

# Donat Spiteri's Translation of Psalm 1,3 within the Translation Tradition of the Psalter in Maltese\*

Anthony Abela

*continued from previous issue (Vol. 59 No. 1)*

## 1.3.1.1.3 Ps 1,3: *The simile of the well planted tree*

a) *Hebrew Text* The first strophe comes to an end in verse 3 which creates a few difficulties for its exegesis and interpretation. Essentially the verse consists of one main clause spread over the first two cola (v.3a)<sup>74</sup> and two relative clauses in the following two cola (vv.3b.3c). The bulk of the verse is taken by the simile of the tree. One difficulty though depends upon the poet navigating in and out of the simile without any linguistic signal which could warn the reader of this passage. Detailed analysis.

1) The first difficulty concerns the subject of the clause initial verb וְהָיָה. Which is its subject: the אֲשֶׁר of verse 1 or הָאִישׁ in the same verse, or the unlexicalised subject in the first כִּי אָם clause in verse 2? The אֲשֶׁר of verse 1 is a good candidate as it is followed there by a verb in *qatal* form: הִלְךְ. In this case the verb would be a simple verb of the same syntactical kind with the *waw* serving as coordinative. The subject that is left unlexicalised in verse 2a and is encoded within the morphology of the clause has the syntactical proximity of the verb וְהָיָה as the basis for its candidacy as the intended subject of the verb. The present writer prefers to see הָאִישׁ of verse 1 as the real though not

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74. It depends how one divides the text. It is possible to divide v.3a in two cola, the first containing solely two words, the verb וְהָיָה and the comparative phrase כִּעֵץ, with the second colon opening with the passive participle שָׁהוּל and continuing till the end of that line. The next line also may be divided into a bicolon, with the first colon starting with the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר and closing with the phrase בִּעְתָּו, while the second colon starts with the nominal וְעַלֵּהוּ and ends with the verb יִבּוֹל. Verse 3c constitutes the concluding colon and the end of the strophe.

the syntactical subject of וַהֲיִיה in verse 3a since this verse seems to be seen by the poet as the end of the first strophe as is indicated by the general statement in verse 3c that appears to be navigating beyond the simile of the tree that predominates in this verse. In translation, some kind of resumptive linguistic strategy needs to be adopted to make clear the link between this predicate in verse 3 and the subject in verse 1. We shall come to this later on.

2) With the absence of the subject from the first clause in v.3a, its physical place in the clause is taken by the adverbial phrase כַּעֵץ שֶׁתֵּלַעַל-פְּלִגֵי מַיִם which actually forms part of the predicate the headword of which remains the verb וַהֲיִיה. This phrase is governed also by the preposition כִּי which in this context serves as an ‘overt marker of comparison’.<sup>75</sup> Morphologically, the preposition is prefixed to the indefinite noun עֵץ, ‘like a tree’, which dominates the adverbial phrase as its subject. Predicated to the subject ‘a tree’ we find then a participial phrase practically governed by passive participle שֶׁתֵּלַעַל, from root שִׁתַּל<sup>76</sup>, ‘to transplant’, with the preposition עַל showing the direction where this tree has been transplanted. One should note that the verb indicates a movement from one place to another place although such movement usually is described through other verbs that accompany this verb as the writer builds up the image (Cfr. Ezek 17,22-24). In our case this movement is hinted to but not described, and the verb operates alone. While the grammatical subject of the phrase is ‘a tree’, the semantic subject hinted at by the passive participle שֶׁתֵּלַעַל is not mentioned in the phrase. By whom is the tree planted or rather transplanted (Dahood) from some unmentioned place, עַל ‘upon’ or ‘near’(Dahood) another place, without the sense of the transfer between the two places being made explicit? We are not told though the role of the Lord in this transplanting is understood.

3) The preposition עַל is phonetically linked through the maqqef<sup>77</sup> to the plural nominal פְּלִגֵי, the construct state of the noun פְּלִיגָה, ‘water channel, irrigating canal’.<sup>78</sup> The poet is therefore stating that ‘the man’ emphatically described as blessed is like a tree transplanted to a place where there are streams of water.

75. Cfr. Zogbo & Wendland, *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible*, 42 for this use of כִּי. This preposition may have several functions as the entries in dictionaries testify. Cfr. for instance BDB, 453-455; and *Dictionary for Classical Hebrew*, IV, 347-348.

76. Cfr., BDB, 1060.

77. Cfr., Joüon & Muraoka, §13

78. BDB, 811.

A number of queries come to mind: what is the source of this simile? Was it the long Jewish literary tradition? Did the poet coin the simile relying upon the dry Palestinian soil, or was he looking towards the organised irrigation system in Mesopotamia, as some suggested?<sup>79</sup> Although one cannot speak with absolute authority on what could have inspired the poet to use this simile here, the present writer prefers to see the Israelite literary tradition (cfr. Ezek 17,5; 19, 10; Ps 92,14; Jer 17,7-8; Hos 9,13; Gen 49,22; Num 24,6; Sir 24) as the ultimate source of the poet for this simile; that is, he was not necessarily borrowing this figure of speech here from one particular written source but from a tradition which was ultimately built upon the experience of the geographical Palestinian context.<sup>80</sup>

Is the simile ultimately referring to the historical experience of **שְׂאִי**? Or is the poet projecting his thought to the eschatological dimension? Mitchell Dahood<sup>81</sup> takes the cue from C.A.Briggs<sup>82</sup> and considers the phrase 'streams of water' as a reference to the streams of Eden, the land of bliss (Gen 2). He gives this interpretation in view of his own textual reading and interpretation of Psalm 73,18.<sup>83</sup> His exegesis involved parsing **וְיִהְיֶה** as a case of perfect consecutive and translates with the future 'so shall he be like....'. "The documented motif of planting or transplanting foes in the underworld permits the conclusion that *šatal* could also be used for the transference of the just to the abode of the blest."<sup>84</sup> Of course, we have here to distinguish between factuality and possibility; on the other hand, notwithstanding Dahood's exegesis, the poet in Psalm 1 does not seem intent of making a dogmatic statement about the future life of a good man; he is simply describing what being a good man simply is. In the first strophe he has been trying to show how the good man live; in verse 3 he returns to eliciting 'the man's' blessedness this time through figurative language (contrary to verse 1 though there metaphors are also employed): the simile of the tree transplanted by or near (Dahood) streams of water which would guarantee its future healthy life as a tree in the context of Palestine's dry climate. There is between the two verses, therefore, a sort of thematic Inclusion.

79. Cfr., Ravasi, *Salmi*, 1, 82-83.

80. Contra Ravasi, *Ibid.*, who saw Jer 17, 7-8 as the ultimate source of this simile.

81. *Psalms 1-50*, Anchor Bible 16; Doubleday, New York 1966, 4.

82. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Edinburgh 1906-1907, 1, 6.

83. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalm 51-100*, Doubleday, New York 1968, 192.

84. *Psalms 1-50*, 3-4.

4) The predicate וְהִיָּה raises the issue of the tenses in this psalm, an argument which we have so far skirted around but not discussed fully. Diethelm Michel has already provided a discussion on the verbal tense system in this psalm.<sup>85</sup> His efforts were criticised by Mitchell Dahood as having created a false problem which issued from a misunderstanding of the poem.<sup>86</sup> But Dahood's own literal translation of the various verb morphological forms in the strophe offers a solution which is far from satisfactory. The *w<sup>o</sup>qatal* of verse 3, on the other hand, seems to offer the key to understanding the verbal system in the entire psalm, at least in the first strophe. If the subject of וְהִיָּה is, as we said above, אֱשֶׁר־הָאִישׁ ... of verse 1 and this *w<sup>o</sup>qatal* proceeds from the present tense of the nominal clause אֱשֶׁר־הָאִישׁ with the meaning being of a present. After all the poet is offering a reflection on human life and is not narrating a story even though then in verse three he employs a verbal system which normally one finds in narrative contexts. About the *qatal* forms in the three relative clauses in verse 1, one may take into consideration what Dr Lènart de Regt writes in his latest paper on the Hebrew verbal system:<sup>87</sup> "The temporal range of *qatal* is extremely wide. It can occur not only at the beginning of a flashback or analepsis (for example πρ 'Samuel had died' in 1 Sam 28,3), but also in reference to the present (for example, Ruth 4,9-10) and even to the future... The verb forms themselves, then, do not indicate the time of the situation in relation to the time of speaking." Perhaps these *qatal* forms in verse 1 express more the aspect of 'non sequentiality' than the tense.<sup>88</sup> The man who is considered to be blessed never follows the advise of the wicked, never takes the path of sinners and never sits in the seat of scoffers (translation of terms according to NRSV). The present tense may be used in the translation of these relative clauses.

**b) Verse 3a in Maltese Translation tradition** Richard Taylor, the first translator of the Psalter in Maltese, differed straightaway from the above exegesis by identifying as the subject of the וְהִיָּה with the subject of the second strophe in his translation:

85. *Tempora und Satzstellung in den Psalmen*, Bonn 1960, §15, 108-111.

86. Cfr. *Psalms 1-50*, 3.

87. "Hebrew Verb Forms in Prose and in some Poetic and Prophetic Passages: Aspect, Sequentiality, Mood and Cognitive Proximity", *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 34/1 (2008)104. See also on p.114 of the article.

88. On aspects in the Hebrew verbs cfr. Joüon & Muraoka, §111c.

*Daun l'is-sigira jixbhu jcuunu*  
*Li kalb l'ilma mhawla tcun:*

Translated literally this rendering becomes something like this:

These resemble the tree  
 That is planted in the midst of water.

Comments: 1) The demonstrative pronoun *daun* refers to the subject in Taylor's second strophe: *Il-bnedmin li jgħeixu sewwa* ['the people who live well']. This subject is not to be lexically found in the Hebrew text nor for that in the Vulgate text which Taylor reproduces together with his own translation. As we have seen before, Taylor creates this subject. 2) Taylor transforms the simile of the Hebrew text into a comparative clause, probably following his Vulgate source text which reads 'Et erit tamquam lignum plantatum secus decursus aquarum'. Instead of the preposition *sicut* that would govern the object in the accusative, we have the adverbial *tamquam*; the poet is comparing the people who behave well not to the tree that is planted along streams of water; he is comparing the behaviour of these people to the behaviour of such a tree. The use of the auxiliary verb *jcunu* with the imperfect *jixbhu* is supposed to denote a continuous action in the past<sup>89</sup> while the Hebrew is making a reflection in the present; the Vulgate puts the action in the future, *erit*. Perhaps with construction *jkunu* + imperfect Taylor meant to create the impression of continuity and stability. The action of the *sigira* (one wonders where Taylor found the second vowel [i], [he writes *sigira*] which is found in no form of the nominal.<sup>90</sup>

e) Peter Paul Saydon translated this line quite differently: *Hu bħal sigira mhawwla hdejn miġra ilma*. This rendering though is not free of ambiguities.

1) What is the meaning and grammatical function of the lexeme *hu*? It may be playing the role of the personal pronoun third person masculine singular, [he], perhaps functioning also as a demonstrative pronoun as does its Arabic

89. Cfr., Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 650.

90. Cfr. Erin Serracino-Inglott, *Il-Miklem Malti*, VIII, Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta 1984, 153-154.

equivalent in some poetical contexts, at least according to R. Dozy in his *Supplément aux dictionnaires Arabes* and quoted by Erin Serracino Inglott.<sup>91</sup> If Saydon understood by *hu* the personal pronoun or a demonstrative pronoun, if Dozy's information is correct, to whom would the pronoun be referring? Given, that Saydon's is a formal equivalent rendering of the Hebrew, *hu* would be referring to the **הוא** of verse 1. But there is another possibility offered by grammar. Personal pronouns in Maltese may also function as the copula and this is the probable use by Saydon of *hu* in this context.<sup>92</sup> *Hu* is translating the clause initial **והיה** although this time Saydon leaves out the conversive **ו**, also because for the translator, according to the editorial disposition of the text, this line starts a fresh stanza made up only of this verse. This means that for Saydon verse 3 is not the end of the first stanza but a new stanza. The present writer thinks, that verse 3 is actually the climax and closure of the first strophe.

d) As a formal equivalent translation, Saydon's rendering of this verse follows the linearity of the Hebrew source text. The initial verb is followed by the simile *bħal sigra* (much better than the definite in Taylor's *lis-sigra* even if one would borrow the nomenclature of the Hebrew grammarians Paul Joüon & Takamitsu Muraoka and describe this definition as a case of 'imperfect definition'<sup>93</sup>. Taylor makes the nominal *sigra* as the object of the verb *jixbhu* ['they resemble']; Saydon, instead, follows Hebrew, uses the copula and the preposition *bħal* ['like'] that governs the indefinite *sigra* and the subsequent qualifications that are in apposition to *sigra*.

e) One should investigate further whether Taylor's verb *jixbhu jcuuu* is correct in view of the fact that according to grammarians the auxiliary *ikun* carries the future and not the present meaning.<sup>94</sup> Word order within the verbal predicate depends upon the poetic structure while the standard order would have been *jcunu jixbhu*. Saydon escaped these difficulties by using the personal pronoun *hu* which in this context functions as the copula.

91. *Il-Miklem Malti*, III, Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta 1976, 252

92. Cfr. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 460; A. Cremona, *Taghlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, II, Malta 1962, 216, §§514-515.

93. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 2006, §137.

94. Cfr. A. Cremona, *Taghlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, §682, p.267.

f) The next component in the Hebrew text is the preposition **עַל** which is rendered differently by Taylor and Saydon. Technically speaking, **עַל** was a substantive with the meaning 'height' used adverbially in a number of poetical texts,<sup>95</sup> but it is most commonly used as a preposition with the meaning 'upon, on'.<sup>96</sup> It is proclitic, that is, as in our text it is usually linked to the following word it is governing through the maqqeph so that it has no stress of its own but is pronounced and read as the initial syllable of the new complex. In biblical Hebrew it normally governs the substratum *upon* which something rests or *upon* which an action is done.<sup>97</sup> But it seems that within the biblical corpus there developed a second meaning for this preposition. "From the sense or impending over, **עַל** comes to denote contiguity or proximity."<sup>98</sup> It is used to designate localities, especially those near water. Thus in Gen 16,7 the messenger of the Lord found Hagar, fleeing away from Sarah, **עַל-עֵיִן הַמַּיִם**, *by/near a spring of water* (cfr. also Gen 24,13.30; 29,2; Num 3,26). It would seem that this second meaning fits our text better. According to Mitchell Dahood it is to be found in a number of Ugaritic texts.<sup>99</sup> The Septuagint rendered the preposition by another preposition, **παρά** + the accusative, with the meaning 'beside, near, at'.<sup>100</sup> One meets this meaning quite often in the NT (cfr. Mt 13,1; Mk 4,1; 5,21; Acts 10,6).<sup>101</sup> The Vulgate translated the preposition by a rare preposition, *secus*, with the same meaning. Taylor however renders this preposition *fi kalb l' ilma* 'in the midst of water' while Saydon preferred the preposition *hdejn*, 'near, by'. Taylor may have wanted to underline the abundance of water the tree enjoyed, but Saydon's rendering is the better one.

g) The preposition **עַל** governs the phrase **פְּלָגֵי מַיִם**. It is clear that the nominal **פְּלָגֵי** is the construct form of the plural noun **פְּלָגִים**. This noun derives from the verbal root **פָּלַג** which basically means 'to divide'<sup>102</sup> and seems to

95. Cfr. BDB, 752

96. Cfr. also Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, Charles Scribner & Sons, New York 1971, 5.

97. BDB, *ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, 755.

99. *Psalms 1-50*, 4.

100. Cfr. J. Lust & E. Eynikel & K. Hauspie, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 2003, 460.

101. Cfr. William Bauer & F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1957, 616.

102. *The dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, VI, Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield 2007, 688.

carry the meanings of ‘man-made channel’(Is 30, 25;32,2), stream, especially of water (Pss 46,5; 65,10; 119,36;Prov 5,16) but also of oil (Job 29,6). In Ps 65,10 we find the clause ‘the stream of God is full of water’; in Prov 21,1 we meet the clause ‘the heart of a king is streams of water’ while our phrase מים פלגים is to be found also in Ps 119,136; Prov 5,16. The nominal פלג means also ‘division’ and ‘altercation’.<sup>103</sup> The only question that remains concerning our text is whether the conductor of water (מים) is meant to be natural or man-made, an issue which is not taken up by the writer. In this case, the context would seem to prefer the meaning and translation ‘streams of water’.

h) Taylor’s rendering of the phrase is as vague as that of his source. The Vulgate translates the phrase by *decursus aquarum*, ‘a downward course of water’, which underlines the impetuosity of the flow of water rather than the stream itself. Taylor fails to picture the ‘container’ of the water so that the tree is planted (*inhawla tcun*) in the midst of water, *kalb l’ilma*. One may say that Taylor’s is a literal translation of the Vulgate which here runs as follows: *quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum*. One should note that in Hebrew the phrase מים על-פלגי עץ stands in apposition to the word ‘tree’ while in Latin it has become a relative clause qualifying *lignum* the word used for ‘tree’. Taylor’s reproduces the Vulgate text in Maltese: *li kalb l’ilma imhawla tcun*. He paints the picture of a tree that grows on an islet surrounded by rapid courses of water. Probably here we have a case of over translation.

i) Peter Paul Saydon improved the rendering of Taylor on various counts. As we have seen elsewhere, his is a formal critical translation of the Hebrew text. The verb ודיה is rendered by copula *hu* which somehow grammatically functions also as the third person masculine singular pronoun that refers back to the one subject of the psalm: הַאִישׁ, ‘the man’ whose blessedness is being described in the psalm. Economy is a characteristic of both the original Hebrew text and Saydon’s translation. As in the Hebrew text, the verb is followed by the comparative particle, which is the preposition *bħal*, of complex etymology and composition.<sup>104</sup> This preposition has various uses,<sup>105</sup> depending upon the

103. *Ibid.*, 688-689.

104. Cfr Erin Serracino Inglott, *Il-Miklem Malti*, I, Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta 1975, 154.

105. Cfr. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 112-113.



subject with which the grammatical subject in the clause is being compared to. The subject, syntactically represented in this context by the pronoun/copula *hu*, in the clause under study is being compared to a tree. What is peculiar to this tree which remains otherwise undefined stands in apposition to it: מים על-פלגי שתול כעץ *bħal sigra mħawwla ħdejn miġra ilma*. The head word *mħawwla* 'planted' that introduces and governs the rest of the phrase, is a passive participle just like the lexeme שתול in the Hebrew text. The preposition על carries the basic meaning of 'upon'<sup>106</sup> but Mitchell Dahood insists that the preposition in this context means 'near'; this means that Saydon saw it right when he rendered the lexeme by the Maltese preposition *ħdejn*, 'near' 'by', a composite preposition made up of the substantive *ħada* (Aquilina) or *ħeda* (Serracino Inglott), and the noun ending *-ejn*. Aquilina suggests that it is always in the construct state.<sup>107</sup> This preposition carries the meaning of 'beside, near, close to'. According to the poet, therefore, this tree has grown or has been transplanted (Dahood) 'near' מים פלגי This phrase of place Saydon rendered by the phrase *miġra ilma* which appears to be a case of construct state<sup>108</sup> with *ilma* being the 'reggent' while *miġra* the 'thing' being possessed. Actually there is a detail which indicates that rather than being a genitive construction, it is a phrase showing the container plus the element being contained as in *tazza ilma*, a glass of water. In such phrases the container appears first in the phrase and is to be judged rather as the head word of the phrase. In this case *ilma* is the thing being contained. This holds also for our text. The 'container' in our text is *miġra*, a mimated noun derived from the verb *ġera* that basically means 'to run, flow'.<sup>109</sup> It is not a very common noun though it is found in two toponyms, *Miġra l-Ferħa*, in the vicinity of Mtahleb, and *Miġra Ilma*, a water channel near Siġġiewi. Aquilina adopting the pronunciation of the word given by Vassalli<sup>110</sup> and which Saydon himself reproduces in this text, *miġra*, defined its meaning as being 'source, spring, fountain head'. One can see therefore that *miġra ilma* is a literal rendering of the Hebrew מים פלגי in our text.

106. Cfr. BDB, 752.

107. *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 471.

108. For the construct state in Hebrew cfr. Joüon & Muraoka, <92; for this syntactical feature in Maltese cfr. Cremona, *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, 24-26.

109. Joseph Aquilina, *Ibid.*, 390-391.

110. Saydon himself produces two other ways of saying the word: *mogra* and *maġra*. Aquilina *ibid.*

There is a possible comment that may be made about Saydon's rendering of גלגלי מים. If the phrase *migra ilma* is build in the same manner as the phrase *tazza ilma*, where the container governs the contained, the phrase elicit the concept of stability, non movement, stationariness, while the Hebrew source phrase evokes vitality and action, with water moving from one part to another, creating life all around it, and thus securing a good future for the tree. It is true that *migra* derives from the verb *gera*, but the water contained is no longer running but is contained at a standstill. If this is the case, and the present writer confirms this analysis, Saydon's intelligent guess misfired.

j) The post-Saydon translation tradition of Ps 1,3a went its way on a number of issues. Here Spiteri's contribution was determining although Saydon's exegesis continued to be felt to the end of the tradition.

Spiteri: *Hu bħal sigra mħawwla ħdejn nixxieġħat ta' l-ilma*  
 Zammit: *U jkun bħal sigra mħawla ħdejn nixxieġħat ta' l-ilma*  
 Schembri: *Hu jkun qisu sigra mħawla ħdejn xmajjar ta' ilma*

.....  
 {Saydon: *Hu bħal sigra mħawwla ħdejn migra ilma*}

A few comments are in order:

1) Saydon introduced in the Maltese translation tradition of this psalm, its delimitation into three stanzas: vv.1-2.3.4-6 even though there exist no clear linguistic signs within the psalm to sanction such delimitation.<sup>111</sup> The present writer thinks that such division is useful even though the psalm is quite short.

2) Translation of the clause initial וַהֲיִהְיֶה The rendering of this *weqatal* verb has been different in the four translators listed above. As we have seen, Saydon uses the pronoun *Hu* as a copula and in this way he reproduces formally this

111. Cfr. Lynell Zogbo & Ernst R. Wendland, *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible. A Guide or Understanding and for Translation*, United Bible Societies, New York 2000, 19-33. This division was accepted by Donat Spiteri and introduced in his translation too (1983); Carmel Zammit followed AV and ignored this delimitation just as Guido Schembri did.

verbal cluster. Spiteri repeats Saydon's translation almost verbatim but he parses the particle as a pronoun and maintains this pronominal function. In Spiteri *Hu* is the subject of the clause and also of the entire strophe, although in the fourth line it is resumed by another *hu*. It bridges the gap between the subject of the psalm **הַיֵּשׁ** in verse 1 to which it refers and the second strophe that starts at verse 3.

3) A visible difference between Saydon and Spiteri on the one hand, and Zammit and Schembri on the other, is the translation of the passive participle **שְׂתוּל** which in Saydon and Spiteri is rendered by *mħawwla* while in Zammit and Schembri *mħawla*. There are three possible explanations for this slight difference. Saydon's *mħawwla* may be parsed as the passive participle of the verb *ħawwel* verb of the second form from the root *HWL*, 'to plant, transplant' which normally takes as objects 'trees, plants, bulbs'; it has a secondary metaphorical meaning: 'to fix firmly in/on ground [*Biex l-arblu żammlu dritt kellu jħawlu sewwa fl-art*: 'to keep the pole firm in position he had to fix firmly in the ground']'.<sup>112</sup> It is possible that Zammit and Schembri parse the lexeme as an adjective and hence the one [w] instead of the gemination of the second radical [w] since the verb is in the second form. If this is the case their parsing is mistaken. But there is another possibility of an explanation. Verbal radicals are normally maintained in verbal forms that see the germination of the second radical. Let us take as example the verb *kiser*, 'to break'. In the intensive second form the verb becomes *kisser*. 'to break to pieces'(Aquilina). The radical [s] is maintained even when in certain morphological scenarios it finds itself hemmed between two consonants without any vowel. So we say *mkissra*, the participle passive of the verb *kisser*. The second [s] does not drop and it is pronounced. But at the actual stage of research in Maltese orthography this is taken to take place when the second radical is a [j] or [w] which are considered to be 'weak consonants' and the second occurrence of such second radical disappear from the orthography of the lexeme. This is a case of the passive participle of the verb *ħawwel*, which should be *mħawwel* with the feminine form being *mħawwla* but according to the accepted orthography it is written *mħawla*. One of the modern experts in Maltese orthography formulates this orthographic rule as follows: 'We may write the sequences [jj] and [ww] when before and after them we find a vowel. When before or behind them there is no vowel we have to write

112. Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 522; Cfr. Serracino-Ingloft, *Miklem*, IV, 90.

[j] and [w].<sup>113</sup> The learned professor furnishes no linguistic explanation for this rule; on the other hand, he gives examples where [w] is the third radical of quadriliteral verbs where [w] hemmed between consonants is pronounced and is therefore maintained: *inhaxwxu* from the verb *ħaxwex*, ‘to rustle’; *inwerwru* from the verb *werwer*, ‘to cause panic, terrify’ (Aquilina). Especially in the case of the consonant [j] there arose a lively debate among scholars in which Prof Saydon took part. He insisted that radicals may not be dropped and he would write *mejllu* rather than *mejlu* as the other side would write this verb which means ‘they bent’.<sup>114</sup> This issue came to the surface once again when the Malta Bible Society decided to publish the second edition of her *Il-Bibbja* and for orthographical issues decided to follow Saydon and Aquilina. This position was maintained also in the third edition (2006) but was changed for subsequent editions because of pressure from various parts including the recently founded *Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* which has the discussion of this issue on its agenda.<sup>115</sup> This brief narrative of this debate explains the difference between *mħawwla* and *mħawla* in the translations given above.

k) Saydon’s translation of the preposition על in the Hebrew text has been accepted by all subsequent translators in Maltese. But his rendering of the phrase פלגי מים has met with varying treatments. Spiteri and Zammit preferred the noun *nixxiġħat* which is the plural of the feminine noun *nixxiġħa* that means ‘spring, place where water wells up from earth’.<sup>116</sup> This nominal has the advantage of being better known than Saydon’s coinage *migra*; but it also has the disadvantage that it does not imply abundant water supply. The noun *nixxiġħa* derives from the root/verb *nixxa*, ‘to ooze, percolate, leak, exude’ [*il-blat inixxi l-ilma*, ‘water oozes from the rocks’]<sup>117</sup> while Saydon’s *migra* from the verb *gera*

113. Carmel Azzopardi *Gwida għall-Ortoġrafija*, Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta 2003, 35.

114. On this debate one may consult Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 596. The present writer has the impression that Carmel Bezzina, in his recent monograph on Saydon, *Saydon. Biblista u Studjuż tal-Malti*, Pubblikazzjoni Preca, Malta 2006, does not mention Saydon’s participation in this debate.

115. For the documentation about the decision of the Malta Bible Society concerning orthography cfr. *Sijon* 9/1 (1997) 86-88. This issue has not been tackled in the latest document of *Il-Kunsill* entitled *Deċiżjonijiet*, 1 issued on 25th July 2008.

116. Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 918.

117. *Ibid.*

118. Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 390-391.

'to run'<sup>118</sup> connotes better the idea of an abundance of water that flows down a stream. This means that Spiteri (and Zammit who probably borrowed from Spiteri) has chosen a better known term which however has its semantic limits. This explains better the last translator Guido Schembri's strategy who instead of *nixxiġhat*, 'streams', opted for the noun *xmajjar*, 'rivers' which however may be defective for the opposite motive, too much water is implied in the term for the arid country of Palestine, especially so if the *nomen regens* פלגני recalls the accadic *palgu* the water canal system in Mesopotamia (Ravasi), and if the emphasis lies not on the *nomen regens* but on the *nomen rectum*, מים. In this case the best solution would probably be rendering the prepositional phrase מים על-פלגני, *ħdejn ilma dejjem niezēl*, 'near water perennially flowing down.'

### *The Relative Clause in v.3b-c*

a) What remains of verse 3 consists of three cola distributed as a bicolon followed by a colon. Syntactically, this text consists of what seem to be three main clauses<sup>119</sup> and a subordinate relative clause. Each of the three clauses has its own subject, one of which is the opening אשר that refers to עץ, tree, mentioned in verse 3a. The second clause is that in the second colon which has as subject עֲלֵהוּ (the noun עלה, 'leaf, foliage', qualified by the third person masculine suffix which refers also to the same עץ). The third colon contains the third clause which has as subject the clause כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה, a complicated structure because while the relative clause qualifies the noun כֹּל, 'all', and אשר is the subject of the relative clause qualifying 'all', the verb יַעֲשֶׂה has as a distant subject 'tree' in verse 3a. These three clauses add information on this 'tree' to which the initial subject in verse 1 is compared to, and on the main subject of the entire psalm, האיש. A few further remarks on each of the three clauses. 1) One cannot but ask about the relationship between the first relative clause introduced by the relative pronoun אשר<sup>120</sup> and the two subsequent clauses in verse 3b-c. It is evident that the three clauses cannot be considered as one relative clause as each is endowed with its own subject, verb, complement, and

119. Although one has to verify whether we have one syndetic relative clause and two asyndetic ones. For the nomenclature Cfr. Joüon & Muraoka, *Biblical Hebrew*, §158.

120. On this pronoun cfr. Joüon & Muraoka, §38.

its syntactical structure. But it is possible that the three clauses may be parsed as relative clauses, the first being 'syndetic' because it is introduced by the relative pronoun, the others 'asyndetic' in that the relative pronoun is dropped.<sup>121</sup>

2) From the contents of each clause, one may surmise that the first two clauses remain within the range of the simile 'tree', while the third clause outranges the limits set by the simile to reach back to the general subject of the Psalm, **הָאֵשׁ** in verse 1. 3) The first clause is a complete syntactical clause, with its subject, **אֲשֶׁר**, its verb **יִתֵּן** from the root NTN 'to give', its object, **פְּרִי**, made up of the noun **פֶּרִי**, derived from the verbal root **פָּרָה**, 'to bear fruit, be fruitful', here meaning 'fruit'; the noun is qualified by what Joüon & Muraoka (§158c) would term 'a retrospective possessive pronoun', 'his/its fruit'. The two grammarians of Hebrew sustain that retrospective pronouns are often dropped in asyndetic relative clauses. In this text however the pronoun is kept to help tying the clause to the simile of the tree. It is the tree which is fruitful, and to this fruitful tree is **הָאֵשׁ** compared to. This clause closes with an adverbial phrase, **בְּעֵתוֹ**, a cluster made up of the nominal **עֵת**, time, season, the genitival pronominal suffix referring back perhaps to the subject **אֲשֶׁר** or to the masculine **פְּרִי**, 'fruit' 4). The tree to which the pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** refers back gives 'its fruit' 'in its time'. Is this time, the time of the fruit or the time when the tree should give fruit? Both **עֵץ** and **פֶּרִי** are masculine nouns so that the masculine suffix qualifying **עֵת** may equally refer back to any of them. The pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** refers back to **עֵץ** so that if grammatically the pronominal suffix attached to **עֵת** is referring to the relative pronoun, it is actually referring to 'a tree' mentioned in verse 3a. In this context it is better to interpret this pronominal suffix as referring to **אֲשֶׁר** its immediate syntactical subject. 5) The final colon of verse 3 contains a syntactical structures made up of a main clause and a subordinate relative clause: **וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ**. The main clause consists of the predicate **יִצְלִיחַ** within the morphology of which is encoded the subject, and the object which is the phrase **כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה**. The entire structure is linked to the previous clause by the conjunction **ו** attached to the noun **כֹּל** that qualifies the complex concept **אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה**. The phrasal **כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה** cannot be the subject of the verb **יִצְלִיחַ** because the latter is intensive (hiphil) and syntactically requires an object which is furnished by the phrase 'all that he does' while the subject has

121. Cfr Ibid., §158a for the nomenclature.

to be gleaned from the morphology of the verb and from the general context. It shares the same subject of the initial verb וַהֲיִיה of the strophe which we have seen, is finally הָאִישׁ of verse 1; this is also the subject of the verb יַעֲשֶׂה of the relative clause. The verb יַצְלִיחַ is the third person masculine Hiphil of the verb צָלַח from root צָלַח II which means 'to advance' 'to prosper'. The use of the hiphil form makes the verb to mean 'to make successful, prosperous'. The verb in this form may take a direct object such as 'one's way' (cfr. Gen 24,21,40) as well as an indirect object normally governed by the preposition לְ. In our case the subject is encoded with the verb's morphology and there is no indirect object. Whom does 'he' stand for? Technically the subject can be the 'tree' who has been the virtual subject, though not the grammatical subject of the clauses previous to this. But that would sound odd after two clauses that literally remain within the simile of the tree: giving fruits and having its foliage perennially green. Here we need a subject who acts and acts successfully. It seems that as the poet made most of the verbs in this strophe to have 'tree' for subject with the exception of the initial וַהֲיִיה, he is making another exception in this concluding clause thus drawing a syntactical inclusio and thus defining the end of the strophe.<sup>122</sup> The subject of יַצְלִיחַ is therefore הָאִישׁ of verse 1 even though this subject has to be grammatically represented in the context by the pronoun 'he'. Of course this subject is shared also by the verb יַעֲשֶׂה 'all he makes', translating this yiqtol verb by the present as we have been doing in all the verbs in this strophe.<sup>123</sup>

### *Ps 1,3b-c in Maltese Translation Tradition*

a) The translation of Richard Taylor suffers from several defects or mistakes. While the Hebrew author, as we have seen, and his Latin translator in the Vulgate, Taylor's source text, seem to have accepted this delimitation of the text (see the two *quod* clauses which keep the text together, with the final clauses forming part of the second relative, *quod*, clause, linked to it through the conjunction

122. On this literary procedure cfr., Lynell Zogbo & Ernst R. Wendland, *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible. A Guide for Understanding and for Translating*, United Bible Societies, New York 2000, 82; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis. A Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2001, 87.

123. Lènart de Regt's study "Hebrew Verb Forms," 81-82 will be found useful in this regard.

*et*, Taylor divided verse 3 into two strophes, separating these last two clauses into a separate strophe:

Et erit tamquam lignum, quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum;  
Quod fructum suum dabit in tempore suo:

.....

Et folium ejus non defluet: & omnia quaecumque faciet,  
prosperabuntur.

Taylor's translation follows the same division of the text:

*Dawn l'is-sigira jixbhu jcuun*  
*Li kalb l'ilma imhawla tcun;*  
*Illi fl'ahhar iz-zmien jasal*  
*Li 'l frott tati flis-stagiun*

.....

*Ma jitbielx il-werak tahha*  
*U jsairilha 'l frott il-gidid*  
*Hech ucoll coll bniedem tajieb*  
*Coll ma jaghmel jsir gid*

Comments: 1) This reconstruction maintained the author's orthography because this is not the issue that concerns this study. What concerns the present writer is the literary analysis that Taylor has done before he translated his text and the translation strategy he adopted as he rendered his source text into the Maltese of his time. The Latin text of the Vulgate which Taylor had, needed not to be divided as Taylor divided his text. For this, it is enough to consult the reproduction of the text in the *Nova Vulgata* (1998). This division of the text already testifies that Taylor hardly understood his source text.

2) Such misunderstanding comes out more clearly in Taylor's handling of the temporal phrase *in tempore suo*, 'in its time'. For this concept Taylor dedicates the entire third line of the first strophe given above (which in Taylor's text is strophe no 3): *Illi fl'ahhar iz-zmien jasal* 'that in the long run the time



arrives' which is found in neither the Vulgate text nor in the Hebrew text. In the following line Taylor repeats this time element that in Hebrew is described by a single cluster: **בעתו**. Taylor renders this cluster by another cluster in Maltese *flis-stagiun*, 'in (its) season' which would have been enough to translate *in tempore suo*. Taylor has not translated the Vulgate text but created a new text on the basis of the Vulgate text.

3) Two further minor comments upon Taylor's second strophe: The verb *jsairilha* gives the impression that it may be parsed as the imperfect from the verb *sajjar*, II form of the verb *sar* 'to become ripe'.<sup>124</sup> This raises the question about who is the subject as this form requires an object. Actually, in Taylor's text we have *frott* which is governed by the accusative marker 'l (confront this line with the last line of the first strophe cited above). Needless to say, in the Hebrew original, the tree itself is ultimately the subject that governs the verb **יִתֵּן** through the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר**. Taylor introduces in the second strophe a subject *coll bniedem tajjeb* 'every good man' which is not in the Hebrew text nor in the Vulgate. This 'good man' is then the subject of the final line *coll ma jaghmel jsir gid*, 'whatever he does, becomes good' which is not what the psalmist seems to have wanted to assert.

b) A professional translation of this text starting from the Masoretic Text could in no way follow Taylor's lead. Peter Paul Saydon hardly took anything from Taylor's, not even the few things that could have been borrowed. 1) Taylor, for instance, rendered Hebrew **פְּרִי** Latin *fructum* by the word *frott* but Saydon preferred the much rarely used *ghalla*, which may mean the crest (comb or tuft on animal's head as in the phrase *ghollet is-serduq*, but it may also mean 'harvest, crop'. Aquilina cites the saying *l-ghēlejjel tar-raba' din is-sena ma kinux sbieħ htija tan-nuqqas ta' xita* 'this year's harvest or crops were not very good because of shortage of rain'.<sup>125</sup> Of course, one may query whether the term 'crop' fits completely to render a tree's fruit. Perhaps Saydon is stretching the semantics of the term to its widest possibilities. But Saydon's *ghallettha* which is the term *ghalla* qualified by the third person feminine possessive suffix *-ha* 'her crops', with the pronoun referring back to the word for 'tree' in Maltese, *sigra* (Taylor's *sigira* with the second vowel and syllable introduced by the author

124. Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 1271-1272.

125. *Ibid.*, 956.

for prosodic reasons).<sup>126</sup> Taylor's *frott* written before 1846 when his translation was published is much more understandable for the standard speaker of Maltese than Saydon's *għalletha*.

2) As Saydon's is a formal equivalent rendering of the Hebrew verse, it reproduces the same syntactical ambiguity we noticed in the Hebrew test. Is the second clause starting with the nominal עלהו, 'his fruit' a separate relative clause sharing with the first clause the relative pronoun אשר, or the same relative clause introduced by אשר of the first clause? The same ambiguity appears in Saydon's translation:

*Li tagħti għalletha f'waqtha, u l-weraq tagħha ma jidbielx.*  
 'that gives its crop/fruit in its time, and its foliage does not wither'

With the help of Joüon & Muraoka's grammar we parsed the second clause as a case of 'asyndetic relative clause' where the relative clause is dropped for some reason, perhaps to link the two clauses closely together on the semantic plane. The two clauses narrate two characteristics of this tree planted or transplanted near good sources of water; it is fruitful and evergreen, both of which are signs of vitality. 3) The fact that the word chosen by Saydon (as well as Taylor) to render עץ, 'tree', is feminine, differently than in Hebrew, served Saydon to do away with some of the ambiguity in the Hebrew text, but perhaps it made the simile to lose some of its lustre. In Hebrew, one has to define when the poet is still within the simile and when he is out. In Saydon's rendering, the last colon operates surely outside the simile of the tree because of the masculine morphology:

*U kull ma jagħmel, joħroġ tajjeb*  
*and whatever he does succeeds* (lit. goes out well).

In this way the inclusion with the *Hu* of verse 3a comes out very clear, whatever the real syntactical value of this *hu* in verse 3a. 4) One should note that in v.3b

126. Non Maltese readers of this essay should note that modern Maltese orthography distinguishes between the sign [g] pronounced like the [g] of the lexeme 'gay' in English and the sign [ġ] pronounced as [j]. This distinction was probably not yet introduced by the time of Taylor, at least not by the system he followed).

of Saydon's we find a chiasmatic arrangement, verb (a) noun (b) noun (b<sup>1</sup>) verb (a<sup>1</sup>); whether this was effected consciously or unconsciously, in Maltese has little effect as it is not used for emphasis as in Hebrew.

c) Donat Spiteri borrowed Saydon's vocabulary and exegesis except for a few instances. As one would have expected, Spiteri changed the expression *tagħti ghalletha*, 'gives its fruit/crop' which is hardly used in this way in modern Maltese to *tagħmel il-frott*, 'bear fruits'. Saydon's cluster *f'waqtha* 'in its time' is still currency in Maltese, but Spiteri preferred the more commonly used *fi żmienha*, (lit. in its season). Here he follows Saydon's exegesis as he understood the pronominal suffix in the cluster **בַּעֲתוֹ** to refer to the tree and not to 'its fruit'. Spiteri's rendering of verse 3c, *hu jirnexxi f'kull ma jagħmel* 'he is successful in all that he does' is clearer than Saydon's *u kull ma jagħmel joħroġ tajjeb* which may sound impersonal, 'and all he does comes out well'. While Spiteri repeated the use of *hu* at the beginning of the strophe in verse 3a, he improves the identification of the subject of the verb in verse 3c by introducing a resumptive pronoun *hu* as the subject of the concluding colon, thus disambiguating who the subject is in verse 3c, and making clear the will of the poet to draw an inclusio between the subject of the main clause in verse 3a 'he (subject encoded in the morphology of the verb **וְהָיָה**) is like a tree...' and the final colon which narrates of the success of all the enterprises that *hu* embarks upon (v.3c).

d) Carmel Zammit encodes the subject of the intended subject of the Hebrew **וְהָיָה** in the verb *jkun*, 'he will be' in verse 3a: *u jkun bħal sigra mħawla hdejn nixxieġhat ta' l-ilma*. One understands he is translating the Authorised Version which also has the future: 'And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water'. There are two slight differences between Zammit and the Authorised Version. The term *nixxieġhat* 'streams', probably borrowed by Zammit from Spiteri, especially in view of the fact that AV has 'rivers', *xmajjar*, is qualified by the phrase *ta' l-ilma* which does not have the same grammatical function of the Hebrew **נְחָלֵי** which is the *nomen rectum* of the genitival phrase. In Zammit *ta' l-ilma* 'of the water' functions as an adjectival phrase qualifying *nixxieġhat*, streams which will thus come 'water streams'. It had to be *nixxieġhat ta' ilma*, 'streams of water'. As hinted at already, the translation of 'rivers of water' by 'water streams' witnesses to the influence of Spiteri's translation which led then to an inaccurate rendering of the English source text. Both AV and Zammit renders the relative clause in verse 3b by another relative clause: 'that

bringeth forth his fruit in his season'; *li tagħti l-frott fi żmienha*. Zammit has preferred Saydon's *tagħti* but Spiteri's *frott* to renders 'bears fruit'. In a way he is not following the Authorised Version which attribute fruit bearing not to the tree but to the 'man' which may sound awkward as can be gleaned from the rendering of the cluster בְּעֵתוֹ by 'in his season' which cannot refer to 'fruit'. In Zammit as in Saydon and in Spiteri the pronominal suffixes here refer to the 'tree'. A remarkable departure in Zammit, both from his source text, the Authorised Version as well from Maltese Translation Tradition is constituted by the rendering by Zammit of the concluding clause: *u kulma tagħmel isir ġid* 'and whatsoever (the tree) does will become prosperity'. As we have seen, this final clause operates outside the simile of the tree and reverts back to the subject of וְהָיָה in verse 3a. Zammit makes the clause remain within the simile of the tree. The Authorised Version renders this clause 'and whatsoever he doeth shall progress'. Spiteri has translated *hu jirnexxi f'kull ma jagħmel*. In many ways, therefore, Zammit's translation has not been an improvement within this translation tradition.

e) Guido Schembri's translation of this verse may sound like a provocation; it differs from its predecessors on a number of points, but its suggestions may not constitute improvements over its predecessors within the tradition this translation forms part of.

*Hu jkun qisu siġra mhawla hdejn xmajjar ta' ilma  
li fi żmienha tagħmel il-frott,  
u l-weraq tagħha ma jinxifx;  
u f'kull ma jagħmel ikollu suċċess.*

A few comments: 1) Like Spiteri, Schembri introduces the strophe by the personal pronoun *hu* which governs the entire strophe although he is present syntactically only in the first and last line. The nominal *siġra*, 'tree', is the subject of the second line while there is an explicit reference to it in the third line where the subject is *l-weraq tagħha*, its foliage. In the fourth line the subject remains unspecified and is encoded within the morphology of the verbs *jagħmel* and *ikollu*. 2) Instead of the preposition *bħal* to express comparison, Schembri uses the imperative of the verb *qies*, 'to measure'.<sup>127</sup> The imperative

127. Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 1154.

form of this verb, *qis/qisu* together with the pronominal suffixes attached to it conveys the idea of 'like' or 'as if it were' or 'a kind of'. Then usually there comes the object. Aquilina gives a number of examples of uses of this verb. *Kien liebes (bħal) qisu barnuż [he was wearing a kind of (what looked like a) hood]*. Here it is difficult to isolate the influence of the preposition *bħal* set within the brackets. One understands that the [u] of the verb *qisu* is the possessive pronoun third person singular masculine; *bdew jghajju qishom imgienen [they started shouting like mad]*. Here the use of *qishom* verges on the adverbial. I wonder whether Svhembrì's employment of this comparison structure sounds completely idiomatic though it seems to be grammatical. 3) The present writer has already commented why the use of *xmajjar ta' ilma* to render מִיָּמִים in verse 3a is not felicitous. 4) The אֲשֶׁר clause in verse 3b is rendered by Schembrì by a relative clause introduced by the relative pronoun *li*. Schembrì makes it more than clear that בְּעֵרְוֹ refers to the tree by advancing its equivalent ahead within the relative clause: *li fi žmienha tagħmel il-frott*. The verb for bearing fruits carries feminine morphology *tagħmel il-frott*. For the word for 'fruit' he followed Spiteri as would have been expected. May be, the focus in Schembrì's translation is on *fi žmienha* 'in its time'. As in Hebrew the subject in the next clause is *weraq* qualified by the possessive pronoun *tagħha* that cannot but refer to *siġra*, 'tree' in verse 3a. We may parse the third clause as a relative clause sharing the relative pronoun of the previous clause to which it is linked through the conjunction *u*. The verbs of the final clause within there is inserted a relative clause *f'kull ma jagħmel* without employing the relative pronoun. Unlike Spiteri, Schembrì does use the resumptive pronoun *hu* and the reader has to supply the subject taking it from the strophe initial *Hu*. Spiteri's syntax is more reader friendly. Schembrì renders the Hebrew יִצְלִיחַ, 'to advance, to prosper' with the hiphil form meaning 'make prosperous, bring to successful issue' by a more glamorous phraseology, *ikollu suċċess*, 'he will have success': *u f'kull ma jagħmel ikollu suċċess* 'and in all he does he will have success' which differs somewhat than Spiteri's *hu jirnexxi f'kull ma jagħmel*, 'and he will have success in all he does'. The differences concern the structure of the clauses, otherwise they are synonymous as one would expect them to be. Schembrì improves over Zammit but all in all he remains within tradition.

Department of Holy Scripture  
 Faculty of Theology  
 University of Malta  
 Msida

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