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LE FRANC DE POMPIGNAN DISCOVERS MUSCULARITY

Theodore E. D. Braun

Several years ago, I published an article in this journal developed from an ASECS conference paper in which I explored the theme of “Truth, Beauty, Harmony, Order, and Muscularity in Le Franc de Pompignan’s *Poésies Sacrées*.”¹ In this essay I hope to show that Le Franc, prior to his discovery of muscularity, had written competent but not exciting translations / paraphrases of biblical texts, using as a model the then-celebrated poet Jean-Baptiste Rousseau. These poems, published in 1742 or even earlier,² stress the classical elements of truth, beauty, harmony, and order. Less than a decade later, a fifth element, muscularity, appeared in

¹ Theodore E. D. Braun, “Truth, Beauty, Harmony, Order, and Muscularity in Le Franc de Pompignan’s *Poésies Sacrées*,” 1650–1850: *Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, 3 (1997), 219–38.

² See the *Recueil de Pièces en Prose et en Vers. Prononcées dans l’Assemblée Publique tenue à Montauban, dans le Palais Episcopal, le 25. Août 1742* (Toulouse, Jean-François Foresté, 1743), 270, where Le Franc states: “Des trois Odes suivantes, on a fait l’honneur aux deux premières de les imprimer dans quelques Ouvrages Periodiques, & dans différentes Collections de Vers.” A section devoted to Le Franc’s poetry appears on 269–99; the three odes derived from psalms occupy 269–83. He also published in this volume his *Dialogues des Dieux de la Mer, traduits du grec de Lucien, avec des Remarques*, 195–268.

many of the poems he published in the first edition (1751) of *Poésies sacrées*.³

Let's take a look at one example of the religious verse of his friend and model, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau (1671-1741), an ode based on Psalm 96 in the Latin Vulgate translation (number 97 in other translations), beginning with "Dominus regnavit, exultet terra,"⁴ and an example of Le Franc's pre-muscularity religious poetry, an ode based primarily on the nearly identical Psalms numbered 13 and 52 (14 and 53),⁵ beginning with the Latin verse "Dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus." Since Le Franc did not translate or paraphrase any of the psalms put into verse by Rousseau, we are unable to make a direct comparison of their poetic styles and translation practices. Still, the elegance of expression, the classical restraint in vocabulary and imagery, the lack of muscularity can be seen in these works of the two poets, and Le Franc's debt to Rousseau is clear. Indeed, the critic Henry A. Grubbs, whose 1941 study of the life and works of Rousseau is still the principal source for the few other studies of the poet that have been made in the last sixty-five years, says

Like all Catholic French poets of his period, in paraphrasing Psalms, Jean-Baptiste tended, consciously or unconsciously, to introduce Catholic and Christian elements that did not exist in the Hebrew original. Thus, to the simple, dry, earthy—if also eloquent and occasionally grandiose—morality of the Jewish Psalms, are added abstractions such as immortality, the eternal felicity of the blessed, the everlasting misery of the damned.

³ Jean-Jacques Le Franc de Pompignan, *Poésies Sacrées de Monsieur L* I*****, divisées en Quatre Livres, Et ornées de Figures en taille douce* (Paris: Chaubert, 1751).

⁴ *Oeuvres de J. B. Rousseau. Nouvelle Edition; avec un commentaire historique et littéraire, précédé d'un nouvel essai sur la vie et les écrits de l'auteur* (Paris: Lefèvre, 1820), 5 vols.; the *avertissement* is signed J. A. Amar.

⁵ *Recueil de Pièces en Prose et en Vers*, 280-83; *Poésies Sacrées* (1751), 17-19, (1784), I, 79-84. In many Bibles, these psalms are numbered 14 and 53, as they are in our reference text, an exegetical Bible edited by Louis Pirot and Albert Clamer, *La Sainte Bible, texte latin et traduction française d'après les textes originaux avec un commentaire exégétique et théologique*, vol. V, *Les Psaumes*, translated by E. Pannier and H. Renard (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1950); Psalms 14 and 53 are essentially identical, and are treated in this translation as variants representing the traditions of the followers of Elohim and those of Yahweh. To be sure of the accuracy of the translation, I made use of *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955).

This, along with the general tendency towards abstraction in the language and imagery in the noble style of the period, produced a tone, an aura, often very different from that of the source.⁶

While *Le Franc* did not fall prey to the Christianization of Old Testament texts, at least not to the extent that Rousseau did, his early attempts at translations and paraphrases parallel the work of his model.

Readers of this journal understand what is meant by the classical principles of truth, beauty, harmony, and order, but many might be unsure of the sense of what I am terming muscularity. The question therefore arises, "What is muscularity, as it applies to poetry?" I might define it in terms of imagery, in particular as powerful and even baroque images that run counter to the prevailing classical tastes of the day, which in general eschewed the bold, the brusque, the grotesque, the uncultured, the disturbing images; and a strong sense of the universe, and of individual human beings or groups of people, in motion, in contrast to the stasis that represented the point of perfection in traditional Catholic theology and indeed even in Newtonian physics. A number of examples of strong opening stanzas to *Le Franc's* poems—especially those based on the Psalms and the Prophecies—illustrate one aspect of this quality. Another aspect is illustrated by the stirring of powerful emotional responses to fear and desolation in some of the Prophecies and Hymns. As *Le Franc* himself put it in the *Discours préliminaire*, "although consecrated by usage and by the judgment of the Church, and while it faithfully preserves the sense of the ideas, [the Vulgate] did not always render with the same truth the power of the expressions or the beauty of the images."⁷ But in 1742 *Le Franc* had not yet discovered muscularity.

He was to find it in his pursuit of truth, or exactitude in understanding the original texts of the Bible, in his transpositions of biblical texts into French verse forms. *Le Franc's* sense of truth, in his transla-

⁶ Henry A. Grubbs, *Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, His Life and Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 229.

⁷ *Le Franc* says that the Vulgate, "although consecrated by usage and by the judgment of the Church, and while it faithfully preserves the sense of the ideas, did not always render with the same truth the power of the expressions or the beauty of the images" [quoique consacrée par l'usage & par le jugement de l'Eglise, en conservant fidèlement le dépôt des pensées, n'a pas toujours rendu avec la même vérité la force des expressions, ni la beauté des images], *Poésies sacrées*, iv.

tions and paraphrases of the Bible, stems from his attempt to get as close as possible to the original language in which God was thought to have addressed men. He wanted to avoid the problem of translating translations of translations, in which one moves by small or large steps increasingly further away from the expressions God used to address his creatures. In practical terms, this means getting as close to the Hebrew texts as possible, and that in turn meant learning that language. In the meanwhile, it was necessary to rely on the Vulgate, the late fourth century Latin translation that is owed to the efforts of St. Jerome. One of the problems one finds in St. Jerome's translation is his attenuation of bold images, his "corrections" of the Hebrew authors' grammar and syntax (for example, they would often switch from plural to singular and vice versa), and adding a touch of elegance to texts not intended to be elegant. In addition, the musicality of many of the texts, including the psalms, was often lost. By the eighteenth century in France, these attenuations had accelerated under the classical rules of propriety. In the presence of these rules and in the absence of a working knowledge of Hebrew, Le Franc published a few odes paraphrasing certain psalms. His choice of models fell by and large to poems bereft of forceful imagery, such as the following typical ode of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, Ode XIV, which the poet says is applied to the Last Judgment.⁸ We will examine briefly the first four stanzas.

Peoples of the Earth, lift up your voices,
 With cries of joy and songs of victory;
 Behold the King of the universe
 Who is coming to make his triumph and his glory burst forth.

Justice and truth
 Are the foundations of his terrifying throne;
 A profound darkness
 Makes him invisible to human eyes.

Lightning, devouring fires,
 Shine before him with their sparkling flame;

⁸ Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, 1820, I, 58–61. Rousseau notes that the poem is applied to the Last Judgment, and titles it "Misère des réprouvés, félicité des élus" [Suffering of the damned; happiness of the elected].

And his dying enemies
Fall down on all sides, struck by his burning thunder.

Full of horror and awe,
The Earth has shaken on its broken vaults;
The mountains, melted by his appearance,
Crumble down into the depths of the burning waves.⁹

Whether reading my unpoetical translation or the French ode directly, one is struck by the attenuation of the images and the weakness of the vocabulary. Even the opening phrase is lost, buried in its new-found feeble form in the third line. "Dominus regnavit, exultet terra: Laetentur insulae multae" [The Lord reigns, let the Earth rejoice: let the multitude of isles be glad] has paled from a reaction bordering on the sublime to the soporific words of Rousseau's first stanza. Furthermore, the fourth line in the stanza is entirely a fabrication of the poet. The Latin goes on to say that clouds and darkness surround him, and that fire goes before him, burning his enemies; there is no mention of thunder and lightning, nor of God's being inaccessible to human eyes. Thus the first three verses lose in the translation the awe-inspiring power and touches of the sublime of the Latin text, which in this psalm

⁹ Peuples, élevez vos concerts,
Poussez des cris de joie et des chants de victoire;
Voici le Roi de l'univers
Qui vient faire éclater son triomphe et sa gloire.

La justice et la vérité
Servent de fondements à son trône terrible;
Une profonde obscurité
Aux regards des humains le rend inaccessible.

Les éclairs, les feux dévorants,
Font luire devant lui leur flamme étincelante;
Et ses ennemis expirants
Tombent de toutes parts sous sa foudre brûlante.

Pleine d'horreur et de respect,
La terre a tressailli sur ses voûtes brisées:
Les monts, fondus à son aspect,
S'écroulent dans le sein des ondes embrasées. (58-80)

follows the Hebrew closely.¹⁰ The concision of the Latin is also dissipated in unnecessary verbiage. Two stanzas later, and contrary to the third-person narrator of the Vulgate and the Hebrew, Rousseau has God speak directly to the people, telling them how wonderful he is, and stating specifically that his laws are adorable (“Vous n’avez écouté que mes lois adorables” [You have obeyed my adorable laws])!

In the fourth stanza, where the Vulgate says in muted but powerful tones, again essentially identical to the Hebrew original: “Montes, sicut cera, fluxerunt a facie Domini” [The mountains, like wax, melted in the presence of God], Rousseau omits the simile, stating merely that the mountains crumbled into the sea. The editor of the *Oeuvres*, J. A. Amar, translates the Latin literally, and notes that Rousseau, having used this image in his Ode IV, felt forced to find another way to translate the Latin. Amar even goes so far as to say that “It was impossible to acquit oneself more gloriously in comba” [Il était impossible de sortir plus glorieusement du combat]. In my judgment, he would have done much better repeating the image, which after all was in the Bible in both contexts. As it is, the absence of this simile flattens the verse, rendering it lifeless and dull.

We will turn now to the one poem by Le Franc de Pompignan that has survived in both its pre-muscularity and its post-muscularity forms, Ode IV, taken from psalms 13 and 15, beginning in the Latin edition “Dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus” (usually translated in English as “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”).

Note that the Latin word *insipiens* designates a person who does not know, who is ignorant, who therefore acts irrationally. In the Bible it is used in opposition to a person endowed with wisdom. The usual French translation of this word is *insensé*, a person lacking sense or reason, a meaning quite in line with both the Latin and the Hebrew usage. In the King James Bible the line is translated as “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,” using a term that is more ambiguous, since *fool* can mean a person who acts irrationally, but it carries a certain flavor of comical or even clownish behavior as well.

The opening biblical verses are terse, as the King James translation of verses 1–4 and 6 indicates:

¹⁰ For this psalm I have also had recourse to a reading of the Vulgate text directly: *Biblia sacra, Vulgatae Editionis. Sixti V Pont. Max. iussu recognita, et Clementis VIII auctoritate edita*, edited by P. Michael Hetzebauer (Ratisbonae [Regensburg] et Romae: Friedrich Pustet, 1922), 538.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.

The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? Who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.

Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge.¹¹

Terse, and even colorless, in this case, in the Hebrew as well as in the Latin. Nevertheless, Le Franc played with this psalm, teasing out of it some images, and also a better translation of the word *fool*. Still, there are hidden metaphors which might be missed if one were not to return to the original Hebrew text. The editor of the King James text I am using, Adam Clarke, states, in a note to verse 1, after discussing the meaning of the word fool ("*nadal* signifies an empty fellow, a contemptible person, a *villain*...The word is not to be taken in the strict sense in which we use the term *atheist*"), "They are in a state of putrescency; and they have done abominable works—the corruption in their hearts extends itself through all the actions of their lives...like their father the devil, [they] spread far and wide the contagion of sin and death" (255). Similarly, "They are all gone aside" in v. 3 means that they seek crooked ways, they have strayed from the truth; and "they are all together become filthy" develops the idea of their corruption: "they are become sour and rancid; a metaphor taken from milk that has fermented, and turned sour, rancid, and worthless."

In the 1742 version of the psalm, Le Franc develops certain aspects of these and other hidden metaphors in general ways. Here are the opening stanzas of this paraphrase, which Le Franc did not intend to be a literal translation of the Latin text of the psalm. Following his notion

¹¹ *The Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments. Carefully printed from the most correct copies of the present Authorized Translation, including the Marginal Readings and Parallel Texts: with a Commentary and Critical Notes; Designed to Help to a Better Understanding of the Sacred Writings*, by Adam Clarke (New York: G. Land and P. P. Sanford, 1843), III, 254–58.

that in translations one must insert the cultural and historical content carried in the original, he has made explicit certain phrases that require explication, and he has added specific acts of the impious that he probably took from the early history of Christianity.

Hell has perverted Earth.
The children of Irreligion,
Audacity and Rebellion,
Are waging war on the King of Kings.
The non-believer is inflamed with the most horrible emotions:
He is destroying in his heart the God who created him.

By what a deplorable prodigy
Has reason lost its rights!
Of the Sacred Cult nor of the Laws
Does there remain any trace?
Mortals, you dare to claim as one of your successes
The abominable excess of so many iniquities.

They have all abandoned the path
On which the Almighty was guiding them.
They have torn the innocent into shreds
As the tiger tears into his prey:
Unworthy protectors of the Wicked who succeeds,
Ardent persecutors of the Just who moans.¹²

¹² *Recueil de Pièces en Prose et en Vers*, 280-81. The stanzas we are concerned with here are:

L'Enfer a perverti la Terre.
Enfants de l'Irréligion
L'audace et la rébellion
Au Roi des Rois livrent la guerre.
Du plus affreux transport l'Impie est enflammé:
Il détruit dans son coeur le Dieu qui l'a formé.

Par quel déplorable prestige
La raison perd-elle ses droits!
Du Culte Sacré, ni des Lois
Il ne reste plus de vestige.
Mortels, vous osez mettre au rang de vos succès
De tant d'iniquités l'abominable excès!

The fool has become the non-believer (in French, *l'impie*, the impious one), a child of irreligion, and some of the abominable things he does are stated specifically. The translation or paraphrase has become a kind of commentary as well. The images of the tiger devouring prey and of the non-believer tearing the Hebrews into shreds are interestingly more powerful than what the Hebrew text actually says, and yet are in accord with some of the hidden metaphors and the cultural history of the epoch. In fact, in the stanza following the one I last quoted, Le Franc's narrator says to God, "You allow your altars to be broken," an image more in line with what some early Christian martyrs did in Roman temples than what was done to the Israelites. And yet there is no movement, no action going on, no muscularity; there is, rather, stasis, unchanging events. A paraphrase following French classical standards, static rather than dynamic, general rather than particular, muted in tone and color rather than bright and bold. By 1751, as I have indicated, he had discovered muscularity, and he rewrote this ode, particularly in the opening stanzas:

The impious man said: Let us destroy these temples,
No, I do not recognize any God.
Saying this, wherever he goes
He brings his impure steps and his examples.
The Lord is disturbed by this, and from the highest Heaven
On the children of man he rests his eyes.

He looks for a just man on Earth,
He looks and he does not find one.
By the darkest of means
Man declares war on his God;
And the bloody ministers of iniquity
Execute his insolent orders everywhere.

With the substance of their brothers

Tous ont abandonné la voie
Où les guidait le Tout-Puissant.
Ils ont déchiré l'innocent
Comme le Tigre fait sa proie:
Du méchant qui s'élève indignes protecteurs,
Du Juste qui gémit ardents persécuteurs.

Are their criminal coffers engorged:
 Hardened by luxury itself
 They are rich because of our misery;
 Voluptuous monsters, whose thirst and hunger
 Devour without mercy widows and orphans.

Of their ferocious avidity
 Great God, you see the unworthy excess;
 In the midst of these vile successes,
 Your name is not on their lips
 But their name is proscribed: the moments are counted:
 And you curse the course of their prosperity.¹³

The strong opening image, with the impious man speaking and at least virtually acting, the movement, the motion, the specific example of the crimes of the impious, these elements are all connected to what I am calling muscularity, and all these elements are lacking in the earlier version. But they are present in other poems in this collection, for instance in the very next ode, taken from psalm 68 [69], *Exurgat Deus*:

¹³ The stanzas I have translated are (*Poésies sacrées*, 17-18):

L'Impie a dit: Brisons ces Temples,
 Non je ne connois point de Dieu.
 Il le dit, et porte en tout lieu
 Ses pas impurs & ses exemples.
 Le Seigneur s'en émeut, & du plus haut des Cieux
 Sur les Enfants de l'Homme il arrête ses yeux.

De la substance de leurs Frères
 Leurs biens criminels sont grossis:
 Par le luxe même endurcis,
 Ils sont riches de nos misères;
 Monstres voluptueux, dont la soif & la faim
 Dévorent sans pitié la Veuve & l'Orphelin.

De leur avidité farouche
 Grand Dieu, tu vois l'indigne excès:
 Au milieu de ces vils succès,
 Ton nom ne sort point de leur bouche;
 Mais le leur est proscriit: les momens sont comptés:
 Et tu maudis le cours de leurs prospérités.

I would be flattered, Reverend Father, if you were willing to help me to obtain a favor from your [Superior-] General Dom Laneau,¹⁸ a favor which is dear to my heart. I had the opportunity to speak to you in Paris about one of your young monks, whose name is Dom Pont,¹⁹ who is singularly endowed in the knowledge of the

teinture de la langue hebraïque. Dom pont me seroit bien necessaire pour cela. j'écris au reverend pere général pour Le prier de permettre à ce religieux de me venir joindre à caix, c'est le nom de ma ferme, et D'y demeurer avec moi jusqu'à La S. martin. c'est un voyage de dixhuit ou vingt jours tout au plus. je vous supplie D'appuyer ma Lettre. vous me rendrez un service infini et que je n'oublierai jamais. je profite en même temps de cette occasion pour vous demander des nouvelles de vos travaux Litteraires. quand aurons nous le dernier volume de votre admirable histoire de Languedoc, et travaillez-vous bientôt à L'abrégé? Il n'est pas de bon citoyen qui ne doive s'intéresser à l'advenement et au succès d'un ouvrage qui éclairoit des points très importants, et qui répand un grand jour sur plusieurs parties de l'histoire générale du royaume. je suis avec un respectueux attachement, mon reverend pere, votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur.

Lefranc

je datte mes Lettres de La campagne où je suis, mais mon adresse est à montauban.

¹⁸ Dom René L'Aneau was at this time the Superior-General of the Benedictine Congrégation de Saint-Maur.

¹⁹ I received important information about Dom Pont from Professor Michel Taillefer of the Université de Toulouse Le Mirail in an e-mail message he sent to me on 25 October 2006. I am grateful to him for this information. Here is the full transcription of the e-mail:

J'ai rencontré dom Jean-Joseph Pont à l'occasion de la préparation de ma thèse sur

l'Académie des Sciences, Inscriptions et Belles-Lettre de Toulouse au XVIII^e siècle, soutenue en 1975. Il est donc cité à plusieurs reprises dans l'ouvrage que j'ai tiré de cette thèse, *Une académie interprète des Lumières. L'Académie des Sciences, Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres de Toulouse au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 1984, en particulier aux pages 129-130, 220, 229 et 271.

Voici en résumé ce que je sais de lui, essentiellement d'après les registres de l'Académie:

Recommandé par Lefranc de Pompignan, dom Pont, bénédictin de la congrégation de Saint-Maur, a été nommé correspondant de M. de Saint-Amand à Montauban le 24 décembre 1750, et après son installation à Toulouse, en 1752 semble-t-il, associé ordinaire de la classe des inscriptions le 14 juin 1753. De 1752 à 1761, il a lu à l'Académie 14 mémoires (principalement des analyses de pièces d'Euripide et des traductions de Lucien) et prononcé 4 discours dans des assemblées publiques, dont le 27 juillet 1752 un discours «Sur les avantages de l'étude» où il réfute le *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* de Rousseau. De 1752 à 1763, il assura les cours publics et gratuits de grec et d'hébreu institués par l'Académie pour pallier les carences des institutions scolaires dans ces domaines, et pour lesquels elle lui versa à partir de 1755 une gratification annuelle de 300 livres. Des

languages of antiquity. We would often speak Greek together when he was at the Abbey of the farm.²⁰ He was since sent to Villeneuve d'Agen. This house is only five or six leagues away from a farm I have in Quercy, where I am to spend the last weeks of our vacation. For some time now I've been ardently wanting to learn a little bit of Hebrew. Dom Pont would be indispensable to me for that. I'm writing to the Superior-General to ask him to permit this

précisions sur cette Ecole originale figurent dans mon livre, p. 129-130.

Dom Pont a remporté en 1753 le prix d'éloquence de l'Académie des Jeux floraux sur le sujet : « Combien les sciences sont redevables aux belles-lettres », et en 1754 le prix d'éloquence de l'Académie des Belles-Lettres de Montauban sur le sujet : « Si on peut dire des académies ce que l'Esprit saint disait des sages, que leur grand nombre tourne au profit de la société ».

Il mourut en 1764.

Here is an English translation of Professor Taillefer's message:

I encountered dom Jean-Joseph Pont while preparing my thesis on the Toulouse Académie des Sciences, Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in the eighteenth century. He is therefore mentioned a number of times in the book developed from this thesis [title above], in particular on 129-30, 220, 229 and 271.

Here is a brief résumé of what I know about him, essentially taken from the registers of the Academy:

Recommended by Lefranc de Pompignan, Dom Pont, a Benedictine of the Congregation of Saint-Maur, was appointed as the correspondent of M. de Saint-Amand in Montauban on 24 December 1750, and after settling in Toulouse, apparently in 1752, he was named ordinary associate in the category of inscriptions on 14 June 1753. From 1752 to 1761, he read at the Academy 14 communications (principally analyses of plays by Euripides and translations of Lucian), and he read 4 speeches at public assemblies, one of which on 27 July 1752 being a discourse "On the advantages of study" in which he refutes [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau's *Discourse on Science and Art*. From 1752 to 1763 He taught the free public Greek and Hebrew courses established by the Academy to make up for the failure of scholastic institutions in these fields, and for which the Academy paid him an annual stipend of 300 livres. Some details on this original school are given in my book, on 129-30.

Dom Pont was awarded the Académie des Jeux-Floraux's Prize for Eloquence in 1753 on the subject "How much the sciences owe to belles-lettres," and in 1754 he was awarded the Académie de Montauban's Prize for Eloquence on the topic "Whether one can say of academies what the Holy Spirit said of wise men, that their great number is good for society."

He died in 1764.

²⁰ Le Franc uses the word *mas*, which is of Languedocian origin and is used extensively in the South of France; it indicates a farm or a country house. Agen is a small city located to the east of Caix, which is the site of the château where Le Franc would lodge the priest and take lessons in Hebrew from him.

monk to come to Caix, that's the name of my farm, to meet me there and to and to stay until Saint Martin's Day. It would be a trip of eighteen or twenty days at most. I'm asking you to lend your support to my request....Lefranc

I am dating my letters from the country where I am at present [Pompignan], but my address is actually Montauban.

There is every reason to believe that he succeeded in having Dom Pont tutor him in Hebrew at this time. His presence in Toulouse, his nomination by Le Franc to the Académie des Jeux Floraux, the Greek and Hebrew courses he taught, the prize awarded by the Académie de Montauban, founded by Le Franc in 1730, all attest to this. Furthermore, it is clear that sometime in the period 1747–1750 he was to learn Hebrew. In his *Discours préliminaire* to the *Poésies sacrées* published early in 1751, he refers more than once to the need to know Hebrew in order to appreciate the Bible, and in the poems themselves he provides some notes discussing the images he puts into French.

Thus, in the Preliminary Discourse to the *Poésies sacrées*, he writes:

Don't imagine that you are familiar with all the poetic riches of Scripture if you judge only by the Latin translation. Much has been lost in the translation. For example, and I am indicating this one case from an infinity of others that could be chosen at random, verse 8 of Psalm 138 [139] reads in the Vulgate: "*Si supsero pennas meas diluculo, et habitavero in extremis maris*: If I take my wings at the break of dawn, and if I go to inhabit the end of the sea." The Hebrew says: "I'll take the wings of Dawn, &c." which I've tried to express by these four lines:

When of the wings of Dawn
I would borrow the assistance,
And when in the sea of the Moorish people
I would end my flight.²¹

²¹ *Poésies sacrées*, iv–v. The French reads:

Qu'on ne s'imagine pas connoître toutes les richesses Poétiques de l'Ecriture, si l'on n'en juge que par la traduction Latine. Il en est beaucoup resté dans l'Original. Par exemple, & ce trait-ci, je le rapporte entre une infinité d'autres

He continues by indicating that the Hebrew image “a bien plus de hardiesse & de rapidité [is much bolder and quicker]” and explains why. He also adds a note to the words “break of Dawn,” saying that the Hebrew word for this can mean *aurora*, *lucifer*, *diluculum* [“Le mot Hebreu signifie également *aurora*, *lucifer*, *diluculum*].”

Le Franc de Pompignan discovered Muscularity when he learned enough Hebrew, thanks to the lessons of Dom Pont and his own astonishing linguistic ability (he already knew Latin and Greek, English, Italian and Spanish, and was eventually to translate texts in each of these languages), to read the Old Testament in the original. The revised and enlarged edition of the *Poésies sacrées*, which he published in 1763, is replete with further examples of muscularity, indicating that in the intervening years he deepened his knowledge of the language. Having a brilliant teacher in the area clearly aided him in this project, and accounts for much of what ultimately separates the poetry of Le Franc de Pompignan from his contemporaries and from his friend and mentor, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and from his own early religious poems that he had composed in their style and within the constraints of French classical expression.

qu'on pourroit choisir au hazard, on lit ainsi dans la Vulgate le huitième verset du Pseaume 138. *Si sumpsero pennas meas diluculo, & habitavero in extremis Maris*: Si je prens mes ailes au Point du jour, & si je vais habiter aux extrémités de la Mer. L'Hébreu dit: je prendrai les ailes de l'Aurore, &c...ce que j'ai taché d'exprimer par ces quatre Vers.

Quand des ailes de l'Aurore
J'emprunterois le secours,
Et qu'aux Mers du Peuple More
J'irois terminer mon cours.

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