Summary

In the study rooms of the States Translators
The creation of the New Testament of the States Translation

The Synod of Dort and the role of the State are mentioned in the many publications about the history of the States Translation. However, there is relatively little information available about what took place in the study rooms in Leiden. As far as the New Testament is concerned, this process will be described here with the purpose of explaining the translation choices of the States Translators.

In 1628 the States Translators decided how they would deal with orthographic matters in the so-called Resolutiën, but they did not always follow the rules they established. Their translation of the New Testament was nevertheless orthographically more consistent than the older Dutch Bible translations. This is in line with the tendency of the early modern time to agree gradually on a uniform orthography, which resulted in the Ravesteijn edition (1657) being even more consistent.

During the translation process, orthography remained an important issue, as is evidenced by the fact that Hommius was specially appointed to check the language use. Thus, in contrast to the current historiography, Hommius and his colleagues did not make an individual translation, which afterwards would be made to one translation of the whole team. The States Translators instead followed the advice of the Synod of Dort to go successively through the New Testament. Rolandus made the first concept of the translation of the whole New Testament (except for some chapters at the beginning of Luke). Walaeus checked whether this translation was in accordance with the source text and other already existing Bible translations. Due to this methodology, the first draft of the translation contains many alternative translations of the New Testament. In August 1629 this draft was completed. At that time the annotation phase began. At that point the States Translators also started to decide how the translation should be. This translation was checked by Hommius.

Thus, during the first one and a half years Rolandus and Walaeus worked together. Both sought to follow the Deux-Aesbible as much as possible because this was an authoritative Bible for the Reformed church members. The work of the States Translators could therefore be considered a revision of the Deux-Aesbible, which they evaluated on faithfulness and transparency. Their manner to make a literal translation differed in the sense that Rolandus wanted of making a concordant translation and Walaeus tried to show the Greek morphology in his translation choices. Walaeus became in that way the learned mentor of Rolandus.

Due to the fact that Walaeus had a key position in the translation process, his morphological way of translating became the most important translation principle in the text of the States Translation. In the eyes of the States Translators, the concordant way of translating was a bit less important and they did not find it at all necessary to represent in translation the word order and the word count of the source text. The States Translators also avoided the use of neologisms and words which were not typically Dutch. They tried to use the target language in a functional way in their translations of participles. Similar to the way in which the government communicated, they used Dutch participles especially in passages about holy things.


The final product of the States Translators was not a wholly new text. It was rather a final redaction and standardization at the end of a long history of Protestant Bible translations. The sentence structure was based on the Deux-Aesbible, the translation of Beza and the Liesveltbible. The translation of Utenhove, Faukelius and Piscator proved to be a good source for the States Translators when they came across difficult and unique words. Dictionaries (of Pasor), concordances and text-critical books were seldom used by the States Translators.

The States Translators also read the Bible translations of the Catholics and the Anabaptists, because they criticized the Vulgate. Comparing the States Translation with these Bible translations, we can see that the States Translators expressed their Reformed thoughts not only in their annotations, but in their translation as well. The Reformed view of man, the Lord’s Supper, baptism and predestination could be seen in every aspect of the text. The States Translation is also a book that represents the thoughts of the seventeenth century through a geocentric world view and an ordering of nature as a *scala naturae*.

The text of the States Translation was also influenced by events that happened during the translation process. For instance, in 1632 Rolandus died and from that time on (which means from the beginning of 2 Corinthians in the second phase of the translation process) Walaeus no longer followed Rolandus’ first draft anymore in the same way that he had before. Further, due to time pressure and the fact that the colleagues who translated the Old Testament had started earlier, the translators of the Old Testament (to help the translators of the New Testament) became the authors of the final translation and the annotations of Judas and Revelation.

In 1634 the revisers came to Leiden. According to the Acta of the Synod of Dort they should make the final decisions about the new translation. However, as Hommius and Walaeus were older than most of the revisers, they were in fact the ones who decided which corrections were accepted. Time pressure limited the influence of the revisers even more. Due to an outbreak of the plague in August 1635, the team of revisers and States Translators worked even quicker from that time on (when they revised Revelation).

This knowledge about the history of the New Testament of the States Translation makes it possible to better understand the choices of the States Translators. A comparison of the States Translation with the Deux-Aesbible and other Bible translations reveals linguistic, translation-historical, bibliographical, theological and historical motives that explain specific translation choices of the States Translators of the New Testament. Those motives do not exclude each other. For example, to understand why the States Translators in Luke 6:39 chose the word ‘gracht’ (canal) in the parable of the blind, we could cite bibliographical and historical reasons, for in German and Latin Bible translations we see a word which means *hole*. The use of the word ‘gracht’ is thus geographically determined. Therefore, the use of ‘gracht’ could reasonably be explained by the historical circumstance that the States Translators did their work near the canals in Leiden.