

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/43579>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-04-29 and may be subject to change.

Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2006.02.21

David J. Ladouceur, *The Latin Psalter. Introduction, selected text and commentary.* London: Bristol Classical Press, 2005. Pp. 126. ISBN 1-85399-683-1. €21.50.

Reviewed by Vincent Hunink, Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands)
(v.hunink@let.ru.nl)

Word count: 1216 words

The biblical book of Psalms was written in Hebrew, but the historical importance of ancient translated versions can hardly be underestimated. In the West, for many centuries the Psalms were read, chanted and meditated upon in Latin. The most authoritative Latin version of the Psalter is the version included in the Vulgate, prepared by St. Jerome. This Latin version of the Psalms, the so called Gallican Psalter, is a revision of an older Latin translation, which in its turn had closely followed a version of the Greek Septuagint.

These Latin Psalms, being a literal translation based on a literal translation from another language, present numerous difficulties that reflect their complex genesis. With their uncommon genre and textual structure (Latin Psalms seem unlike either classical prose or classical poetry), vulgate forms, uncommon metaphoric language, Graecisms and Hebraisms, they strike the average reader of Classical Latin as highly curious texts. Given their strangeness, obscurity or even unintelligibility, additional help is required even for advanced readers of Latin. Unfortunately (and surprisingly, given the status of these texts) not much help is available. In English, the new edition with commentary of selected Psalms by Ladouceur (L.) is the first one to be published for many years. The small volume is a welcome publication, which will be of practical use to readers who wish to approach the Latin Psalms.

The book opens with an admirably short and helpful introduction of merely 18 pages. The section contains basic information about the origin of Latin Psalms, a description of the aim of the book, notes on Hebrew grammar, a glossary of grammatical terms, a bibliography, some help in pronouncing Hebrew letters, and a comparative table of Psalms.

Next follows a Latin text of the selected Psalms. According to the Graeco-Latin numbering the included Psalms are: 1-15; 18-19; 22-23; 25; 31; 37-38; 41-42; 50; 109; 119; 121-123; 125-130; 132; and 150 (a total of 25 pages of Latin). The adopted text is, essentially, the edition of Weber and others (***Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem***; Stuttgart 1994), but for copyright reasons, the full texts have been taken from older editions. All deviations from Weber's text (nearly always concerning small points) are noted in bold. This solution seems less felicitous, as it disturbs the layout of texts and inevitably draws too much attention to matters of relatively little importance. One wonders why permission could not be obtained from the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft to use Weber's text.

The main part of the book is, of course, the commentary. Here, L. provides practical help for understanding the Latin, while focusing on linguistic problems due to the Hebrew and Greek backgrounds of the text. Wherever necessary, Hebrew or Greek words are added, always with translation, and in the case of Hebrew, transliterated. Occasionally, L. brings in exegetical remarks from Church Fathers such as St. Augustine. The notes are short

and helpful, although the material as a whole may still leave readers with a number of questions.

Perhaps the best way to show the merits and deficiencies of the book is by giving a concrete example. The format of this material allows me to quote a complete text: the short, enigmatic Psalm 132. I give the text as printed by L., followed by a description of his notes.

Psalm 132

1. Canticum graduum David.

Ecce quam bonum, et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum:

2. Sicut unguentum in capite, quod descendit in barbam, barbam Aaron, quod descendit in ora vestimenti eius:

3. Sicut ros Hermon, qui descendit in *montem* (W, montes) Sion.

Quoniam illic mandavit Dominus benedictionem, et vitam usque in saeculum.

In his notes (p. 124-125) on this Psalm, L. first explains that its original setting is obscure, and offers two possibilities: it may have been a wisdom psalm celebrating harmony in extended families or a cultic text celebrating the assemblage of a community of pilgrims in Jerusalem. The opening individual note adds the remark that according to Church Fathers the line inspired the foundation of monastic communities. No references or further literature are given. Next follow notes on 'habitare fratres' and 'in unum', relating these words to the Hebrew. 'Sicut' is translated as '(to dwell thus is) like...'. The 'unguentum' is a 'precious oil' in Hebrew used for the high priest. 'Aaron' is explained as a genitive and interpreted as a general name for any priest, with an additional remark that for Augustine the name refers to Christ as Victim and Priest; again no references are given. Another instance of Augustinian exegesis is given in the note on 'descendit'. Next, a brief stylistic remark on the repetition of 'barbam' is followed by a longer note on 'in ora vestimenti eius', which gives an element of textual criticism ('some manuscripts have *in oram vestimenti eius*' (as from 'ora', edge), references to the Hebrew original, to parallel usages of Latin 'os' for 'mouth, edge', and the rendering in the Revised Version. Finally, L. suggests what he thinks is the original meaning here: an image of oil descending from the head to the feet. Four final notes on the last line conclude the material. The first one deals with Mt. Hermon, and with some allegorical explanations of Sion and dew, again by Augustine and again without references. 'Quoniam' is related to the Hebrew for 'truly'; the position of 'illic' is called emphatic. Finally, the words 'vitam usque in saeculum' are said to have referred to perpetuation of the family line, whereas for Augustine, the expression points to eternal life in heaven.

This sample may suffice to show how the reader is helped to understand many difficult points of the Latin text and to place them in their original cultural context. On the other hand, the added notes on Augustinian exegesis, interesting as they are, remain rather casual and short. For lack of references and further discussion, the reader is, in the end, left in the dark as to these exegetical remarks and their relevance, both for Augustine himself and in general terms. Not everyone will have Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (this appears to be what L. is referring to) at his or her desk. Generally speaking, the special attention for Augustine seems somewhat out of balance. Surely, other patristic explanations could have been quoted too.

What L. clearly does not do is to analyse the texts as literary compositions. His occasional remarks on style are certainly not all there is to say here. For example, the striking Latin rhyme in the opening line is left unmentioned, as is the use of 'ecce' and the repetition of 'quam...' and 'sicut...'. The unusual turn 'mandare benedictionem' is passed over in silence but might also have been given some explanation.

L. is not entirely clear about the target group of his book and about future publications, but he does mention a projected 'more elaborate edition of the Psalms' (p.12). It is to be hoped that this edition will include all 150 Psalms and will provide somewhat more detailed information. That way, the book will serve a wider readership.

As it is, this foretaste of L.'s promised edition is already warmly welcome, if only because there is little help available for the study and reading of the Latin Psalms. The volume is rather too concise to satisfy all but beginning readers, but it is a promising start.

[Read Latest](#)

[Index for 2006](#)

[Change Greek Display](#)

[Archives](#)

[Books Available for Review](#)

[BMCR Home](#)

HTML generated at 13:30:45, Friday, 03 April 2009

Preview " Latin Psalter by David Ladouceur. Latin Psalter: Introduction, Text and Commentary. by. David Ladouceur. 0.00 Rating details. 0 ratings 0 reviews. Even for an experienced reader of Latin, the Psalter sometimes follows underlying Greek and ultimately Hebrew idiom too literally and thus poses real difficulties. This new commentary on selected psalms, the first for decades, seeks to resolve these problems by placing the Latin within its historical linguistic context. For the reader without Hebrew and only a little Greek Even for an experienced reader of Latin, the Psalter sometimes follows underlying Greek and ultimately Hebrew idiom too literally and thus poses real difficulties. The Latin Psalter by David J. Ladouceur, October 26, 2005, Duckworth Publishers edition, Paperback in English. The Latin Psalter. Introduction, Selected Text and Commentary (Latin Texts). by David J. Ladouceur. Published October 26, 2005 by Duckworth Publishers . Written in English. There's no description for this book yet. Introduction, Text, Translation and Commentary. (Latin and Greek Texts, 7.) Pp. x+250. Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1994. The text of the letter is accompanied by an introduction as well as a commentary, in which all Greek words have been translated and various allusions to antiquity or to coeval scholars that could render certain passages of the text obscure have been explained. Read more. Article. Book Review: John Colet's Commentary on I Corinthians: A New Edition of the Latin Text, with Translat October 1987 The Journal of Religion. Peter I. Kaufman. Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary. (Classical Texts.) Pp. iv + 316. texts. The psalter in latin and english. by. Church of England. Psalter; Bernard, J. H. Publication date. 1911. Publisher. London : A.R. Mowbray & Co. Collection. cdl; americana. Edited with Introduction, Commentary and Bibliography. Pp. xvi + 171. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996. Paper, £10.95. ISBN: 1-85399-454-5 [Book Review]. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2002. Paper, £12.99. Isbn: 1-85399-613-. [REVIEW] Arthur J. Pomeroy - 2003 - The Classical Review 53 (02):378-. Suetonius' VESPASIAN B. W. Jones (Ed.): Suetonius : Vespasian. Hills (P.) Horace. Pp. 160. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2005. Paper, £10.99. ISBN: 1-85399-674