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The *Ars traducendi* of Hilduin of St. Denis

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ABSTRACT

Hilduin of St. Denis (ca. 785–855) stands as a pivotal figure in the early Carolingian Renaissance, bridging linguistic and cultural divides between Greek theological thought and the Latin-speaking West. His translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, attributed to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, exemplifies the challenges of rendering complex Greek theological concepts into Latin. Often criticized for its density, neologisms, and occasional obscurity, Hilduin's work nonetheless played a critical role in shaping medieval theology and linguistic practice. This article examines Hilduin's translational techniques, linguistic innovations, and their broader cultural implications, providing a comprehensive view of his contributions to Western intellectual history.

KEYWORDS

Medieval Latin, translational policies, neologisms and calques

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT OF TRANSLATION IN THE CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE

1.1. The intellectual landscape of the ninth century

The Carolingian Renaissance was characterised by a systematic effort to integrate the linguistic and intellectual heritage of classical antiquity into a Christian framework. Initiatives directed by the Frankish court sought to consolidate Christian doctrine through educational reform while reinforcing the theological foundations of imperial authority. In particular, during the reign of

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Louis the Pious (814–840), a relevant aspect of this programme was the translation and adaptation of Greek theological texts, an undertaking that operated as a site of contact between distinct linguistic systems and rhetorical traditions. Such work entailed the negotiation of structural and semantic asymmetries and similarities between Greek and Latin – for example, in the treatment of article–noun complexes, participial clauses, and nominalised infinitives – and often required the deployment of specific translation strategies, ranging from formal calque to syntactic reorganisation and lexical substitution. The ninth-century intellectual milieu was animated by the ambition to re-establish a unified Christendom within a shared theological and cultural paradigm: this aim presupposed not only the recovery of Latin classical works but also the incorporation of Greek sources, valued for their theological authority and for the opportunity they offered to expand the Latin lexicon and syntactic repertoire in line with the conceptual frameworks of the early Church.

The long-standing humanistic perspective of a rupture in the transmission of Hellenic culture to early medieval Europe, as formulated by Lemerle (1971, 9–21), has been decisively revised by recent scholarship. Studies by Lapidge (2017), Rovai (in press), and Cotticelli-Kurras & Cotugno (in press) have argued that interest in Greek language and culture persisted in the Latin West, albeit under constrained conditions. The key obstacles in this endeavour were the scarcity of Greek manuscripts and, more critically, the absence of adequately trained teachers capable of sustaining advanced instruction in the language (cf. Berschin 1980, 1988, 1992; Herren 1988; Rovai in press). Within this framework, Louis the Pious, following in Charlemagne's footsteps, placed great emphasis on consolidating the Church's authority and in this sense, Greek theological works – notably the writings attributed to Pseudo-Dionysius – were deemed vital for enhancing the doctrinal and spiritual resources of the Latin Church (Goldberg 2013; Lapidge 2017). The Dionysian corpus, steeped in Neoplatonic conceptual structures and integral to Eastern Christian theology, was seen to blend with the Carolingian vision of a divinely ordered society.

Hilduin, abbot of the influential monastery of Saint-Denis, exemplifies the period's dual commitment to theological inquiry and cultural mediation. Saint-Denis represented a repository of classical knowledge and also a centre of monastic reform. Hilduin's formation in classical Latin helped him navigate complex textual traditions, while his limited but growing acquaintance with Greek reflects the broader linguistic horizon of Frankish scholarship. In 827, Byzantine envoys presented Louis the Pious with the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, a text whose prestige was grounded both in its theological content and in its perceived apostolic lineage.

From a historical-linguistic perspective, the transmission of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* exemplifies the complex processes of textual mediation in early medieval Europe: Greek manuscripts entered the Carolingian sphere through diplomatic and ecclesiastical exchanges with Byzantium, and their incorporation into Latin intellectual milieu required translation strategies capable of bridging substantial differences. The decision to entrust Hilduin with the translation of the Dionysian corpus (Lapidge 2017) reflects a deliberate policy of linguistic and conceptual synthesis as such translations demanded the negotiation of typological differences – including the handling of Greek article-noun complexes, participial periphrases, and abstract substantival infinitives – and thus offer crucial evidence for the adaptation of Latin syntax and lexicon in response to Eastern theological discourse (cf. Rovai in press).

Hilduin's translation was also embedded in a programme of cultural legitimation. By identifying the Areopagite with the martyred bishop of Paris, he created a narrative that fused theological authority with local ecclesiastical prestige (Taylor 2013; Lapidge 2017). This act was not

merely a hagiographical embellishment; rather, it was a strategic intervention in the formation of the Carolingian intellectual landscape, thereby consolidating Saint-Denis's status as a centre of theological (and linguistic) innovation within the broader context of the Holy Roman Empire.

1.2. Lost in translation? Who actually knew Ancient Greek in the Middle Ages

In the early medieval period, the study of Greek was by no means uniform or widespread throughout Europe. Instead, it was a mosaic of fragmented endeavours, influenced by intellectual aspiration, limited resources, and the scarcity of qualified instructors (Berschin 1980, 1988; Lanéry 2010; Jullien 2010; Lapidge 2017). Notwithstanding these constraints, Greek learning persisted as a tenuous yet vital thread, laying the groundwork for a more systematic revival in later medieval and Renaissance periods. A paradigmatic case is that of Paul the Deacon, who was commissioned by Charlemagne to educate clerics bound for diplomatic missions in Byzantium. In the Epistles to Petrus Pisanus (*Carm*. XIII, 6), he candidly acknowledged his knowledge of Greek to be limited to 'three or four syllables'[1] (Lapidge 1986; Rovai in press). However, certain cultural enclaves of Greek culture did succeed in establishing a lasting presence. As Bischoff (1951) and Berschin (1980, 1988, 1992) have demonstrated, several monasteries, including those of St. Gall, Fulda and Auxerre, were responsible for the preservation of a variety of teaching materials, including grammars, glossaries and instructional texts.

The existence of these niches during the Carolingian era also depended on a concerted effort to bridge Latin and Greek Christian traditions promoted by Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, thereby bolstering connections with Byzantium (Lanéry 2010; Lapidge 1986, 2017). At the same time, centres such as Saint-Denis, under the leadership of Hilduin, sought legitimacy through cultural endeavours such as the translation of Greek theological works, thereby amplifying the authority of the abbey. In this vibrant framework, the contribution of Irish scholars is also significant, as they transmitted and preserved a range of Greek knowledge (Traube 1892; Berschin 1980, 1988; Rovai in press). Possibly the most significant witness to Carolingian engagement with Greek grammar is Codex 444 in the Municipal Library of Laon, which stems from the Irish milieu associated with Martin of Laon and even contains the outline of a Greek grammar (Dionisotti 1988).

A critical element pertains to the distinction between passive and active competence in Greek during this period. Many scribes could recognise or transcribe Greek characters, perhaps to add glosses or insert short symbolic phrases, yet could not truly understand or speak the language. This basic familiarity spread through alphabet primers, word lists, and glosses, but seldom developed into full grammatical proficiency – even though there is evidence of cases of such proficiency (cf. Rovai in press). In fact, Greek functioned predominantly as a written code, at times even cryptographic, and was sometimes deployed to embellish or safeguard particular formulas rather than to enable authentic conversation or advanced textual study.

Thus, it was the symbolic, liturgical, and diplomatic roles of Greek that best explained its survival within a Latin-speaking society. The interest in Greek was not merely an antiquarian curiosity but rather a strategic means of drawing upon the authority of Eastern Christian

[1] *Graiam nescio loquellam, ignoro Hebraicam;/Tres aut quattuor in scolis quas didici syllabas,/Ex his mihi est ferendus maniplus ad aream*. Translated: "I do not know the Greek tongue, nor am I familiar with Hebrew; Three or four syllables which I learned in school, From these I must carry my little sheaf to the threshing floor".

tradition and maintaining ties with the Byzantine Empire. Even before the Renaissance resurrected ancient languages with a more robust philological enthusiasm, Greek circulated in hybrid forms: alphabet tables in manuscript margins, occasional monograms, isolated quotations, numerological charts, and scriptural glosses. Although these traces were far from constituting a thorough command of the language, they proved pivotal in keeping alive a flicker of curiosity for the Hellenic heritage – one that would eventually spark in subsequent centuries.[2]

1.3. The *Corpus Dionysiacum* and its theological importance

The *Corpus Dionysiacum*, traditionally attributed to the figure known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, stands as a seminal collection of early Byzantine Christian writings composed in Greek, likely during the transition from the fifth to the sixth century. Although its authorship remains obscure – scholars have long debated whether the texts emerged from a single author or from a small, tightly knit circle of disciples – the collection's influence on subsequent Christian thought is beyond question (Théry, 1932a, 1932b; Lapidge 2017; Mazzucchi 2006). Written in a period marked by both doctrinal disputes and flourishing philosophical inquiry, the Corpus Dionysiacum integrates Neoplatonic perspectives with Christian theological topics, creating a synthesis that helped shape the Christian doctrinal and liturgical framework for centuries (Stock 2008).

The *Corpus Dionysiacum* is composed of different parts, such as *De divinis nominibus,* which deals with the challenging task of expressing the transcendent reality of God within the limits of human language. Another treatise, *De Mystica Theologia,* represents one of the most significant expositions of apophatic theology within the Christian tradition. Here, the way of negation supplants positive statements about the divine; the individual who seeks union with God must move beyond all intellectual constructs, relinquish even the highest forms of conceptual knowledge, and enter a realm of silence where the divine presence is encountered without mediation (Stang 2012). Equally important is the *De Coelesti Hierarchia*. In describing the hierarchy of angelic beings, Pseudo-Dionysius envisions a cosmos in which the divine light is refracted through successive ranks of pure bits of intelligence, each mediating the grace of God to those beneath it. This conviction that reality is structured, tiered, with each level illumined by the one above, extends to his account of earthly church offices. By portraying the sacraments and liturgical rites of the Church as visible echoes of this higher angelic pattern, the author underscores the idea that earthly worship participates in a transcendent liturgy, uniting the faithful with celestial realities. An additional set of letters rounds out the collection; in these epistles, the theoretical principles presented in the treatises find concrete application in discussions of doctrinal quandaries and spiritual counsel. Although relatively brief, the letters serve as an illuminating glimpse into how Pseudo-Dionysius intended readers to interpret the more difficult ideas of the main works and implement them into pastoral or philosophical contexts.

[2]Nevertheless, certain scribes could discern the phonetic significance of specific Greek orthographic conventions and incorporate them into the Latin system of spelling. By doing so, they conveyed distinctive phonetic features that would otherwise have remained unexpressed. The use of *spiritus asper* provides an example of the complexities involved: its phonetic role in Greek writing exemplifies the tension between phonological evolution and graphematic continuity (Cotticelli-Kurras & Cotugno in press).

As is noticeable from the short summary provided here, the theological relevance of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* reverberates through nearly every branch of subsequent Christian thought. In merging biblical exegesis with the philosophical vocabulary of Neoplatonism, the texts shaped Western scholasticism just as profoundly as it happened for the Byzantine mysticism (Wear & Dillon 2007, 75–84). The emphasis on divine transcendence and the ultimate ineffability of God spurred renewed reflection on the limits of human language and knowledge, influencing other scholars such as Maximus the Confessor, John Scottus Eriugena, Thomas Aquinas and, later, Robert Grosseteste. Moreover, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* exemplifies a blending of scriptural allusion with philosophical speculation, revealing how early Christian authors navigated the tension between fidelity to biblical revelation and the allure of Hellenic intellectual currents. In this negotiation between two worlds, the biblical on the one hand and the philosophical on the other, arose the pioneering theological and translational vision of Hilduin of Saint-Denis, who could bridge doctrinal and linguistic divides.

2. HILDUIN'S *ARS TRADUCENDI*

As previously noted, among the foremost undertakings of the Carolingian Renaissance were the translational efforts of Hilduin, works distinguished by their striking literalism and regarded as a pivotal moment in the wider trajectory of Western theological development. While subsequent translators, such as John Scotus Eriugena, would revisit the *Corpus Dionysiacum* with different strategies, Hilduin's work stands as a relevant example of early medieval translational method, simultaneously revealing the strengths and pitfalls of a literal and 'faithful' approach. As a matter of fact, Hilduin's work compels us to recognise the translation process's inherent difficulties and the weight placed on the shoulders of every conscientious translator through the Boethian concept of the *fidi interpretis culpa*,[3] who must balance fidelity to the source text with the need for intelligibility in the target language (Chiesa 1987, 1990, 2001; Rovai in press). The role of the *faithful interpreter* in the Middle Ages was, in fact, seen as both a moral and an intellectual duty, demanding that the translator uphold the theological integrity of the source material. Hilduin's adherence to this principle highlights his commitment to preserving the doctrinal integrity and semantic richness of the original text. While his translation may at times appear to betray a limited command of Greek, as Théry (1932b) notes, this impression must be contextualised. The translational process undertaken by Hilduin and his *scriptorium* followed a series of distinct stages, which likely shaped the final rendering in significant ways (see § 3). In this light, his linguistic limitations, often overstated, were not substantially different from those observed in many comparable efforts of the period. Much like modern students grappling with Ancient

[3]Although Eriugena himself produced a far less literal version of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, he was aware that he occasionally fell into the same error as literal translation, albeit less flagrantly than Hilduin. In the medieval period, the concepts of *interpretatio* and *expositio* were well understood by authors. On the one hand, Eriugena's *interpretatio* may have been, to some extent, guilty of the *fidi interpreti culpa*. On the other hand, Eriugena sought to address this by clarifying his translational choices in his *Expositiones in Hierarchiam caelestem: Sin vero obscuram minusque apertam praedictae interpretationis seriem iudicaverit, videat me interpretem huius operis esse, non expositorem. Ubi valde pertimesco, ne forte culpam fidi interpretis incurram*. "If, however, someone should judge the course of the aforementioned interpretation to be obscure and less clear, let him see that I am the translator of this work, not its commentator. Here I greatly fear that I may perhaps incur the fault of a faithful translator." (*PL* 122 col. 1032) (see Rovai in press)

Greek, whose literal translations tend to reflect the structures of their native tongue, Hilduin's version reflects the linguistic and pedagogical conditions of his time more than a simple lack of competence.

2.1. Literal translation as a double-edged sword

However, as theorised by scholars like Théry (1932a, 1932b), Lapidge (2017), and Rovai (in press), this fidelity introduces a form of *culpa* stemming from the inherent trade-off between strict adherence to the source and the necessity of rendering it understandable for a Latin audience. Hilduin's translational method highlights this search for balance (or at least compromise) that medieval translators faced: on the one hand, fidelity to the source text and, on the other hand, the intelligibility of the resulting Latin prose. His translation deals with the challenges of Greek's syntactic flexibility, participial constructions, and extensive use of the definite article, features that the Latin language could not always replicate directly (Théry 1932a, 1932b; Scazzoso 1967; Nuchelmans 1991; Lapidge 2017). The ultimate result is a text that, while preserving much of the original's semantic depth, often tests (and sometimes fails) the limits of Latin readability. Lapidge (2017, 75; 478) describes Hilduin's prose as bombastic and convoluted, mirroring, in a way, the tension between a conservative translation and intelligibility. The intricate syntax challenged contemporary readers and also became a point of critique for later translators like John Scotus Eriugena, who sought a more balanced approach, and after him, Robert Grosseteste, who tried to mediate between the different translations. Eriugena's translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* indicates a shift toward reconciling fidelity with fluency, aiming to make the text more accessible without compromising its theological essence.

The strengths and weaknesses of Hilduin's literalism encapsulate the 'double-edged sword' metaphor. On the one hand, his translation served as a vital conduit for introducing the *Corpus Dionysiacum* to the Latin West, preserving its theological richness and asserting the translator's moral fidelity. On the other hand, this same literalism created barriers to comprehension, diminishing the text's pedagogical effectiveness and requiring future efforts to reinterpret or adapt it for broader use.

3. TRANSLATIONAL CHALLENGES

It should not be assumed that Hilduin's translation is qualitatively inferior to that of Eriugena, nor that the latter's work was free from flaws. In any case, some of the translational challenges stem from an imperfect knowledge of the Greek language, but also from the necessity of preserving, to some extent, the structural integrity of the original text – a text in which form and substance are inseparable. Moreover, Eriugena himself occasionally fails to translate complex concepts where Hilduin succeeds, as in the case of the Epistles (VIII, 6): τῆς χειρὸς ἤδη προτεταγμένης παῖε κατ᾽ ἐμοῦ.[4] Hilduin correctly renders this phrase as *manu preconstituta percute aduersus me*,[5] interpreting the verb παῖε as the imperative singular of παίω. By contrast, Eriugena misunderstands this form as the vocative of παῖς ('child'), translating the original

[4]Translated: "Strike against me, now that your hand is already outstretched".

[5]Translated: "Strike against me with the predetermined hand".

phrase as *manu iam ante praeordinata puer*[6] (cf. Théry 1932b, 334; Lapidge 2017, 80). Another example of significant misinterpretation by Eriugena is his translation of ἄνδρας as though it were a compound of ἄν and δράς (from δράω), rendering it as *forsan agentes*:

> ἀλλ' εἴποι ἄν τις· οὐκ ἔστι δικαιοσύνης ἄνδρας ὁσίους ἐᾶν ἀθοηθήτους ὑπὸ τῶν φαύλων ἐκτρυχωμένους (P.G. 59, 869, b6).[7]

Here, Hilduin translates ἄνδρας correctly as *viros*, as seen in: *Sed dicit quiscumque: non est iusticie uiros sanctos inauxiliatos*[8] (*De Div. Nom*. VIII, 8, 9–10). Conversely, Eriugena translates it as: *sed quis dixerit non est justitiae forsan agentes sanctos inter non adjuvantes a deludentibus extorquendos* (P.L 122, 1158, d8).[9] Even though the divergences in the translation do not necessarily stem from any greater or lesser competence in Greek on the part of either author, in this specific case, this seems to be precisely the issue: one correctly identifies the Greek form, the other does not. However, such explanation cannot be considered definitive but rather one of several factors influencing their respective translational choices. It is also worth noting that the manuscripts used by both Hilduin and Eriugena for their translations were written in uncial script, which could easily lead to errors in reading and interpretation. The stages that led from the Greek text to its Latin translation were multiple (as also analysed by Théry 1932a, 1932b), and in these various stages, errors were made both in hearing and transcription. In both translational processes, three distinct phases can be identified: reading the text to be translated, translating it, and transcribing it. Indeed, some translation errors do not stem from a lack of linguistic competence but rather from a chain reaction triggered by a pronunciation error, which then results in a transcription error, inevitably leading to an inaccurate translation of the original text.

In this regard, we can distinguish and cite errors that Théry classifies as "common" hearing errors and those caused by incorrect or defective pronunciation or hearing. Among the former are cases such as the misreading of καί ἄλλα ἅττα[10] – which should be rendered as *alia quaecumque* – mistaken instead for the neuter plural of ἅλας (ἅλατα, 'salts'). This results in a distorted enumeration: *et facies, et manus, et scapulas, et alas, et brachia, et terga et pedes ymnidicunt; coronas eciam, et thronos et calices, et crateras eius, et sales misticos perplasmant, de quibus in Symbolica Theologia secundum virtutem dicemus* (*De Div. Nom*. I, VIII, p. 173).[11]

[6]Translated: "Strike, boy – your hand was chosen long ago."

[7]Translated: "But someone might say: there is no justice – holy men, though innocent, are being worn out by the wicked".

[8]Translated: "But anyone might say: it is not just for holy men to be left without help".

[9]Translated: "But who would say there is no justice – perhaps because the holy live among those who do not aid them, and must be rescued from those who deceive?".

[10]Cf. CD, *De Div. Nom*. I, VIII, p. 121: Στεφάνους τε καὶ θώκους καὶ ποτήρια καὶ κρατῆρας αὐτῇ καὶ ἄλλα ἅττα μυστικὰ περιπλάττουσι, περὶὧνὲν τῇ Συμβολικῇ θεολογίᾳ κατὰ δύναμιν ἐροῦμεν. Translated: "They also fashion crowns, thrones, cups, bowls, and other mystical forms, about which we shall speak, as far as possible, in the Theologia Symbolica".

[11]Translated: "Both the face, and the hands, and the shoulders, and the wings, and the arms, and the back, and the feet hymn his praise; likewise the crowns, and the thrones, and the chalices, and the bowls, and the mystical salt-shakers express him – about which we will speak, according to their significance, in the Theologia Symbolica".

Cases such as ΠΡΟΣΤΟΚΥΡΙΟΣ misunderstood for ΠΡΩΤΟΣΚΥΡΙΩΣ are considered ascribable by Théry (1932b) to imperfect pronunciation or mishearing. The original passage from the *Corpus Dionysiacum* ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ κυρίως ὂν ὁλικῶς ἐπεστραμμένην καὶ κυριαρχικῆς ἀεὶ θεοειδείας ἐν μετουσίᾳ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν αὐτῇ γινομένην[12] (*CD. De Coel. Hier*., VIII, I, 6–8) was interpreted as *sed prime dominanter et universaliter conversantem, et domini principalis semper deivise in metusia, secundum possibilitatem eius, factam*, by reading πρὸς τὸ κυρίως as πρώτος κυρίως (*prime dominanter*).

At the Monastery of Saint-Denis, the various tasks were divided among different monks: a reader, a translator (both certainly of Greek origin, though not necessarily specialists), and a scribe (Théry 1932b, 435). By contrast, John Scotus Eriugena personally carried out all three functions. It is evident that this particular division of labour at the Abbey of Saint-Denis led to various types of errors, such as reading errors, scribal errors, and, to a lesser extent, translational errors. By handling all three stages himself, Eriugena minimised the errors arising from the confusion between translator and scribe. However, issues related to the reading of uncial script remained, and although, as Théry (1932b) notes, Eriugena revised Hilduin's version in certain places, adopting his own translational strategies; however, he also introduced new errors. These were already being identified and systematically addressed as early as the ninth century by Anastasius the Librarian in his critical revision of the translation (cf. Chiesa, 2001; Rovai in press), and continued to attract the attention of commentators throughout the 12th and 13th centuries.

Besides this, the inherent tension between faithfulness to the Greek source text and the structural limitations of the Latin language shaped Hilduin's translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. While both Greek and Latin are inflected languages, their syntactic structures cannot be directly mapped onto one another. Greek exhibits syntactic patterns that have no straightforward equivalent in Latin, which, although morphologically rich, tends to rely on more fixed syntactic conventions for clarity and rhythm. Hilduin's decision to reproduce Greek constructions too literally often resulted in Latin sentences that, while grammatically correct, appeared stylistically strained or opaque. As Lapidge (2017, 78) observes, this is particularly evident in his rendering of comparative constructions, where idiomatic Latin alternatives were bypassed in favour of calques that mirrored the Greek model, despite the availability of established Latin equivalents:

> *Subprema autem divinior aliarum sacrarum illuminacionum, de quibus facta est sola contemplatrix, splendidata perfectalem disciplinam* (*De Eccl. Hier*. III, XIV, p. 129).[13]

In this passage, the genitive *aliarum sacrarum illuminationum* accompanies the comparative *divinior*, functioning as a complement of comparison. However, this construction should not be viewed merely as a stylistic device aimed at achieving conciseness. If brevity alone were the objective, the ablative could have served just as well. Among the three comparative strategies available in Latin – *quam*, the ablative, and the genitive (the latter already attested in Classical usage; cf. Pinkster 2015, 733–734) – the genitive is the one most closely aligned with the Greek

[12]Translated: "But entirely turned towards the true Being, and perpetually participating in a sovereign, divine likeness, as much as it is possible for it to do so."

[13]Translated: "But the highest illumination, more divine than the other sacred illuminations, of which it alone has become the sole contemplator, has been made splendid by the perfect discipline".

model. Although the Greek source is not quoted in this specific instance, it is reasonable to assume that the construction in question was likewise in the genitive. This choice is thus best interpreted as a conscious translational strategy. As observed in the tradition of sacred translation since the Vulgate (cf. Bortolussi & Sznajder 2024), when several options exist in the target language, the one structurally closest to the original is often preferred. Such fidelity is not purely formal: it also carries theological and stylistic weight,[14] especially in texts that aspire to preserve the conceptual density and rhythm of the source. Another noteworthy translational feature in Hilduin's rendering of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is his tendency to reproduce syntactic constructions typical of Greek, even when they have no exact or idiomatic counterpart in Latin.

Another noteworthy translational choice made by Hilduin concerns Greek verbs that govern genitive complements, such as πληρόω ('to fill'). These are rendered in Latin using corresponding genitive constructions. In the original passage from Pseudo-Dionysius – τετελεσμένας δέ ὡσαύτως οὐχ ὡς ποικιλίας ἱερᾶς ἀναλυτικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἐλλαμπομένας, ἀλλ' ὡς πρώτης καὶ ὑπερεχούσης θεώσεως ἀποπληρουμένας κατὰ τὴν ὑπερτάτην ὡς ἐν ἀγγέλοις τῶν θεουργιῶν ἐπιστήμην[15] (CD, *De Coel. Hier*., VII, II, 16–18) – Hilduin renders the genitive phrase ὑπερεχούσης θεώσεως ἀποπληρουμένας as *prime ex superantis divinitates replete*[16] (Hild., *De Coel. Hier*., VII, II, p. 34), where an ablative – more typical in classical Latin – might have been expected. Rather than constituting a 'genitive of the object' in the strict sense, the construction is more accurately described as a 'genitive of content' (cf., e.g. πληρόω κρατῆρα οἴνου, 'I fill a krater with wine'). While Latin more frequently employs the ablative in such contexts, the genitive is also attested in Classical usage (cf. Pinkster 2015, 150). Its use here, therefore, may not have impeded comprehensibility for Latin readers and in fact reflects Hilduin's broader strategy of syntactic fidelity to the Greek source. The genitive participle *superantis* does not agree with the plural noun *divinitates*, which appears in the nominative or accusative rather than the expected genitive (*divinitatis*) or ablative (*divinitate*). The phrase thus stands as a revealing example of the broader tension between syntactic fidelity and grammatical coherence in early medieval translations of the Dionysian corpus.

[14]By employing the genitive instead of an explicit construction (e.g., *quam aliae sacrae illuminationes*), it imparts greater brevity and compactness to the discourse, mirroring a philosophical and theological style that seeks to condense complex concepts into precise and impactful formulations, as already done by other authors such as Augustine (e.g., *Conf*., XIII, 9, *Amor Dei ordinatior est amore rerum temporalium*; *De Doct. Christ*. I, 33, *Beatius est Deo frui quam uti eo*) and Boethius (e.g., *De Cons*. III, 9, *Maior est beatitudo mentis quam corporis*.).

[15]Translated: "And [they are] likewise perfected, not as being illuminated by a sacred analytical science of manifold character, but as being filled with the first and transcendent vision, according to the highest theurgical science, such as exists among the angels".

[16]Moreover, modern readings present an additional layer of difficulties and possible inconsistencies. On the one hand, the original Greek καὶ ὑπερεχούσης θεώσεως ἀποπληρουμένας has been rendered by Théry (1932b, 34) as *prime ex superantis divinitates replete*, whereas – on the other – Lapidge (2017, 78) used *exsuperantis divinitatis replete*. So, it seems that Lapidge corrected the *divinitates* as *divinitatis* and rendered Théry's version of *ex superantis* as *exsuperantis*. None of them – however – give any indication for these choices, especially considering that apparently Hilduin did not translate the conjunction καὶ in καὶ ὑπερεχούσης θεώσεως ἀποπληρουμένας (which has been correctly translated by Eriugena as *et supereminentis deificationis repletas*, P.L. 122, 1151, d16-17). It should also be noted that *divinitates* may well be not a true plural but simply the expected genitive singular *divinitatis* with the interchange of *e* for *i*, just as *replete* may stand for *repletae*. However, it is difficult to assess such hypothesis also given that Hilduin's work – as it was common in that period - is transmitted in a markedly unnormalised form (*e.g., perfecionem* for *perfectionem, perfeccionis* for *perfectionis, eterne* for *aeternae,* or *ierarchie* for *hierarchiae*).

3.1. The role of neologisms and calques

Beyond syntax, Hilduin faced other significant challenges in adapting the theological vocabulary of Pseudo-Dionysius to Latin. The Greek text has complex philosophical and theological terms, often lacking direct Latin equivalents. To address this, Hilduin demonstrated linguistic creativity, coining neologisms such as the univerbation *perfectoperacio* (inspired by τελεία ἐνέργεια, or 'perfect operation') and *uniordinem*[17] (to express 'divine unity'). Although these terms adhered to Latin word-formation principles, their novelty made them opaque to readers unfamiliar with the Greek conceptual framework. To convey Greek theological concepts, Hilduin coined numerous Latin neologisms. Terms such as *perfectoperacio*[18] (for τελεία ἐνέργεια) and *multiluminem*[19] (for πολύφωτον) reflect his attempt to encapsulate the original text's metaphysical depth. While some neologisms successfully captured the intended meaning, others introduced unnecessary complexity. For instance, *perfectalis*[20] was used to describe divine attributes, but its novelty and lack of precedent in Latin theological vocabulary made it difficult for readers to grasp its proper meaning. As a matter of facts, Hilduin employs the use of neologisms, a practice widely embraced within the classical literary tradition by authors such as Petronius. However, while Petronius did not have particular fame during the Middle Ages, his influence endured, often implicitly, as in the case of the *Coena Cypriani*,[21] whose principal model is – in fact – Petronius (Mosetti Casaretto 2006, 216–219). While Petronius' neologisms reflect the vibrant and multilingual milieu of his time – marked by linguistic hybridity, Greek–Latin interplay, and ironic subversion – his word formations are primarily playful and subversive, often flouting morphological norms for comic or grotesque effect.[22] In contrast, Hilduin operates in a fundamentally different register. His linguistic creativity is harnessed not for satire, but for theological and doctrinal authority as Hilduin crafts neologisms that adapt classical forms to Christian content. These coinages are not whimsical but deliberate, aiming to preserve semantic accuracy and convey metaphysical nuance. His language aspires to formality,

[17]Cf. *De Eccl. Hier*. III, III, pp. 117–118, *sicut uniordinem et ipsoperam collacionis sacre perfeccioni, ipsis imaginibus sicut multam et misticis perornacionibus et sacris sermonibus perordinaverunt* "just as they arranged the whole order and very work of the sacred collection for perfection, adorning it with many images, mystical embellishments, and sacred discourses".

[18]Cf. *perfectoperacione* in *De Eccl. Hier*. III, I, p. 94; IV, II, p. 114.

[19]Cf. *De Nom*. III, I, pp. 191–192; *Epist*. VI. 332.

[20]Cf. *De Coel. Hier*. III, III, p. 117.

[21]The anonymous work gained immense popularity during the Middle Ages, achieving such cultural and political significance that it was even recited during the coronation ceremony of the Carolingian Emperor Charles the Bald in 875. This event underscores the text's elevated status as not merely a literary piece but also as a symbol of imperial and ecclesiastical authority. Throughout the medieval period, numerous retellings and adaptations of the story emerged, attesting to its enduring resonance. Among the earliest and most renowned versions are those composed in the ninth century by John the Deacon and Rabanus Maurus, both prominent intellectuals of the Carolingian Renaissance. Their interpretations not only preserved the narrative but also contributed to its integration into the broader cultural and theological framework of the time, ensuring its influence across centuries (Bayless 1996, 215–216).

[22]As recently emphasised by Cotticelli-Kurras & Cotugno (2024), Petronius' skill is also evident in his manipulation of prefixes and suffixes. Consider *gaudimonium* (*Sat*. 61, 3), a term that conveys the notion of joy while mimicking the formal structure of words such as *matrimonium*, thus generating an effect that is simultaneously familiar and discordant. These examples clearly illustrate how Petronius exploits language to emphasise exaggeration and the diversity of Roman society, particularly in its lower classes and more marginalised settings.

using lexical innovation as a means to mediate between the classical heritage and the Christian present. Another distinctive feature is that Hilduin uses calques, translating Greek terms straight into Latin while retaining their structural and semantic peculiarities and using prefixes and suffixes to craft new theological terms, often with specific purposes. While this process may not be as immediately striking as Petronius's inventions, it demonstrates a sophisticated linguistic awareness. This approach produced phrases such as *principi deus* 'pertaining to the divine beginning; godly in origin', which, though innovative, required extensive commentary to be understood.

Especially in the *De Divinis Nominibus* and in the *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, we encounter peculiar formations such as the noun *principideus*, the adverb *sacridecenter* 'in a holy and fitting manner; with sacred propriety' (*De Eccl. Hier.* I, I, p. 76), and adjectives such as *pacimunerus* 'gift or offering of peace' (*De Div. Nom.* IV, XXI, p. 222), *deioperus* 'God's work; divinely wrought' (*De Eccl. Hier.* III, II, p. 96), *benignoperus* 'bringing forth kindness; graciously fruitful' (*De Div. Nom.* II, XI, p. 190) among others (cf. Stotz 1995, 101). These formations stand in marked contrast to the later translation by Eriugena, which largely eschews such morphologically bold constructions. Stotz (1995) considers that Hilduin's lexical innovations compel the Latin language to imitate the Greek with a level of ingenuity that borders on theatrical mimicry – as if Latin were cast in the role of reproducing foreign speech. Yet, this phenomenon should be assessed within its broader intellectual and theological context. The author of the pseudo-Dionysian corpus was widely regarded as a disciple of the Apostles, and the reverence accorded to his words likely contributed to the enduring replication of Hilduin's formulations. Over the centuries, and across vastly different linguistic circumstances, these expressions were preserved almost unchanged – a legacy of the *Vetus Latina* reflex, in which fidelity to sacred texts took precedence over linguistic naturalness.

This terminology illustrates how the practice of neoformations is broader and more complex than it might initially seem. It challenges the assumption that Hilduin resorted to neologisms merely to solve a translational problem. Instead, it reveals that his use of new formations was a far more conventional stylistic choice than one might initially assume. A clear distinction must be drawn between *ad hoc* linguistic formations, experimental in nature and unlikely ever to gain widespread acceptance, and those neologisms deliberately crafted to address practical linguistic needs, filling specific gaps in the Latin lexicon. Medieval Latin speakers and writers appear to have been particularly attuned to this distinction, displaying a nuanced linguistic sensitivity, even more so than when adopting Greek vocabulary directly. Terms such as *benignoperus* or *pacimunerus* had little realistic prospect of being used beyond their immediate textual contexts. The use of neologisms during the medieval period was, in fact, widespread and responded to a variety of linguistic and literary needs. This phenomenon can be observed in authors such as Bede and Albertus Magnus, whose coinages offer valuable insight into the system of Latin word formation, including derivational processes and composition. One striking example is given by Bede when he employs the term *hiemiplenium*,[23] demonstrating the necessity of translating terms from vernacular and everyday speech into written Latin (Stotz 1995). This brings us to

[23]Here, Bede takes a metalinguistic approach and refers to the month October *potest dici composito novo nomine "hiemiplenium"* ("it can be called by the newly coined name *hiemiplenium*"), where *hiemiplenium* stands for *Winterfilleth*. This indicates that Bede was fully aware that the new term did not stand on its own and required metalinguistic justification to be properly anchored in a proper meaning (cf. Stotz 1995, 103).

the distinction between merely utilising language and truly creating language, which was far more pronounced in the Middle Ages. The Latin word-formation system, including its derivational and compounding processes, together with inflectional paradigms, constituted a vast and diverse matrix in which language users navigated with uneven results.

Another area of lexical growth and neoformations in medieval Latin was driven by philosophical terminology. Expressions such as *Socratitas* ('Socratic nature') in Albertus Magnus are notable. Authors such as Albertus Magnus admit to using *ficta nomina* in a context where *ficta* does not merely mean that the word did not exist in antiquity. Instead, the term refers to the fact that the suffix *-tas* was applied to a noun rather than an adjective, as customary. These instances illustrate how medieval thinkers, even while stretching the boundaries of linguistic norms, remained keenly aware of the structural rules and limitations of Latin word formation. It should, therefore, be considered, at least in part, how Hilduin's neoformations fit into a much broader framework of lexical enrichment typical of the period. This practice did not merely affect the general vocabulary of Latin, but extended into the more complex domains of philosophical and literary expression. The coinages introduced in this context do not primarily enrich the everyday lexicon; rather, they contribute to the development of a specialised terminology and metalanguage capable of conveying abstract and speculative thought. In this sense, what is at stake is not linguistic ornamentation but the elaboration of a metalanguage adequate to the linguistic precision of the source. The challenges posed by Hilduin's translation can undoubtedly be traced, at least in part, to his command of Greek – a limitation he shared with other authors of the period who undertook similarly ambitious translational endeavours, including Scotus Eriugena himself.

3.2. The limits of translation: Greek syntax and Latin constraints

In examining Hilduin's translation of Greek texts into Latin, it becomes evident that his grasp of certain Greek syntactic features was incomplete, leading to both linguistic inconsistencies and a loss of nuance in the translation. Greek, with its complex and flexible syntax, posed significant challenges for translators like Hilduin, particularly when encountering structures and concepts that lacked direct Latin equivalents. Three primary areas of difficulty stand out: the Greek pronoun system, the use of ἄν in conditional clauses with the subjunctive, and the employment of the article τό with infinitives to create substantives.

One of the key difficulties Hilduin faced was understanding and translating the Greek pronoun αὐτός and its compounds. In Greek, αὐτός can serve a variety of functions, such as acting as an intensifier, emphasising a constituent, or carrying a reflexive meaning. Latin, however, lacks an equivalent that captures all these different functions. As a result, Hilduin either misinterpreted or omitted such uses, which occasionally disrupted the emphasis or clarity of the original Greek text. For instance, where αὐτός might highlight a particular subject in Greek, its absence in the Latin translation could weaken the intended focus or rhetorical effect.

As a matter of fact, αὐτός is frequently used in ancient Greek also in compounds, accounting for about four hundred occurrences (cf. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* - DELG,[24] I, 144); the number is even higher if we consider all the secondary derivations as well.

[24]Chantraine, Pierre. Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots. 4 vols. Paris: Klincksieck, 1968–1980. Supplément, 1999.

In this way, the omission of Hilduin to translate these specific aspects deprives the content of much of its depth and significance. In some cases, Hilduin even skips entire passages, leaving them out altogether:

For example, the original passage from the *Corpus Dionysiacum* shows elements that are not translated or poorly translated:

> ἀνθρώποις εἰπεῖν ἀμιγὴς μὲν ἐστιν ἁπάσης ἀνομοιότητος, πλήρης δὲ φωτὸς ἀϊδίου, τελεία καὶ ἀνενδεὴς ἁπάσης τελειότητος, καθαίρουσα καὶ φωτίζουσα καὶ τελεσιουργοῦσα, μᾶλλον δὲ κάθαρσις αὐτὴ καὶ φωτισμὸς καὶ τελείωσις, ὑπὲρ κάθαρσιν ὑπὲρ φῶς προτέλειος αὐτοτελεταρχία καὶ πάσης μὲν ἱεραρχίας αἰτία, παντὸς δὲ ἱεροῦ κατὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον ἐξηρρημένη (Ps-Dion., CD. *De Coel.* III, 2).[25]

> The translation offered by Hilduin: *Divina namque beatitudo, sicut est in hominibus dicere, inmixta quidem omni insimilitudine, repleta autem lucis eterne, et inindigens est omni perfectitate, purgans et illuminans et in perfecionem ducens immo; purgacio sacra, et illuminacio, et perfectitas, super purgacionem, et super illuminacionem, et primatum perfeccionis habens, omnisque ierarchie causa, omnive sacri secundum eminenciam inenarrabilem* (*De Coel. Hier*. III, 2, p. 21).[26]

Hilduin's translations simplify the metaphysical depth of the Greek original version. Greek terms like αὐτοτελεταρχία and προτέλειος are immersed in the Neoplatonic framework, emphasising not just superiority but also the nature of self-sufficiency, intrinsic fulfilment, and a dynamic process of completion. However, Hilduin's translation is incomplete, and the Latin terms, while accurate in a basic sense, do not fully preserve the original layered meanings, presenting a less nuanced interpretation of the original concepts. Théry (1932b, 21) argues that Hilduin did not translate the Greek term αὐτοτελεταρχία, but that he only translated προτέλειος. This is not entirely accurate. Hilduin translates the text but collapses προτέλειος and αὐτοτελεταρχία into a single concept, *primatum perfectionis habens*, blending them together and thereby losing much of the original meaning.

This translation reflects some aspects of the original meaning but also simplifies the richness of the Greek term. In Greek, αὐτοτελεταρχία is a compound word where αὐτο- refers to something autonomous or self-sufficient, and αὐτοτελεταρχία combines the ideas of τελετή (i.e. initiation, ritual, or completion) and ἀρχή (i.e. principle or authority). Together, the term conveys the profound concept of a 'self-sufficient and autonomous principle of perfection or completion.' In this way, Hilduin emphasises the idea of something that not only possesses perfection but generates and governs it independently, but the original complex and layered meaning is irremediably lost in translation.

[25]Translated: To speak in human terms, it is unmixed with all dissimilarity, full of eternal light, perfect and lacking in no perfection – purifying, illuminating, and perfecting. Indeed, it is purification itself, illumination, and perfection – beyond purification, beyond light, the primal perfection, the source of every hierarchy, and, by virtue of its surpassing excellence, set apart from all that is sacred.

[26]Translated: "For divine beatitude, as it is possible to express it in human terms, is indeed mingled with all dissimilarity, yet filled with eternal light, and in need of no perfection. Rather, it purifies, illumines, and leads to perfection; indeed, it is sacred purification, illumination, and perfection– surpassing purification, surpassing illumination, and possessing the pre-eminence of perfection. It is the cause of every hierarchy and of all that is sacred, according to an ineffable eminence."

In fact, while the Latin phrase conveys the idea of holding the highest rank in perfection, it does not capture the self-sufficiency and autonomous nature inherent in the Greek, as *primatum perfectionis habens*, is a much more generic concept. On the one hand, *primatum* points to 'primacy' or 'supremacy,' which conveys the sense of preeminence; on the other hand, *perfectionis* retains the idea of 'perfection' or 'completion'. When translating προτέλειος as *primatum*, the Latin translation conveys the idea of being 'foremost' or 'supreme,' but it loses the deeper nuance of τέλειος, meaning 'perfect' or 'complete' and signifying something that is not only first in rank but also prior in perfection and therefore intrinsically fulfilled. In this ways, when rendered as *primatum*, the Latin translation bears the idea of being 'foremost' or 'supreme', but it loses the deeper nuance of τέλειος, which implies an ontological completeness, and a hierarchical transcendence tightly tied to the concept of perfection.

Lapidge reports that Hilduin encounters significant difficulties with complex aspects of syntax, particularly when dealing with conditional clauses and hypothetical constructions, with special reference to the use of the particle ἄν with the subjunctive mood to express potential or hypothetical actions. In Greek, the use of ἄν creates a nuanced system of conditionality, allowing for various degrees of hypothetical or potential situations. Greek employs this particle to make the logical and rhetorical relationship between the action and its condition explicit, thereby underscoring the dependency and impossibility inherent in the statement. This syntactical structure has no direct equivalent in Latin, which instead relies on tense–mood combinations (such as the indicative and subjunctive) to convey similar nuances. The difference is not striking and we should not see such difference in terms of presence/absence as both languages possess this construction the syntactic structure is equivalent with only the morphological expression differing. Hilduin is able to recognise the differences, despite Théry's and Lapidge's strong criticisms on his command of Greek. They argued that several sentences are translated so literally as to become nearly unintelligible, and that ἄν is frequently left untranslated. However, this assessment warrants further scrutiny. While it is true that Hilduin occasionally fails to render ἄν explicitly, it is not entirely accurate to claim that he consistently omits its semantic function. Notably, Lapidge does not provide a sustained comparison with the Greek text to substantiate his view. By contrast, Théry (1932a, 116) acknowledges that Eriugena, Hilduin's successor, opts to translate ἄν using modal adverbs such as *forsan* and *fortassis*, signalling a more nuanced awareness of its conditional force. The claim that omitting ἄν results in a loss of emphasis may also be overstated: in both Greek and Latin, we are ultimately dealing with structurally comparable unreal conditional forms, expressed through different formal means.

The broader issue at stake is the clash of mature and codified philosophical metalanguage, especially when mediated by early medieval translational practices. These challenges become especially evident when examining specific passages. For instance, the original text of Pseudo-Dionysius in the *Epistles* (VIII, 4) reads as follows:

> «Ἐξέστη ὁ οὐρανός ἐπὶ τούτῳ» και ἔφριξα ἐγὼ καὶ διαπιστῶ ἐμαυτῷ. Καὶ εἰ μὴ τοῖς σοῖς ἐνέτυχον – ὡς οὐκ ὤφελον εὖ ἴσθι – γράμμασιν, οὐκ ἄν ἔπεισαν, εἴπερ ἄλλοι μέ τινες περί σου πείθειν ἠξίουν.[27]

[27]Translated: "The Heavens were astounded at this, and I myself shuddered and was at a loss. And if I had not come upon your writings – know this well – I would not have been persuaded, even if others had deemed it worthy to try to convince me about you".

The Greek particle ἄν is a conditional or modal particle often used to express contingency, potentiality or an *irrealis* mood. In the part οὐκ ἄν ἔπεισαν ('They would not have persuaded'), ἄν indicates an *irrealis* mood, expressing what would not happen under a given condition. Théry stated that Hilduin is incomprehensible here and that he translated verbatim, but he actually did not translate the particle ἄν with another particle (as Eriugena did, with *fortassin*), but he somehow captured the nature of ἄν with the translation *non satis fecissent michi umquam alii* ('Others would never have sufficed for me'):

> *Expavit celum in istud, et horrui ego, et non credo michi ipsi; et nisi tuis interpellarer, non utique te bene scire litteris, non satis fecissent michi umquam alii nec michi quicumque de te satis facere idonei essent* (Hild., *Epist*. VIII, 4, p. 327).[28]

The translation *non satis fecissent michi umquam alii* maintains the sense of something that could not happen unless the stated condition is met. In the original text, the particle ἄν is pivotal in conveying a counterfactual condition and οὐκ ἄν ἔπεισαν explicitly communicates that the action of persuasion could not have occurred unless a specific condition was met. By contrast, Hilduin's translation does not render ἄν with a direct equivalent. Instead, it relies on the subjunctive mood, as in *non satis fecissent*, to imply the counterfactual nature of the statement. The Latin subjunctive effectively conveys a hypothetical condition without requiring additional particles. This omission aligns with the conventions of Latin grammar, where counter-factuality is often embedded in verb forms rather than expressed through particles. Introducing explicitly a particle equivalent to ἄν, such as *forsitan* or *fortasse*, like Eriugena did, might have rendered the sentence awkward or excessively Greek in tone. Thus, the omission avoids unnecessary redundancy while preserving grammatical accuracy. However, omitting ἄν diminishes the rhetorical emphasis found in the Greek. The Greek particle not only signals the counterfactual condition but also intensifies the logical and rhetorical dependency of the action on the condition. In Latin, the *irrealis* sense is more implicit, requiring the reader to infer the same degree of contingency from the subjunctive construction alone. While the fundamental meaning remains intact, the force and precision of the Greek original are somehow attenuated in translation.

Loss of meaning during the translation process from one language to another is always inevitable. Lexical systems and frames of reference are not entirely congruent. The preservation of conceptual material depends heavily on the skill and decisions of the translator, as well as the competence of the reader, who must be capable of recovering implicit references – something we, while dealing with ancient texts, cannot always do fully. In translating Greek theological and philosophical concepts, Hilduin encountered a series of syntactic structures whose conceptual and grammatical underpinnings were sometimes difficult to replicate in Latin. One particularly problematic construction is the Greek use of the article τὸ with the infinitive to form abstract substantival expressions such as τὸ εἶναι, 'being' or 'existence'. The article isolates the verbal concept, reifying it and enabling it to function as a fully referential and logically autonomous noun. As Benveniste (1935, 171–175) and Fabrizio (2015, 410–412) observe, this use positions the infinitive at the intersection between verbal predication and nominal reference. Latin, lacking a grammatical article, cannot reproduce this morphologically and must instead rely on

[28]Translated: "The Heavens were terrified at this, and I myself trembled and do not trust myself; and if I had not been confronted by your writings, certainly no one else would ever have convinced me, nor would anyone have been capable of satisfying me concerning you".

circumlocution or derivational morphology (i.e. *nomina actionis*) to obtain the same degree of nominal determination.

Hilduin's standard practice is to omit τὸ, producing bare Latin infinitives that, while morphosyntactically nominal, often fail to convey the abstract, reified quality of their Greek counterparts. Nuchelmans (1991) notes the resulting semantic loss: deprived of the article, the Latin infinitive reverts to a propositional or eventive reading unless the surrounding context or an additional determiner secures its status as an abstract entity. This limitation does not reflect any inherent incapacity of the Latin infinitive *per se* – which, as Fabrizio (2015) stresses, was fully grammaticalised as the nominal form of the verb from an early period – but rather the absence of a determiner capable of marking the nominalised verb as a discrete conceptual object.

The problem is further complicated by the syntactic distribution of the Latin infinitive. Fabrizio (2015) has shown that in Latin the infinitive's occurrence in subject position is constrained to mono-argumental, non-agentive predicates, typically stative or transformative (e.g., *esse*, *videri*, *accidere*), and it is systematically excluded from constructions involving semantic control or high-agency roles.[29] This distribution, as Fabrizio (2015) interpret it, reflects a semantically-oriented alignment privileging *undergoer* roles (Dixon 1994; Van Valin & LaPolla 1997). Although marginal in the history of the Latin language, this configuration occurs in several other morphosyntactic phenomena repeatedly discussed by Cennamo (2009), Rovai (2005, 2007, 2012, 2014), and Fabrizio (2024). Such restrictions limit the infinitive's ability to operate as a general abstract noun outside a narrow set of syntactic environments, in marked contrast to the Greek τὸ + infinitive, which enjoys broad syntactic mobility.

Lapidge (2017, 79), while acknowledging Hilduin's difficulty in handling Greek syntax, merely observes that Hilduin "simply ignored the Greek article τὸ" and that this often left the Latin "nonsensical", particularly with εἶναι. His account, however, remains essentially descriptive and does not address the typological asymmetry or the translational consequences of article omission for the expression of abstract verbal concepts in Latin. A more diagnostic analysis must recognise that the asymmetry lies not in the existence of nominal infinitives – a category common to both languages – but in the grammatical means of signalling their nominality. Greek accomplishes this through the article, while Latin must resort to periphrasis or *nomina actionis*. Without such compensatory strategies, Hilduin's translations inevitably flatten distinctions that, in Greek, mark the boundary between process and concept.

These difficulties are not only linguistic but also educational. Hilduin's imperfect knowledge of Greek syntax, as Lapidge suggests, was perhaps compounded by the limited grammatical resources available to him. The *Ars minor*–based glossary preserved in Paris, BnF lat. 5285 (fols. 134r–135r), which lists Latin equivalents for Greek grammatical terms, makes no attempt to account for structures such as τὸ + infinitive. Nor is it likely that the *interpretes Graeci* mentioned in Carolingian sources were trained to recognise the semantic import of such constructions. The consequences are evident in Hilduin's translations, which consistently fail to register the syntactic and conceptual autonomy of substantivised infinitives, revealing the full extent of the linguistic and intellectual challenges posed by the Greek article in Latin translation.

[29]The origin of these constraints lies in the Indo-European system of *nomina actionis*, where, as noted by Benveniste (1935) and Kuryłowicz (1964), the verbal noun emerges not from the free reification of verbal processes but from their incorporation into lexicalised nominal paradigms. As such, the Latin infinitive lacks the grammatical autonomy of its Greek counterpart, which the article τὸ elevates to a conceptually independent category.

4. LINGUISTIC INNOVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It may seem difficult to identify linguistic innovations in a translation that, by most standards, would hardly qualify as a "good translation" due to its extreme literalism. However, the linguistic contributions of Hilduin are not rooted in the refinement of his translations but rather in their pioneering nature. Hilduin undertook the challenge of translating texts that were complex both in linguistic structure and content, initiating the process of transferring Greek philosophical and theological ideas into a Latin context. His efforts provided a foundational base upon which later medieval translators, such as John Scotus Eriugena, Sarrazin, and Robert Grosseteste, built more precise and accessible translations.

One of Hilduin's key contributions to the early medieval reception of Greek thought was his extensive use of lexical neologism, a practice characteristic of the Latin literary experimentation of the Carolingian period. Through these coinages, Hilduin sought to expand the semantic range of medieval Latin, creating words, expressions, and syntactic constructions capable of capturing the density and abstraction of Greek philosophical discourse. Although many of these innovations appear awkward or opaque, they nonetheless laid the terminological groundwork for later translators such as John Scotus Eriugena, who would build upon and refine these efforts with greater syntactic and philosophical precision.

As further confirmation of Hilduin's lexical influence, several of the compounds he coined reappear a century later in Liutprand of Cremona's *Antapodosis*[30] (Bougard 2015), indicating that his translations – despite their stylistic roughness – circulated widely and contributed to the shaping of a shared philosophical vocabulary within the Latin tradition. Hilduin's approach was groundbreaking in its literalism. While this produced Latin that was frequently obscure and far from fully intelligible, it successfully brought Greek philosophical and theological concepts into the medieval Latin vocabulary. This method, though rudimentary, represents an early form of cultural transmission between the Greek East and the Latin West. Certainly, his choices were influenced by his limited linguistic competence, but they were likely also shaped by deliberate translational decisions. Hilduin approached Greek philosophical terms with direct translations, avoiding efforts to adapt their meaning to the Latin cultural context. While this rendered the texts challenging for a Latin audience, it introduced new concepts that would later be developed further.

An illustrative example is the Greek term τὸ εἶναι ('being'), which Hilduin translated literally as *esse*. This translation, while simplified and stripped of the original term's metaphysical richness, paved the way for the inclusion of the concept of "being" in the Latin philosophical lexicon. Subsequent translators, such as Eriugena, built upon this foundation, using more nuanced terms like *essentia* or *esse ipsum*, enabling a more sophisticated engagement with Greek metaphysical thought.

Hilduin also adhered to the principle of maintaining the syntactic *ordo* of Greek, often translating Greek syntactic structures directly into Latin and preserving their original order, even when these constructions were not fully compatible with Latin conventions. A notable

[30]E.g., *inuiriliter* (*Ant.* II 48, 61; III 4, 8, 26; < *Eccl.hier.* VI 1: ἀνάνδρως), *uictorifer* (*Ant.* IV 24, 25; < *Eccl.hier.* VII 3: νικηφόρος), *multirumiger* (*Ant.* V 21; < *Diu.nom.* IV 28: πολυθρύλλητον) and probably as well *multisonus* and *insonus* (*Ant.* IV 26; < *Theol.myst.* I, 3: πολύφωνος; III: ἄφωνος) (Bougard 2015, 462 n. 147, 498 n. 110, 510 n. 78, 500 n. 132).

example is his translation of the Greek expression διὰ τὸ ζῆν ('because of living') as *propter vivere*. Here, the Greek substantivised infinitive is rendered as a Latin infinitive preceded by the preposition *propter*. Although the overall meaning remains clear, the construction appears artificial and unnatural to a Latin-speaking audience.[31] While sacrificing stylistic elegance and fluidity, this strategy reflects Hilduin's effort to preserve the Greek structure in translation and signals an early attempt to introduce Greek syntactic and conceptual constructs into medieval Latin.

Furthermore, Hilduin was crucial in incorporating fundamental Greek theological terms into the medieval Latin lexicon. He often retained the original root of Greek words, creating Latin equivalents that not only transmitted philosophical and theological concepts but also provided a foundation for further elaboration. A prominent example of Hilduin's lexical choices is the translation of the Greek term οὐσία ('essence' or 'substance') as *essentia*. While this rendering may appear straightforward and is in fact not original to Hilduin – *essentia* is already attested in Quintilian (*Inst. orat.* III 6, 23) – its continued use in this context is far from trivial. By incorporating such terms into the lexicon of theological translation, Hilduin contributed to the terminological stabilisation and continuity throughout the Middle Ages, allowing later scholastic thinkers – most notably Thomas Aquinas – to further refine the metaphysical implications of *essentia*, integrating it into a systematic ontology that articulated distinctions between substance, being, and essence. In this sense, Hilduin's work participates in a broader process of lexical sedimentation, whereby early translations, even when not innovative in form, shaped the conditions of possibility for the philosophical elaborations of the high and late Middle Ages.

Hilduin's contributions, therefore, went beyond the mere transfer of terminology from Greek to Latin; they established an intellectual and linguistic space where these concepts could thrive and enrich Western thought. His translation work, despite its limitations, exemplifies the challenges and opportunities of early medieval cultural and linguistic mediation, paving the way for future developments in scholastic and theological discourse. Hilduin's work must be understood in its broader historical and cultural context. The Carolingian Renaissance was a time of intense intellectual ambition, marked by efforts to recover and integrate classical and patristic learning into a unified Christian worldview. Hilduin's translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was part of this larger project, reflecting the Frankish court's aspiration to align itself with the intellectual and spiritual legacy of early Christianity. His identification of the Areopagite with Saint-Denis of

[31] Although this construction - developed under Greek influence - never became a normative feature of Latin, it is nevertheless attested in late Vulgar Latin and survives in the Romance languages. Cf. Väänänen (1981, 139): "One also finds the infinitive preceded by the preposition *ad*: *Itala* John 6:52 (Vercelli codex) *dare ad manducare*, a construction created either under the influence of Greek or by the contamination of the two competing turns of phrase *aggredior dicere* and *aggredior ad dicendum* (Bourciez §120; Ernout–Thomas §280); cf. French *donner à boire*, Italian *dare a bere*, etc." ("On trouve aussi l'infinitif précédé de la préposition ad: Itala Ioh. 6, 52 (cod. Verc.) *dare ad manducare*, construction créée soit sous l'influence du grec, soit par la contamination des deux tours concurrents *aggredior dicere et aggredior ad dicendum* (Bourciez, §120; Ernout–Thomas, §280); cf. Fr. *donner à boire*, It. *dare a bere,* etc.") In Italian, however, the form *dare a bere* eventually ceased to be productive and survived only as a crystallized idiom. From this perspective, Väänänen's examples, in which the infinitive is preceded by *ad*, should be understood as possible extension of the argumental use of the infinitive, either in a strictly argumental position (as with verbs of motion towards a goal) or in a pseudo-argumental role comparable to that of an indirect object. However, this is not equivalent to the case of propter, which is used adverbially with circumstantial force. In fact, the cases with propter available in Hilduin may represent an extension of this pattern, but syntactically they are not the same of those quoted by Väänänen.

Paris further exemplifies his work's political and cultural dimensions, as it sought to elevate the status of the Abbey of Saint-Denis as a spiritual and intellectual centre within the Carolingian Empire.

Hilduin's contributions to the Western intellectual tradition must be recognised for their immediate impact and enduring influence on the development of medieval theology and linguistic practice. His translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* stands as evidence of the challenges and opportunities of cultural and linguistic mediation in the early medieval period, highlighting the complexities of bridging different worlds and cultures while preserving the integrity of their respective traditions. Though his translations may sometimes appear rudimentary and obscure, they represent a crucial step in the ongoing dialogue between the Greek East and the Latin West – a dialogue that would shape the course of Western thought for centuries to come.

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I am also sincerely grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their perceptive suggestions and constructive criticisms, which have improved this article in both substance and clarity. *Gratias ago iudicibus invisibilibus, qui tam argute quam clementer censuerunt – nec mihi noti, sed certe notabiles.* Needless to say, all remaining errors and infelicities are entirely my own. All translations from Latin and Greek are my own, unless otherwise specified. They aim to remain as faithful as possible to the original texts, while ensuring clarity and readability in English. The present paper was prepared within the framework of the HORIZON-ERC-2022-ADG project no. 101098102 Digital Latin Dialectology (DiLaDi): Tracing Linguistic Variation in the Light of Ancient and Early Medieval Sources Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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