύνασθε τραπέζης κυρίου μετέχειν καὶ τραπέζης δαιμονίων.³⁵

(¹⁹ hva nu qiþam? þatei þo galiugaguda hva sijaina aiþþau þatei galiugam saljada hva sijai? ²⁰ [ni þatei þo galiugaguda waihts sijaina,] ak þatei saljand þiudos, skohslam saljand, jan-ni guda. Ni wiljau auk izwis skohslam gadailans wairþan. ²¹ ni maguþ stikl frauþins drigkan jah stikl skohsle; ni maguþ biudis frauþins fairaihan jab-biudis skohsle.)³⁶

The first problem comes from the compound noun *εἰδωλόθυτον* ('sacrifice (to the idols)'). The Gothic language, like all other Germanic idioms, uses composite forms without difficulty, but in this case the translator prefers to ignore the word *θυτον* ('sacrifice') and simply gives the word for 'idol' which in turn is a compound noun: **galiug-guþ*. *Galiug* means 'lie', 'falsehood', and *guþ*, nominative plural in the text, is 'god', namely 'the false gods'. The solution adopted by Wulfila reflects the customs of pagan Germanic culture in which the veneration of the gods goes as far as the action of sacrifice even if we do not know whether the rites were made in the presence of an iconographical representation of a deity.³⁷ Idols and sacrifices are intimately linked in Germanic pagan practice; thus the overlap of meanings between 'idols' and 'sacrifice' is easily explicable.³⁸ Hence, the Gothic bishop uses the form for 'idol' intending 'sacrifice', also taking into account that the Greek word intimates the presence of both meanings. What is remarkable in Wulfila's translation is the neologism he adopted for 'idol', namely the compound **galiug-guþ*. He uses the same kind of composition, *ga-liug* + noun for other words where the Greek text has the same structure, *ψευδός* + noun:³⁹

ψευδοαπόστολος	galiugaapaustaulus	false apostle	II Corinthians 11. 13
ψευδάδελφος	galiugabroþar	false brother	John 2. 4; II Corinthians 11. 26
ψευδοπροφήτης	galiugapraufetus	false prophet	Mark 13. 22; Luke 6. 26
ψευδόμαρτυρ	galiugaweitwoþs	false witness	I Corinthians 15. 15
ψευδόχριστος	galiugaxristus	false Christ	Mark 13. 22

Having adopted the technique of the linguistic calque, Wulfila expands it to include the translation for 'idols' as well, whenever the Greek language has the specific term *εἰδωλόν*:

εἰδωλόν galiugaguþ

It should also be recalled that the letter 'a' at the end of the noun is the connecting vowel between the first and the second word of the compound. The presence of 'a' after a long-syllable word denotes that the composition is a new-coined word which did not exist before the translation of the Bible.⁴⁰ In this way, the Gothic translator creates and marks with the recurrent word *galiug-a-* something linked to falsehood and to the idols which are false deities, as many of the Goths could have seen in Roman and Greek statues and images, but also in their own old representations of the heathen gods.

The Gothic verb for 'to sacrifice' is *saljan*. It comes from the Indo-European root **sel-* ('to sell') which in Proto-Germanic languages has the causative meaning of 'to cause to take'. Therefore, it is very different in its semantic meaning from the Greek *θύω* ('I let smoke', consequently: 'I sacrifice'). The Germanic attitude pays attention to the relation with the

³⁵ I Corinthians 10. 19–21: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. by Nestle and others, p. 457.

³⁶ I Corinthians 10. 19–21: *Die gotische Bibel*, I, ed. by Streitberg, p. 263.

³⁷ Simek, 'Opfer', pp. 311–13.

³⁸ A good example can be found in a sermon delivered by the Anglo-Saxon Abbot Aelfric (c. 955–c. 1010) known as *De falsis diis* in which he used the expression *hæðengyld*, literally 'tribute to the gods', namely 'sacrifice', to denote 'idols': Aelfric, *De Falsis Diis* XXI. 72, ed. by Pope, p. 680.

³⁹ All forms compare here in the nominative singular case.

⁴⁰ Kroesch, 'The Formation of Compound', p. 4.

recipient of the offering, while the Greek verb mentions the result of the sacrifice which is burnt for the beneficiary.⁴¹ In this case, the translator uses his own lexical material, which is obviously understood by the audience.⁴²

The last case to be examined in this passage by Paul has to do with the translation of the Greek *δαιμόνιον* ('devil'). The choice is for the word *skohsl*, which in Gothic translates *δαίμον*, *δαιμόνιον*, but the Gothic translator also uses *unhulþa* (masculine) and *unhulþo* (feminine) for the same Greek words. *Unhulþa/o* likewise translates the Greek *διάβολος* and *σατανᾶς*, where the feminine is preferred in passages in which evil spirits are exposed to physical torments and possessions.⁴³ A similar meaning seems to be conveyed by the neuter noun *skohsl*. This word is less frequent than *unhulþa* (fifteen occurrences) or *unhulþo* (forty occurrences) as it is used only on three occasions, the first in Matthew 8. 28–31, where the demons coming out of the body of a possessed man ask Christ to send them into the bodies of pigs.⁴⁴ Moreover, *skohsl* appears as a gloss to the word *unhulþo* in Luke 8. 27 where the same episode is narrated. Finally, it occurs in the Epistle which we are analysing. Particularly thought-provoking is this gloss written in the Codex Argenteus, the invaluable manuscript probably copied in Ravenna during the reign of the Ostrogoth Theoderic in Italy (493–526).⁴⁵ In this case, the glossator wanted to create a link to the passage in Matthew in which *skohsl* is applied: he did not need *skohsl* as *interpretamentum* of the word *unhulþo*, easily understood by the Goths. *Unhulþs* and the correlated Teutonic forms were already in common use in the Germanic languages in religious contexts; without the negative prefix *un-*, it can denote a benevolent domestic spirit (see for instance Old High German *holdo* ('spirit', 'servant', 'friend')).⁴⁶ With the prefix *un-* unclean spirits are designated, thus the frequency in use of the term is no surprise. On the other hand, the scarcity of occurrences for the word *skohsl* suggests a specific use, which can be retraced through its etymology. The Indo-European root is **skek-* ('to spring, to move quickly'), but only in Gothic does the word assume the meaning of 'fiend', 'demon', differing from the other Germanic forms, in which the common denotation is 'someone/something who/which springs or hurries' or similar situation of rapid motion.⁴⁷ References to the semantic field of ghosts and/or demons can be traced only in the Old Irish word *scāl* ('supernatural being', 'phantom').⁴⁸ The question is: why did the Gothic translator use this particular word in those two passages alone? Presumably, he wanted to convey a specific representation of this kind of demon, cited in Matthew's passage and in Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians. The distinctive aspect which

⁴¹ Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I, '3. sel-', p. 899 and '4. dheu-', p. 262; Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary*, 'sell', p. 670.

⁴² The verb *saljan* is discussed by Üçök, *Über die Wortgruppen weltanschaulichen und religiösen Inhalts in der Bibelübersetzung Ulfilas*, pp. 71–72.

⁴³ Üçök, *Über die Wortgruppen weltanschaulichen und religiösen Inhalts in der Bibelübersetzung Ulfilas*, p. 24.

⁴⁴ *Die gotische Bibel*, I, ed. by Streitberg, p. 15: '28jah qimandin imma hindar marein in gauja Gairgaisaine, gamotidedun imma twai daimonarjos us hlaiwasnom rinnandans, sleidjai filu, swaswe ni mahta manna usleiþan þairh þana wig jainana. 29 jah sai, hropidedun qipandans: hva uns jah þus, Iesu, sunau gudis? qamt her faur mel balwjan unsis? 30 Wasuh þan fairra im hairda sweine managaize haldana. 31 iþ þo skohsla bedun ina qipandans: jabai uswairpis uns, uslaubei uns galeiþan in þo hairda sweine' (*The Bible*, ed. by Stirling, p. 14: '28And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. 29And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? 30And there was a good way off from them and herd of many swine feeding. 31So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine').

⁴⁵ The *Codex Argenteus* is a deluxe manuscript, which was probably in use in the palace's church of the Gothic court in Ravenna: Cavallo, 'La cultura scritta a Ravenna', p. 87; Munkhammar, *La Bibbia dei Goti*.

⁴⁶ Feist, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache*, 'hulþs', p. 274.

⁴⁷ Grienberger, 'Untersuchungen zur gotischen Wortkunde', 'skohsl', p. 190; Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 'skek-', pp. 922–23.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the Celtic words see Vendryès, *Lexique étimologique*, 'scāl', p. 30 and O'Brien, 'Varia', pp. 89–90.

skohsl should convey is that of uncontrolled and quick motion, which characterizes possessed bodies. In pagan times, this can be connected to the imagination of evil beings embodied by wild animals like wolves, and the same attitude was adopted by the Nordic *berserkir*.⁴⁹ The furious and unrestrained conduct of *berserkir* was also the consequence of ritual meals during which parts of wild animals (wolves and similar predators) were eaten in order to take on their qualities.⁵⁰ This kind of mutation, known as *berserkergang*, had particular corporeal manifestations. Howard Fabing, reporting the words of the nineteenth-century historian Peter Andreas Munch, gives this explanation:

This fury, which was called berserkergang, occurred not only in the heat of battle, but also during laborious work. Men who were thus seized performed things which otherwise seemed impossible for human power. This condition is said to have begun with shivering, chattering of the teeth, and chill in the body, and then the face swelled and changed its colour. With this was connected a great hot-headedness, which at last gave over into a great rage, under which they howled as wild animals, bit the edge of their shields, and cut down everything they met without discriminating between friend or foe. When this condition ceased, a great dulling of the mind and feebleness followed, which could last for one or several days.⁵¹

No evidence of similar physical reactions and rites is known among the Goths, but the coincidence of uncontrolled motion of the body associated also with animals, which emerges from Matthew's episode, and the connection to a ceremonial meal (the ritual drinking alluded to by Paul) open the possibility to customs practised by pagans and easily identified by the audience. If this explanation is convincing, the use of the word *skohsl* instead of the more frequent *unhulþ* reflects a conscious choice on the part of translators who thus convey a particular idea of evil whose connection to heathen behavioural patterns emerges clearly.

The examples which I have analysed, though they could be more copious, should sufficiently show the attention of the Gothic Bible's translators in rendering the Greek text, as they took into account the cultural background of the receptors of the translation.⁵² The approach adopted by Wulfila and his team reveals the intention of having a final product which can be open to the understanding of the common people to be converted and to ensure the integrity of the recently adopted Christian faith. As far as possible, all cultural obstacles have to be removed and the translator facilitates comprehension of situations and value-systems alien to the Germanic tradition. The *modus operandi* of Wulfila is not that far from some instructions given during the second Vatican Council about the use of vernacular languages in the liturgy:

21. Especially in the translations intended for peoples recently brought to the Christian Faith, fidelity and exactness with respect to the original texts may themselves sometimes require that words already in current usage be employed in new ways, that new words or expressions be coined, that terms in the original text be transliterated or adapted to the pronunciation of the vernacular language.⁵³

Thus, the problems of evangelizing the Germanic tribes in the fourth century were not so different from those of the current Catholic Church when it decided to translate sacred texts from Latin into vernacular languages. The concern of the Congregation for the Divine Worship, which delivered the rule for having texts which were both respectful of the original version but also comprehensible to people, was the same that animated the intentions of the Gothic translators. They searched for an equilibrium between fidelity to the orthodoxy of God's word and its transmission and comprehension in other cultural milieus. Moreover, the Goths had a

⁴⁹ De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, I, pp. 264–67; Chiesa Isnardi, *Storia e cultura della Scandinavia*, p. 170.

⁵⁰ Literary examples have been collected by Chiesa Isnardi, *Storie e leggende del Nord*, pp. 136–38.

⁵¹ Fabing, 'On Going Berserk', p. 234. On the *berserkergang* cf. Høyersten, 'Berserkene', pp. 3247–50.

⁵² The use of the term 'receptor' in translation studies can be deduced from De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, pp. 33–34.

⁵³ Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Fifth Instruction*, II, 21.

special awareness of their mainly illiterate public, who received the texts through oral performances. The auditory finish of the translation was not a subordinate aspect, which interfered in the translation's choices, but over the course of the centuries, even the Gothic version of the Bible, originally conceived to be read aloud, became a text also intended for personal reading.

From Orality to Personal Reading

By the turn of the century, both Visigoths and Ostrogoths migrated from Eastern Europe to settle in France and Italy, respectively.⁵⁴ During this period, we have no mention of further translations or revisions of Wulfila's version, apart from a commentary on the Gospel of John known to scholars as *Skeireins*, which was likely produced during their settling in the area of the Eastern Roman Empire, as it is a translation from Greek into Gothic.⁵⁵ However, when they were in Western Europe, Latin writers immediately related the activity of the Gothic Arian clergy to the biblical texts. Salvian of Marseilles, in his *On the Government of God*, attacked the Visigothic Christians because they only knew what they heard from their priests and teachers.⁵⁶ Hence, the diffusion and evangelization of Christianity among the Goths still depended on oral teaching, confirming that illiteracy was the normal condition for the majority of the Germanic people. But Salvian also asserted that they read the sacred texts even if these were manipulated and corrupted by heresy. He was referring to the clergy who had an organization similar to the Orthodox Church: lecturers, deacons, priests, and bishops.⁵⁷ We know of a priests' community in Ravenna by the church of St Anastasia where a large number of them signed a deed of sale; one of them, named Wiljariþ, refers to himself as *bokareis*, or a copyist.⁵⁸ At the turn of the fifth century, in Ravenna, there was a bookshop managed by a Goth named Uiliaric, perhaps the same man who signed the deed.⁵⁹ During the Ostrogoth's Kingdom in Italy (489–553) many biblical manuscripts were copied, and parts of them have survived as palimpsests.⁶⁰ One of them, known as *Codex Carolinus*, now in Wolfenbüttel Library, has parallel texts: Gothic on the left and Latin on the right. It was probably used by an Arian community, perhaps in Verona where both languages were practised but – due to its position on the page – with a preference for Gothic.⁶¹ These are years of immersive contact with Latin culture, which largely overrides the Greek influence on which the Bible's translation has

⁵⁴ Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 150–71 and 278–84.

⁵⁵ Bennett, *The Gothic Commentary on the Gospel of John*.

⁵⁶ 'Barbari quippe homines, Romanae immo potius humanae eruditionis expertes, qui nihil omnino sciunt nisi quod a doctoribus suis audiunt, quod audiunt hoc sequuntur; ac sic necesse est eos, qui totius litteraturae ac scientiae ignari sacramentum diuinae legis doctrina magis quam lectione cognoscunt, doctrinam potius retinere quam legem'. Salvien de Marseille, *Du gouvernement de Dieu* V. II. 8, ed. by Lagarrigue, p. 316 ('The barbarians, indeed, lacking the Roman training or any other sort of civilized education, knowing nothing whatever unless they have heard it from their teachers, follow blindly what they hear. Such men, completely ignorant of literature and wisdom, are sure to learn the mysteries of the divine law through instruction rather than reading, and to retain their masters' doctrines rather than the law itself'; Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, trans. by Sanford, p. 135).

⁵⁷ About the ecclesiastical organization of the Arian clergy during the Germanic Kingdoms see Mathisen, 'Barbarian "Arian" Clergy', pp. 158–69.

⁵⁸ Tjäder, *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri Italiens aus der Zeit 445–700*, pp. 91–104; Zironi, *L'eredità dei Goti*, p. 27; Francovich Onesti, *I nomi degli Ostrogoti*, p. 362, 'Uiliaric' p. 364, 'Wiliarit', pp. 110–11.

⁵⁹ Cavallo, 'La cultura scritta a Ravenna', pp. 84–86.

⁶⁰ Stutz, 'Codices gotici', pp. 52–60; Zironi, *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio*, pp. 53–68; Lo Monaco, 'De Fatis Palimpsestorum', pp. 53–62.

⁶¹ Falluomini, *Der sogenannte Codex Carolinus*, pp. 150–52.

depended.⁶² In some Gothic cultural centres, namely Ravenna and Verona, the Bible text was studied and emended. So, the translation into Gothic of the Bible is a sort of work in progress, where the Greek text is compared with the Latin and Gothic versions without any passive or overly reverent attitude. In other words, the Gothic translation has the same dignity, and all three languages can help arrive at the correct interpretation of the sacred texts.⁶³ It is evident that the native speaking Gothic clergy involved in this kind of study was bilingual with Latin, and in some cases could also read Greek. This process of improvement on the Gothic version of the Bible is demonstrated by a preface written by Gothic grammarians during the Ostrogothic reign in Italy and attached to another manuscript, a Latin version of the Gospels, part of the *Vetus Latina* group known as the *Codex Brixianus*. Scholars agree in considering the *Brixianus* the Latin part of a Gothic-Latin bilingual transmission.⁶⁴ The Preface, even if it was not originally part of the manuscript, explains how the Gothic grammarians meant to proceed in their studies. This is their practice; they gloss the Gothic text with the term *wulþrs* when they see the necessity of creating a reference to a Greek or Latin form.⁶⁵ The result of this declaration of intent is evident in the *Brixianus*, where the Latin text contains *lectiones* from the *Vulgate* but also from the Gothic text.⁶⁶

The example of the interest of Goth grammarians in the biblical text also reveals a transformation in the need for its translation into Gothic. When the Goths finally settled in Italy and France, their version of the Bible had become part of the Arian liturgy in countries in which many of the barbarians they met were already native Latin speakers or, more generally, in a condition of imperfect bilingualism (where Latin had obviously prevailed). Therefore, the necessity of having both Gothic and Latin texts for the liturgy arose, and this was the occasion to revisit not only the translation without compromising the word-order but also the Latin version, which could also be changed where the Gothic version was considered better than the Latin one. Hence, we can affirm that after a first pioneering phase characterized by the evangelization of the Goths, with all the implications of the particular strategies of oral communication, during the kingdoms of the Goths in Western Europe the role of the Gothic translation changed. It became a matter of philological speculation and eventually a personal relationship with the text; from general, widespread oral use to individual, personal reading.

The ensuing story of the Goths and their language can be briefly summarized; during the second half of the sixth century, the use of Gothic rapidly disappeared and the Arian church dissolved in the same years.⁶⁷ The Gothic language persisted in Italy until the year 680 with the Lombards, who are suspected of having used Gothic texts for Arian liturgies: the Lombards were Germanic speakers, so it seems likely that they would have privileged manuscripts translated into a Germanic language instead of Latin texts.⁶⁸ With the conversion to orthodoxy in 680 and the disappearance of the Lombard language by the latest in the very first decades of the eighth century, Gothic texts became useless and some of them were erased.⁶⁹ But other manuscripts must have survived. During the Carolingian age, between the very last years of the eighth century and the first half of the ninth century, an interest in Gothic texts grew among the scholars who surrounded Charlemagne, in particular those who were of Visigothic origin.⁷⁰ Following the cultural programme of the Emperor to support and increase the use of vernacular

⁶² Falluomini, *The Gothic Version of the Gospels*, pp. 101–12.

⁶³ Zironi, 'La letteratura gotica', p. 43.

⁶⁴ On the *Codex Brixianus* cf. Burkitt, 'The Vulgate Gospels and the "Codex Brixianus"', pp. 129–34.

⁶⁵ Scardigli, *Die Goten*, p. 185; Botto, 'La "Praefatio" del "Codex Brixianus"'.
⁶⁶ Francini, *Edizione sinottica del Vangelo*, pp. 17–19 and 254–55.

⁶⁷ Zironi, *L'eredità dei Goti*, pp. 17–24 and 26–29.

⁶⁸ Scardigli, 'Appunti longobardi', pp. 93–94.

⁶⁹ About the Lombard Arianism cf. Fanning, 'Lombard Arianism Reconsidered', pp. 241–58; Scardigli, 'Die drei Seelen der Langobarden', pp. 426–29; Pohl, 'Deliberate Ambiguity', pp. 53–58; Sergi, 'Dai Goti ai Longobardi', pp. 217–19.

⁷⁰ Zironi, *L'eredità dei Goti*, pp. 70–75.

languages in connection with Christian rituals (such as baptism, daily prayers, homilies) some scholars looked back to the past Gothic experience.⁷¹ The Gothic translation could be useful in the first attempts at translation into other Germanic languages, first and foremost into Old High German, the language of the Emperor. We know of examples of this intention thanks to two manuscripts, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 795, fol. 20^{r-v} and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cod. lat. 528, fol. 71^v, which contain notes for learning and pronouncing Gothic with examples taken from the translation of the Gospels.⁷² In these cases, the Gothic translation has the role of an educational instrument for learning the language in order to correctly read and pronounce it. The Gothic translation is practised by the lone scholar, in a personal linguistic acquisition of a foreign language which will be useful for future translations from Latin into other vernacular idioms.

Conclusion

The history of the Gothic translation of the Bible begins in the fourth century and continues until the Carolingian age, roughly 500 years, or half a millennium. I consider this lengthy period of time a good means for investigating in a larger sense how the same translation can change its role across the years. In late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the reasons for having a text translated generally relate to the demands of a community and thus take into account the widespread illiteracy of the people then living. Normally, a translation may be made to be orally declaimed and/or to be used in small communities of scholars and therefore destined for very restricted circulation. The case of the Gothic translation suggests another possibility, the modification of the function for the same translation when social and cultural conditions change, in particular with the abandonment of Arianism and the disappearing of Gothic-speaking communities. It is controversial to justify a possible usage of the translated text to evangelize other pagan Germanic-speaking peoples. It has been suggested that the Goths pursued missionary activities among barbarians, in particular those dwelling in Bavaria; some Bavarian words seem to be loanwords from Gothic terms, but the question is highly controversial.⁷³ Consequently, the translations of the Bible exhaust their liturgical function and become instrument for scholarly knowledge. When it comes to the influence of readers on translations, with regard to the early Middle Ages we have to stretch the idea of readership, to include also those who listened to the reading of a translated text. Finally, the boundary between reading and hearing must be obviated as personal and silent reading is an interior rehearsal of

⁷¹ The bibliography on the Carolingian Renaissance is constantly expanding. As far as the liturgical use of vernacular languages is concerned, a good reference can be found in two volumes by McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, pp. 20–22 and *Charlemagne*, pp. 237–43 and Haubrichs, *Die Anfänge*, pp. 229–56. The interest in the Gothic language involved the cultural milieu, which had at its centre Charlemagne, with his strategy of connecting his political power to the most famous Germanic kingdom, namely, the Ostrogothic reign of Theoderic the Great. Together with the figure of Theoderic, the Gothic language was also rediscovered thanks to the prestige of the Goths and to their translation of the Bible which was still mentioned in some monastic educational texts. More specifically, Alcuin, Arno of Salzburg, and Theodulf of Orléans devoted particular attention to the Gothic language, the first of his linguistic interests. The second was in intimate contact with Alcuin and his experience in the monastery of St-Amand-les-Eaux allowed him to pay special attention to grammatical and rhetorical questions. The third, Theodulf of Orléans, of Visigothic origin, was the most famous of a large community of Visigothic scholars who took part in the intellectual life of Charlemagne's entourage. See Zironi, *L'eredità dei Goti*.

⁷² Zironi, *L'eredità dei Goti*, pp. 91–179.

⁷³ It was Friedrich Kluge, in 1909, who asserted the influence of the Gothic language on Bavarian due to Arian missions (Kluge, 'Gotische Lehnwörter im Althochdeutschen') and his opinion was particularly supported by scholars during the 1930s. In the following years, Kluge's arguments have been rebutted in many works: cf. Schäferdieck, 'Gab es eine gotisch-arianische Mission im süddeutschen Raum?'; and Stutz, 'Die germanistische These vom "Donauweg" gotisch-arianischer Missionare im 5. und 6. Jahrhundert'.

a text that becomes audible in our mind, as were the oral readings of the Bible for the first Christian communities of the Goths.

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