

Summary

The history of European psalm paraphrases begins in late ancient Greek literature. Greek interest in combining poetic content and metre is documented in the paraphrase of Psalm 102 from the 4th century preserved in the *Codex visionum* and the paraphrase of the whole psalter from the mid-5th century called *Metaphrasis psalorum* or "Homeric psalter", both composed in dactylic hexameters. They share some features with early modern paraphrases: use of artistic language, application of christological interpretation, relation to singing, various approaches in terms of the degree of dependence on the biblical text.

The Hebrew text of the Psalms shows no signs of the metric arrangement that is characteristic of traditional European poetry. Some Hebrew verses tend to be regularly organized on a tonic basis, but this arrangement is not binding or regular, unlike the standard of traditional European poetry. In the European environment, however, there has been since ancient times a strong conviction that the Hebrew verse is regularly arranged on a quantitative principle, and this belief lasted until the early modern period. Renaissance translations of ancient poetry into vernacular languages use syllabic or accentual-syllabic verse, and the same type of verse is also used in early modern psalm paraphrases when composed in vernacular languages.

The history of psalm paraphrases in the Reformation movement begins with the psalm paraphrases by Martin Luther. According to his concept, psalm paraphrases are to serve as spiritual songs, to be composed in simple and easy-to-understand but dignified language, to faithfully preserve the meaning of the biblical text and not to adhere anxiously to biblical formulations, but to clarify the christological meaning of the biblical model. The New Testament language is to be used in translating the Old Testament text.

In the Calvinist Reformation, psalm paraphrases also serve as spiritual songs, they should also be faithful to the meaning of the biblical text, and are to be composed in plain and easy-to-understand language. However, they are to adhere to the historical, not to the christological sense and to maintain the Old Testament language.

Being based on the psalm commentary of Calvin's predecessor Martin Bucer, the psalm paraphrases by Clément Marot (1496–1544) retain the features of "Calvinist" paraphrases. John Calvin took them over into his hymnbooks published in 1539 in Strasbourg and in 1542 and 1543 in Geneva. Clément Marot paraphrased 49 psalms during his lifetime. After his death, Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605) wrote paraphrases of the remaining 101 psalms. The complete collection of paraphrases of the entire psalter, the so-called Genevan Psalter, was published in 1562 and reached enormous popularity in French-speaking countries, especially in the Reformed environment. Already in the sixteenth century many language versions of the Genevan Psalter were composed. Several versions were made in German-speaking countries, the most popular of which was the version by Ambrosius Lobwasser (1515–1585).

The Czech language version of the Genevan Psalter, *Žalmové neb Zpěvové svatého Davida* (Psalms or Saint David's Songs), was published for the first time in 1587. Its author Jiří Střejc (1536–1599) was a preacher of the Unity of the Brethren and a follower of Calvin's teachings. He studied at the school of the Czech Brethren in Mladá Boleslav from 1556 and at the universities in Königsberg and Tübingen in the early 1560's. He served as a preacher of the Unity of the Brethren in Hranice na Moravě and in Židlochovice. He was a member of the narrow council of the Unity of the Brethren and he collaborated in the preparation of the Kralice Bible. In the Unity of the Brethren, he was censured for his disobedience and violation of the Brethren customs. He was one of the propagators of Calvinism in the Unity of the Brethren.

Střejc's work contains some minor poems in Latin, six songs in German, two major versified compositions in Czech, a Czech report on the negotiations over the Bohemian confession, the Czech translation of a reply of Swiss theologians to a treatise of Johann Brenz, and the Czech translation of John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion. Střejc's proportion of the translation of the Kralice Bible is not known. The versified compositions and verses inserted into the translation of Calvin's Institution prove Střejc's interest in poetry.

Strejc's Czech psalm paraphrases, composed under the melodies of the Genevan Psalter, were printed for the first time in 1587 in the printing works of Czech Brethren in Kralice. Next editions were made by Prague printers in 1590, 1593 and 1596. The last edition in his lifetime was printed in 1598 in Kralice. The second Kralice edition is slightly revised in style.

The text of Strejc's paraphrases combines two textual traditions: the textual tradition of the Genevan Psalter and the textual tradition of the Czech translations of biblical psalms published by the Unity of the Brethren. Strejc worked with the Ambrosius Lobwasser's German version of Genevan Psalter and he probably also knew the original French version of the Genevan Psalter. It is not known which specific version or versions of the psalter published by the Unity of the Brethren he used, but to some extent he probably used the psalter contained in the third volume of the Kralice Bible printed in 1582.

From a theological point of view, Strejc's psalm paraphrase shares the main features of their models (the Genevan Psalter and its Lobwasser's German translation): 1. closely dependence on the biblical text, i. e. capturing the meaning of the biblical text as faithfully as possible; 2. preference of the historical interpretation of the biblical text, i. e. understanding the psalm as a statement relating to the specific historical situation of its Old Testament author; 3. avoidance of explicit interpretation of the text, i. e. sticking to the wording of the original and do not try to change the wording to express the interpretation ascribed to the biblical text.

From an artistic point of view, Strejc's paraphrases take over and consistently imitate the verse and strophic arrangement of the Genevan Psalter and thus enrich contemporary Czech poetry with new strophic schemes, among which terza rima in particular stands out. A significant feature of the artistic arrangement of Strejc's verse compositions is its rhetorical character combined with syntactic and intonational variability, with which they excel over other contemporary Czech verse production. The imagery of the original and its pregnant formulation are not always successfully captured. Like many other early modern paraphrases, Strejc's psalms adapt the biblical text to the modes of expression of European literatures and, in principle, do not seek to imitate the modes of expression peculiar to Hebrew poetry.

Strejc's paraphrases spread vastly already during his lifetime and they were used also by adherents of other confessions. They emerge in Utraquist and later in Catholic hymnbooks. At the end of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth century, the text of the paraphrases was appreciated for its aesthetic value; it was seen as more poetic than other Czech versified compositions of the end of the sixteenth century.

They ceased to be used in spiritual chant in the second half of the nineteenth century, possibly due, in part, to changes in Czech versification: during the second half of the nineteenth century the accentual-syllabic verse became predominant in Czech poetry and the syllabic verse of Strejc's psalms began to appear outdated and artistically imperfect.