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Trebolle, Julio, and Susana Pottecher

Libros de los salmos: Himnos y lamentaciones

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Pablo Torijano
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Madrid, Spain 28040

Julio Trebolle and Susana Pottecher are the authors of an unusual book. What we have here is a translation of the Psalms into Spanish almost without any notes whatsoever and precluded only with a small introduction. In fact, the present book is the companion volume to a second book by Prof. Trebolle (*Libro de los Salmos: Religión, poder y saber* [Madrid: Trotta, 2001]), which constitutes the exegetical basis and the real introduction to the first book, that is, this new translation of Psalms into Spanish. Thus, this translation and many of its special characteristics and achievements have to be considered against the other volume, without which many of the subtle hermeneutic nuances underlying in the translation would be lost.

Having said that, let us begin with the review of the book. The translation is preceded by a prologue (9–29), in which Prof. Trebolle explains his personal approach to the task of a new translation of Psalms and the necessity of it. Trebolle is well aware of the intrinsic difficulties of such an endeavor, of the necessity of balancing poems that can have modernized the archaic or archaized the modern. Thus, he has preferred to adopt a concrete translation even if it reflects an archaic zoomorphic expression such as “Yahvéh, el Toro (’*ăbîr*)” (Ps 132:2, 5) rather than the more abstract “Yahvéh, el *Fuerte* de Jacob,”

which fits better in the later monotheist “orthodoxy.” In the same way, he tries to reflect the language of symbols, images, and primordial myths of texts that have their roots in the Near Eastern literature: this means that his versions prefer the concrete meaning over the abstract, the corporeal over the moral quality reflected in the text. Thus in Ps 144:7–8, the author translates *yād* as “mano” instead of the “poder” of other translations. In Ps 18:7, the version of the poem preserved in 2 Sam 22:7 is adopted as more original, since it does not have the interpolation “ante Él” that appears in the Masoretic Text of the psalm, which is caused by a tendency toward the abstract that we can observe in many modern translations as well.

As a further example of this tendency to the concretization of the Psalms imagery, which we can clearly perceive almost in every psalm, we can note the translation of Pss 16 and 131. Treballe proposes to read them as poems put in the mouth of a woman, that is, to interpret them as “psalms of women.” In the article on Psalms by K. A. Farmer in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* ([ed. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 138), we do not find many indications or references about the feminine aspects in the Psalter. In the same way, many translations obscure allusions to women such as the one we find in Ps 68:12–13. The author does not correct Ps 16:2, which begins with the verb “you say” (*’āmart* / “tu dices”) in feminine (indicated in a footnote, since Spanish does not mark the genre in the second person of the singular), nor the following two verses with their evident mythological connotations; accordingly, the psalm describes the words of a bride or a queen to her lord. The translation adopted differs from the other Spanish translations, which usually correct the Masoretic Text (e.g., Luis A. Schökel, *Nueva Biblia Española* [Madrid: Cristiandad, 1975]) and changes the traditional interpretation of the text. This kind of reinterpretation can be found also in Ps 131, even in a more radically manner than in Ps 16, because the Hebrew word *napšî* is translated “yo misma,” which clearly reads the text as put in the mouth of a woman.

This new translation, then, seems to pursue a double aim: on the one hand it tries to restore the old Near Eastern roots of the texts, the old theophanic images; on the other, it tries to define a poetic language and a literary style that reflect some the richness of the Hebrew text. The first goal is accomplished by choosing the concrete over the abstract meaning in most of the versions; the second is reached by choosing a poetic version that is very well done by Susana Pottecher. This version is literary, with some penchant for archaic expressions, but at the same time easy to read. It is clear that in some occasions, one would have translated differently; for example, the authors tend to translate the Hebrew root *g^ʿr* as “dar un bufido” in Pss 18:16; 80:17; 104:7, which I do not like too much since it sounds a bit colloquial, but no translator finds ever completely felicitous the work of a colleague. In the same way, the graphical disposition of the verses is quite surprising: they appear without punctuation marks, with capital letters to mark the

beginning of the verses; although I like this, since it leaves much to be interpreted, many readers will find it quite distracting and even misleading.

Not much more can I say about this new translation. I recommend it to anyone interested in a Spanish version of Psalms that conjugates scholarship and literature but without betraying the original: without doubt, it ranks among the best translations of Psalms into Spanish.