

NOTES

*Caveat Lector: Notes on Thackeray's Translation of the *Bellum Judaicum***

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Since its publication in 1927, H.St.J. Thackeray's translation of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* for the Loeb Classical Library has served as the standard, authoritative English translation of the work. It decisively replaced Whiston's antiquated version,¹ and although other English translations of BJ have since been published, most notably G.A. Williamson's Penguin edition (1959, rev. 1970 and 1981), Thackeray's remains the one most quoted and referred to in scholarly contexts. Occasionally readers of Josephus' original Greek have noticed oddities and inaccuracies introduced by Thackeray, but the reputation of his translation as both elegant and reasonably accurate remains justly untarnished.²

In our work on a new Hebrew translation of BJ, we have often noticed miscues and odd renderings in Thackeray's translation, but have understood them to be the result of compromises which even an accomplished scholar must make when trying to wrestle a difficult text into another language. And Josephus' writing, especially in the BJ, is notoriously difficult, marked by unclarity, deliberate obfuscation, confusion, posturing and inconsistent use of words. Yet at a conference on Josephus in Rome in September 2003, Anthony Forte of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, who is translating part of the BJ into English for the Brill Josephus project, suggested, in reference to Book I of BJ, that Thackeray often closely followed the standard French translation of the BJ, by René Harmand (with notes by Théodore Reinach), published in Paris in 1911.³ This translation is on the whole very faithful to Josephus' Greek, and often finds elegant solutions to awkward or difficult problems in the original. In our own work on the BJ, we had occasionally noticed striking similarities between Thackeray and Harmand, but after hearing Forte we went back to see how systematic the correspondences in fact are, and we have found Forte's observations on Book I to be remarkably perceptive for other parts of the BJ as well. Thackeray's English translation imitates Harmand's French in two significant ways, viz. by reproducing mistakes and by adopting original creative choices of words and images. We offer as illustration some examples from a small section of Book II, from section 250 to the end of the book (654).⁴

We begin with two mistranslations, each bearing a strong resemblance to Harmand's similarly erroneous rendering. The first occurs at BJ 2.450, in Josephus' account of the Jewish extremist

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1 Noteworthy is Abraham Wasserstein's revisions of some parts of Whiston's translation, in *Flavius Josephus. Selections from his Works* (New York 1974).

2 L.H. Feldman, in his gigantic bibliography, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship (1937-1980)* (Berlin-New York 1984), 30, notes the 'felicity and vigor' of Thackeray's translation.

3 In his preface, Thackeray expresses gratitude to Reinach 'and his collaborators' for their edition of the BJ. He then adds: 'Dr. Reinach has graciously permitted me to make use of this work with its admirable commentary, and my constant indebtedness to this brilliant scholar will be evident to the reader from the references in the footnotes throughout this volume'. A. Forte has suggested to us, in private correspondence, that 'Reinach is the person who was ultimately responsible for the French translation of Josephus' entire opus', but despite this interesting hypothesis, we shall continue to refer to Harmand as the main translator. Forte's observations will be published in the proceedings volume of the Josephus colloquium in Rome.

4 In each case, unless otherwise noted, Thackeray's text is Niese's text, unmodified.

factions besieging Roman soldiers in Herod's palace, where the soldiers had fled after being expelled by the factions from the Antonia fortress:

ἀμέλει πολλὰ τοῦ δήμου τοῖς στρατιώταις ἀνεῖναι τὴν πολιορκίαν παρακαλοῦντος, οἱ δὲ προσέκειντο χαλεπώτερον κτλ.

Thackeray translates:

In fact, though the civilians urgently entreated the soldiers to abandon the siege, they, on the contrary, only pressed it more vigorously ...

This is nearly identical to Harmand:

En fait, tandis que le peuple *invitait les soldats avec insistance à se relâcher des opérations du siège, ils le pressaient au contraire plus vigoureusement ...*

Both similarly worded translations contain the same error of both sense and syntax. The soldiers — i.e., the Roman soldiers in the palace — are in fact the ones under siege,⁵ so that the people of the city would not beseech *them* to abandon the siege, but rather would plead with the extreme rebels themselves to abandon the siege *on the soldiers*. The Jewish rebels, who are not dignified by the name 'soldiers' but are called rather *στασιασταί*, were at this stage led by Eleazar b. Ananias. Moreover, *παρακαλεῖν* takes an accusative of the party entreated, so that the soldiers, in the dative, cannot be the object of the people's exhortation. Admittedly the absence of an object is a bit awkward, but the implied *αὐτούς* is picked up by οἱ δέ Thus the dative *στρατιώταις* is a complementary dative,⁶ not a direct object, and the passage should be rendered: 'In fact, although the people urgently entreated [them] to abandon the siege on the soldiers, they only pressed it more vigorously'. And this is how other translators have understood it: Williamson renders, 'In fact the more the people urged them to abandon the siege of the soldiers, the more vigorously they pressed it ...'; and Clementz, in his translation published in 1900 in Berlin, translates 'Und obwohl das Volk sie dringend ersuchte, von der ferneren Belagerung der Soldaten Abstand zu nehmen, setzten sie den Römern nur um so ärger zu ...'. Both of these capture the sense of the passage.⁷

A second mistranslation by both Thackeray and Harmand is found at BJ 2.634, where Josephus says that while at Tarichaeae he received report of insurrection against his authority by the inhabitants of Tiberias:

τῷ [τῶν Niese] δ' ἡγγέλη μὲν εἰς Ταρχέας ἡ ἀπόστασις εὐθέως, ἐκπεπομφῶς δὲ πάντας τοὺς στρατιώτας ἐπὶ σίτου συλλογὴν οὔτε μόνος ἐξορμᾶν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀποστάντας οὔτε μένειν ὑπέμενε, δεδοικῶς μὴ βραδύναντος αὐτοῦ φθάσωσιν οἱ βασιλικοὶ παρελθεῖν εἰς τὴν πόλιν κτλ.

Thackeray translates:

Their *defection* was immediately reported to him at Tarichaeae. He had just sent all his soldiers on a *foraging* excursion; he could neither go out alone to face the rebels nor afford to remain idle, *for fear that the king's troops, profiting by his delay, might forestall him in occupying the town ...*

The similarity to Harmand's translation is strikingly obvious:

La nouvelle de cette *défection* parvint aussitôt à Josephé dans Tarichées; comme il venait d'envoyer tous ses soldats pour *fourager*, il ne voulut ni partir seul contre les révoltés, ni rester les bras croisés, *de peur que les gens du roi, profitant de son retard, n'occupassent la ville ...*

⁵ See BJ 2.440 and 441.

⁶ Which, while translated as *dativus incommodi* here, could also be understood as *dativus incommodi*; compare *ἀνίημι* with an accusative object and complementary dative at BJ 1.484, 5.254 and AJ 16.43.

⁷ But Ricciotti, in his 1949 translation of BJ (Torino), although normally quite accurate, makes the same mistake here: 'Tant' è vero che, sebbene il popolo esortasse vivamente i soldati ad abbandonare l'assedio, costoro al contrario lo proseguirono con maggior vigore'.

The wording of both passages is close, especially in those expressions which we have italicized, but the last part of the sentence in particular does not represent straight, prosaic translation but original or interpretive choices of words and sentence structure which strongly suggest reliance of one translator on the other. 'Profiting by his delay' is a fair translation of βραδύναντος αὐτοῦ but unlikely to have been reached independently. Furthermore, Thackeray repeats the French *mis-translation* of παρελθεῖν, which really cannot mean 'occupy', especially when 'the city' comes after the preposition εἰς, and it is curious that Thackeray did not judge the straightforward translation 'go or pass in' sufficient. This at least is how other translations have understood the passage (with φθάσωσιν): Williamson: 'slip into the city before him'; Clementz: 'weil sonst die Königlichen ... die Stadt erreichen konnten'; Ricciotti: 'giungessero prima di lui in città'.

Original and interpretive choices of words and syntax, which two translators would scarcely arrive at independently, appear identically in other parallel passages. We shall cite only a few.

After reporting a mass murder of Jews in Syria, Josephus says in BJ 2.464 that the λουδαῖζοντες, 'Judaizers', there were in peril:

προκαλεῖτο (προεκαλεῖτο Niese) δὲ ἐπὶ τὰς σφαγὰς τῶν διαφόρων καὶ τοὺς πάλοι προσητάτους πάνυ δοκοῦντας ἢ πλεονεξία· τὰς γὰρ οὐσίας τῶν ἀναιρεθέντων ἀδεῶς διήρπαζον καὶ καθάπερ ἐκ παρατάξεως τὰ σκῦλα τῶν ἀνηρημένων εἰς τοὺς σφετέρους οἴκους μετέφερον, ἔνδοξός τε ἦν ὁ πλείστα κερδάνας ὡς κατισχύσας πλειόνων.

Thackeray translates as follows:

Even those who had long been reputed the very mildest of men were instigated by avarice to murder their adversaries; for they would then with impunity plunder the property of their victims and transfer to their homes, as from a battle-field, the spoils of the slain, *and he who gained the most covered himself with glory as the most successful murderer.*

Harmand renders:

Des hommes réputés de longue date pour leur douceur se laissaient entraîner par la cupidité à se défaire de leurs adversaires; car on pillait impunément les biens des victimes, on transportait chez soi comme d'un champ de bataille les dépouilles des morts, *et celui qui gagnait le plus se couvrait de gloire, parce qu'il avait été le plus grand meurtrier.*

In addition to the overall similarity, the last part of this translation is identical almost word-for-word to Harmand's French translation. The image of 'covering oneself with glory' is elegant, but it is an individual creative choice, not the most straightforward or most obvious rendering of ἔνδοξος ἦν. Furthermore, the rendering of the word κατισχύσας as 'murderer', while apparently influenced by the beginning of the sentence ('the very mildest of men were instigated by avarice to murder their adversaries'), is again not the most straightforward, and it is perfectly reasonable, even more natural, to translate the word in its plain sense of control, gain power over or prevail. Indeed, this is how Williamson — '... special honour being paid to the man who grasped the most, as if he had overcome more powerful enemies' — and Clementz — 'Ja, man feierte den, der am meisten eingeheimst hatte, wie den Sieger über viele Feinde' — render the words.⁸

Describing the clashes between Jews and Greeks at Alexandria on the eve of the rebellion, Josephus writes at BJ 2.494:

Κάκεινος συνιδῶν ὡς χωρὶς μεγάλης συμφορᾶς οὐκ ἂν παύσαιντο νεωτερίζοντες, ἐπαφίησιν αὐτοῖς τὰ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν Ῥωμαίων δύο τάγματα καὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς δισχίλους στρατιώτας κατὰ τύχην παρόντας εἰς τὸν Ἰουδαίων ὄλεθρον ἐκ Λιβύης· ἐπέτρεψεν δὲ οὐ μόνον ἀναρεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς κτήσεις αὐτῶν διαρπάζειν καὶ τὰς οἰκίας καταφλέγειν.

⁸

Ricciotti understands the word κατισχύσας more in the vein of Harmand and Thackeray, but does not have the image of covering oneself with glory: '... ed era più stimato colui che più guadagnava, in quanto aveva spacciato più gente'.

Thackeray translates:

Understanding then that *nothing but the infliction of a severe lesson* would quell the rebels, he [Tiberius Alexander] let loose upon them the two Roman legions stationed in the city, together with two thousand soldiers, who by chance had just arrived from Libya to complete the ruin of the Jews; permission was given them not merely to kill the rioters but to plunder their property and burn down their houses.

This sounds very close to Harmand's formulations:

Comprenant alors que les révoltés ne s'arrêteraient pas *si on ne leur infligeait une sévère leçon*, il envoie contre eux les deux légions romaines stationnées dans la ville et leur adjoint deux mille soldats arrivés par hasard de Libye pour la perte des Juifs; il leur permet non seulement de tuer les rebelles, mais encore de piller leurs biens et d'incendier leurs maisons.

The wording and syntax of the two translations resemble each other more closely than other renderings of the passage, but particularly striking is the translation of *χωρὶς μεγάλης συμφορᾶς* as 'nothing but the infliction of a severe lesson', which is identical to Harmand's 'si on ne leur infligeait une sévère leçon' and, while not straying too far from the sense of the Greek, is interpretive and an unnecessary deviation from the plain sense, which Williamson captures in his translation, 'realizing that nothing less than *a major calamity* would halt the rebels ...'.⁹

At BJ 2.577, in his description of his training of his Jewish forces along the lines of the Roman army, Josephus writes:

Ἐπειτα συνιδὼν ἀήτητον τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἰσχὺν γεγενημένην εὐπειθείᾳ μάλιστα καὶ μελέτῃ τῶν ὀπλῶν, τὴν μὲν διδασκαλίαν ἀπέγνω τῇ χρεῖᾳ διωκομένην, τὸ δ' εὐπειθῆς ὄρων περιγινόμενον ἐκ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἡγεμόνων Ῥωμαϊκώτερον ἔτεμνε τὴν στρατιὰν καὶ πλείους καθίστατο ταξιάρχους,

which Thackeray translates

He understood that the Romans owed their invincible strength above all to discipline and military training; if he despaired of providing similar instructions, to be acquired only by long use, he observed that their discipline was due to the number of their officers, and he therefore divided his army on Roman lines and increased the number of his company commanders.

This is apparently directly influenced by Harmand's:

Il comprenait que les Romains devaient leur force invincible surtout à la discipline et à l'exercice; s'il fallut renoncer à pourvoir ses troupes d'une instruction que l'usage seul fait acquérir, il tâcha du moins d'assurer la discipline qui résulte de cadres nombreux, en divisant son armée à la romaine et en lui donnant beaucoup de chefs.

Here the italicized part seems to be more a translation of the French than of the Greek, particularly owed/devaient and the decision to ignore the word *ἔπειτα* and separate that clause from the rest of the sentence by a semicolon. Other translations illustrate by their differences the similarity between Thackeray and Harmand:

Ricciotti:

In seguito, essendo egli convinto che l'invicibile forza dei Romani era prodotto specialmente dalla disciplina e dalla pratica delle armi, depose senz'altro la speranza [di portare le sue truppe allo stesso grado] d'istruzione, raggiungibile [soltanto] con l'uso i tuttavia vedendo che la disciplina risultava dalla moltitudine dei comandanti, suddivise l'esercito in maniera più simile alla romana e vi mise un numero maggiore di ufficiali.

⁹ Compare Ricciotti: 'Egli allora, convintosi che senza *una grossa calamità* gl'innovatori non avrebbero desistito ...'. Clementz comes close to Harmand/Thackeray: 'Da freilich sah Alexander ein, dass die Aufrührer nur durch *eine nachdrückliche Züchtigung* zu bändigen seien'.

Clementz:

Von einer Schulung seiner Truppen im Geiste der Römer, deren unüberwindliche Macht, wie er wusste, vornehmlich auf Gehorsam und steter Waffenübung beruhte, musste er freilich Abstand nehmen. Da er aber erkannte, dass die Leute sich um so leichter an die Disciplin gewöhnen würden, je zahlreicher die Führer seien, teilte er das Heer mehr nach römischer Art ein und ernannte eine grössere Anzahl von Offizieren.

In the same discussion of his army, just five sections on (BJ 2.582), Josephus says that he declared that:

διοικεῖσθαι γὰρ κάλλιστα τοὺς πολέμους παρ' οἷς ἂν ἀγαθὸν τὸ συνειδὸς ἔχωσιν πάντες οἱ στρατευόμενοι, τοὺς δὲ οἰκοθεν φαύλους οὐ μόνον τοῖς ἐπιούσιν ἐχθροῖς ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ θεῷ χρῆσθαι πολεμίῳ.

Thackeray translates:

For, he [Josephus] added, the armies that are most successful in war are those in which every combatant has a clear conscience; whereas those who were depraved at heart would have to contend not only with their adversaries but also with God.

Again the resemblance to Harmand's translation, which departs from a literal rendering of the Greek, is unmistakable:

Les armées les plus fortes à la guerre sont celles où tous les combattants ont la conscience pure; ceux qui emportent de leurs foyers un coeur pervers auront à combattre non seulement leurs adversaires, mais encore Dieu lui-même.

Literally the sentence says, 'Those wars are conducted most successfully in which all the soldiers possess a clear conscience, but men who are corrupt in their private lives have to deal not only with their enemies, when they attack,¹⁰ but also with God as an antagonist'. In the second part of the sentence, Josephus effectively uses two different words for adversary, distinguishing bad men's human enemies, ἐχθροί, who may be motivated by hatred, from God, who will merely face them as an antagonist in battle as πολέμιος. Not only in the second part, but in the first part of the sentence as well Thackeray seems to have relied on the French translation nearly word-for-word, thereby avoiding the clumsiness of such a literal rendering as we have suggested and also conveying the fact that Josephus was actually talking about soldiers *in armies*. But so far as that is concerned, these problems were solved by other translators in different ways:

Clementz: 'Denn in denjenigen Kriegen gehe es am besten, in welchen die Kämpfer ein gutes Gewissen mitbrächten; die von Haus aus Schlechten aber hätten nicht nur die gegen sie anrückenden Feinde, sondern auch Gott selbst zum Widersacher'.

Ricciotti: 'meglio di tutte, infatti, riescono quelle guerre in cui i combattenti hanno tutti una buona coscienza, mentre coloro che sono interiormente perversi devono sostenere la guerra, non soltanto contro i nemici che vengono all'assalto ma anche contro Dio'.

Finally,¹¹ a clear and close correlation between Thackeray and the French translation appears at BJ 2.609, where Josephus reports in indirect discourse a speech he gave at Tarichaeae:

καὶ πολλὰ τὴν προπέτειαν αὐτῶν κατονειδίσας ἐκ μὲν τῶν παρόντων Ταριχέας ἔφη τεχίσειν, ἀσφαλιεῖσθαι δὲ ὁμοίως καὶ τὰς ἄλλας πόλεις·

¹⁰ Or (taking ἐπιούσιν as substantive): "...have to contend not only with the ones who come to attack them as their enemies, but also with God as their antagonist".

¹¹ We have not cited all of Thackeray's close correspondences with Harmand's translation in the small section of BJ we have chosen. For example, note at BJ 2.597 the reflection of 'dans l'intention de les renvoyer à leurs légitimes propriétaires quand l'occasion se présenterait' in 'intending to return them to their legitimate owners when an opportunity presented itself' for πέμψαι κατὰ καιρὸν τοῖς δεσπόταις προαιρούμενος — especially the rendering 'legitimate owners'.

Thackeray translates:

He severely censured them for *their precipitance, promised to fortify Tarichaeae with the funds at his disposal*, and undertook to provide similar protection for the other cities as well;

Again, much of this seems closer to Harmand's French than Josephus' Greek:

Il critique vivement *leur précipitation, promet de fortifier Tarichées avec l'argent disponible, et cependant de mettre aussi en état de défense les autres villes ...*

The choice of the English word 'precipitance', while accurate, is unusual and was most likely suggested by Harmand's 'précipitation'; likewise the translation of ἔφη as 'promised', corresponding to Harmand's 'promit', which does not violate the sense of the passage but is not required by any particular nuance in the Greek.¹²

Thackeray does not often make mistakes in his translation of the BJ, but when he does their source can sometimes be traced to his apparent over-reliance on Harmand's French translation of Josephus' work, a reliance which in any case is amply demonstrated in other passages in which the translation is not inaccurate but mirrors the style and word-choice in Harmand. Our purpose has not been to compromise readers' trust of Thackeray's translation of BJ, even less so to question his competence or tarnish his scholarly accomplishment. On the whole, Thackeray's translation of Josephus is not a translation of Harmand with reference to the Greek but the opposite, a translation of the original Greek with frequent reference to Harmand. Sometimes, however, an over-dependence on Harmand skewed his reading of the Greek. *Caveat lector.*

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¹² Contrast Williamson 'declared', Clementz 'erklärte' and Ricciotti 'disse'.