Online Database of Middle High German Translations of Latin Hymns: ‘Berliner Repertorium’

In this contribution on our database of hymn translations, the ‘Berliner Repertorium’, I will introduce you to its structure and outline the possibilities for research and publication related to the project. In conclusion I will present two case examples of Low German hymn translations recorded in the database.

1. Introduction

The Berliner Repertorium (http://opus.ub.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/page/home), online since June 2017, provides a database of Middle High and Low German translations of Latin hymns, sequences, and antiphons until the year 1600. The project is led by Professor Andreas Kraß and carried out at the institute of German literature at the Humboldt University of Berlin. At the end of the project we will have documented the translations of 400 Latin pretexts. The database provides a service for philology, linguistics and the history of art, music and liturgy. Since 2012 the project is supported by the German Research Foundation ‘DFG’ and will be completed in 2021.

2. Structure

The database not only provides descriptions of Latin source texts and their German translations, but also those of manuscripts, early printed books and the textual witnesses they contain, complemented by bibliographies and digital reproductions. The exploration of the database can start from a Latin hymn, a manuscript, a feast, or an author.

The caption “hymns” subsumes all liturgical song types. The hymns are arranged alphabetically by their incipits. Each record contains a brief description of the Latin pretext, a bibliography as
well as hyperlinks to significant reference works such as Analecta hymnica\(^1\) or the hymn repertory of Ulysse Chevalier.\(^2\) A list of German translations in order of their incipits is situated at the bottom of each record. The linked records document the characteristics, the extent and the type of each translation, such as prose, verse, a glossing or a paraphrase. By selecting from a list of the signatures arranged by the repositories one gets to the description of a witness.

Beyond explicit, incipit, inscriptions and the writing material, the record provides information about the layout, miniatures and melody notation. A link to the digital reproduction of the witness directs either to the digital collections of the respective library or to the scans in the local storage of the Repertorium.

The manuscripts containing textual witnesses are arranged alphabetically by their repositories. The brief description of each manuscript is accompanied by a bibliography and hyperlinks to relevant reference works and databases such as Handschriftencensus\(^3\) or Manuscripta Mediaevalia.\(^4\) The section “printings” is organized analogously and contains an exemplary selection of incunables and early printings of the 16\(^{th}\) century, which comprise hymnals, breviaries, broadsheets as well as catholic and protestant songbooks. The entries are sorted by title and are adjusted to the reference databases Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke\(^5\) and VD16.\(^6\)

The alphabetic list of “authors” includes the authors of the Latin hymns such as Prudentius or Hermann von Reichenau as well as the authors of the vernacular translations (for example Heinrich Laufenberg or the Mönch von Salzburg).

The search tool includes a free text search, a specific search for hymn titles and IDs and a filtered search. Thus, one can choose between the document types (hymns, translation, witness, manuscript and printing), which can be combined with several special filters. For example, one can seek for Middle Low German manuscripts from the 14\(^{th}\) century, for witnesses with miniatures or verse translations. Besides that, the magnifying glass symbol at the bottom of the hymn records allows a direct search in the respective hymn.

---

\(^3\) http://www.handschriftencensus.de/.
\(^4\) http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/.
\(^5\) https://www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de/.
\(^6\) https://www.bsb-muenchen.de/sammlungen/historische-drucke/recherche/vd-16/.
3. Research Possibilities and Publications

This vast collection of data demonstrates the dynamic connections between textual witnesses and their intermedial complexity, thus challenging the printing age fiction of a text being a closed and static entity as well as facilitating systematic research of the productive space between official liturgy and lay devotion.

One of the recent publications of the project is Eva Rothenberger's monograph on vernacular translations of the sequence ‘Ave praecclara maris stella’. On the basis of translation theories and concepts of cultural transformation Rothenberger examines the poetical and liturgical transformations in the German translations. The study with its critical editions shows in a stylistic perspective how verse adaptations of the ‘Ave praecclara’ with their concern to build a formal equivalent to the Latin pretext open a creative space for semantic shifts, whereas prose translations are far more interested in preserving the semantic substance of the Marian sequence. Thus, the rhythmic and metric restrictions of the Latin hymn stimulate semantic variance in the vernacular verse translations especially regarding the representation of Mary. For example, these theological transformations concern the intimization or hierarchization of the relation between Mary and the praying Christians, her involvement and intermediary role in the act of salvation or her relationship to trinity. The publication demonstrates how the database can be used productively for critical editions of the largely unknown or unpublished translations and how intertextual interdependence and theological, liturgical as well as musical developments can be examined by means of the textual archive the database offers. Our recent case studies were published last fall in the volume “Hymnus, Sequenz, Antiphon”, which shows the broad spectrum and variety of themes and research approaches in the field of vernacular hymn translations.

4. Case example

As a case example I chose the paschal hymn ‘Salve festa dies’ and its vernacular adaptations. The text is based on the Carmen paschale ‘Tempore florigero’ of Venantius Fortunatus, who wrote it for the bishop Felix of Nantes in the second half of the 6th century in celebration of his administered paschal baptism rite. The text uses nature and spring motives to glorify the

---

9 https://repertorium.sprachen.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/id/6651.
resurrected Christ. The original poem consists of 55 elegiac distichs and thus was too long for liturgical usage. Over the course of the 10th century briefer hymns in a cento-like manner were composed, which usually started with verse 39 “Salve festa dies toto venerabilis evo” or used it as a refrain. These rearranged hymns with a varying amount of strophes generally served as processional hymns and enjoyed increasing popularity during the 14th and 15th centuries.  

There are 15 translation versions presented in our database with the incipit ‘Salve festa dies’, for which ‘Tempore florigero’ serves as a pretext and which vary in their selection of strophes. I will pay particular attention to two of them, which are interesting not only for liturgical reasons.

The first one with the incipit ‘Also hillich is de dach’ only translates verse 39 and the following with the beginning ‘Salve festa dies’. It counts as the oldest Low German translation of the hymn. The majority of the witnesses are inserted into or attached to more extensive translations of ‘Tempore florigero’ and serve for acclamatory purposes, as the textual supplement for a melismatic addition or as a refrain. Some of the witnesses document melody notations or neumes.

The Codex 322/1994 in quarto format of the city library Trier at folio 207 recto shows this translation within a motet. The Codex formerly owned by the Augustinian canons of Eberhardsklausen near Trier was supposedly created in the last third of the 15th century.

The polyphonic arrangement is bilingual: The first part uses the Latin ‘Cum rex glorie’ in the upper voice, the second part ‘Salve festa dies’ or ‘Crucifixum ihesum christum in carne laudate universi populi’ in the inner voice and ‘Also heylich ist der dag’ in the lower voice. The notation is in the style of the ‘cantus fractus’, where characters of the square notation are combined with mensural notation, thus recording rhythm but sometimes in an ambiguous way. On the basis of regional ordinaries from the 15th century one can assume, that the motet was used during a procession before the Easter mass. The example shows in terms of intertextuality on a diachronic vertical level how the pretext ‘Tempore florigero’ itself was transformed for

11 https://repertorium.sprachen.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/id/12800.
12 https://repertorium.sprachen.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/id/12791.
13 https://repertorium.sprachen.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/id/12790.
liturgical reasons and in which way these adaptations were translated in German texts. One can not only observe how the Latin pretext is translated, but also on a synchronic horizontal level how the vernacular text interacts with its Latin textual environment in the motet. Thus, intertextual and polyglot relations can be examined. The witness also demonstrates the interdependence and synergy of official liturgy and lay devotion in the late middle ages and the need for the singability of vernacular texts to propel the participation of laity. Furthermore, it displays the possibilities and problems of musical and rhythmic notation.

My second example also underlines the interdependence of official liturgy and lay devotion. This translation consists of 13 distichs of ‘Tempore florigero’ beginning with ‘Salve festa dies’ and is related to the translation first mentioned as it cites ‘Also hillich is de dach’ as a refrain or for acclamatory purposes.\(^\text{15}\) I chose a witness in a Low German prayerbook from the second half of the 15\(^\text{th}\) century now reposited in the Bishopric archive of Trier (Abt. 95 Nr. 528, 64\(^\text{v}\)-66\(^\text{r}\)).\(^\text{16}\) The foregoing rubric says that the priests as well as lay people while performing their procession at the churchyard should praise the Easter day and greet it with these sweet words and sing with heart and lips the following song (64\(^\text{v}\)).\(^\text{17}\) The incipits of the Latin distichs are placed in front of each vernacular strophe, so that the Latin pretext can be easily recognized. As an acclamation ‘Also hillich is de dach’ is mentioned several times in the prayer book. At folio 108\(^\text{v}\) it says again, that “dat mene volk” – the common people – should sing “Also heylich is desse dach” while “De dummen kinderken de anders nicht en konnet” – the simple minded children, who are not able to behave differently – should exclaim “heyl heyl oster dach”. Neumes situated above both acclamations by the rubricator seem not to document a concrete melody, but mark them as well-arranged acclamations rather than unorganized shouts.\(^\text{18}\) The witness documents the inclusion of both laity and priests in the Easter procession and the different degrees of participation as well as the differing evaluation of the participants and their capability. Especially the rubrics in the manuscripts are informative in this respect and give an account of the intended usage of the text and the degree of involvement in liturgical or paraliturgical acts. Both examples give a brief insight into the spectrum of research approaches to vernacular translations ranging from intertextuality, through liturgical usage, to musical arrangement. We would like to invite you to explore our database yourself!

\(^{15}\) https://repertorium.sprachen.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/id/12781.

\(^{16}\) https://repertorium.sprachen.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/id/12785.

\(^{17}\) Axel Mante (ed.): Ein niederdeutsches Gebetbuch aus der zweiten Hälfte des XIV. Jahrhunderts (Bistumsarchiv, Trier, Nr. 528). Lund/Kopenhagen 1960 (Lunder germanistische Forschungen 33), pp. 82-85.