

A RAMIST TRANSLATION OF EURIPIDES

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An interlinear manuscript Latin translation of Euripides' *Hecuba* signed by Nicolaus Nancelius (Nicolas de Nancel), pupil, secretary, and biographer of Peter Ramus, and identified by Nancel as dictated by his *praeceptor*, has recently been acquired by the Pius XII Memorial Library at Saint Louis University.* This constitutes a unique item in the Ramist canon, utterly new and, so far as I can ascertain, not even suspected to be in existence by anyone since Ramus' own day.

Physical description. — The translation is written into a very well preserved copy of a Paris printed edition of the Greek text of the play published by Vascosanus in 1552, four years after Nancel entered Ramus' Collège de Presles at the University of Paris and two years before he received his degree of master of arts (at the age of fifteen!). The following is a description of the printed copy:

Title: ΕΥΡΥΠΙΔΟΥ/ ΕΚΑΒΗ/ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΙΣ ΗΕCΥΒΑ./ΛΥΤΕΤΙΑΕ/
Apud Vascosanum, uia Iacobaea./ M. D. LII.

Colophon: None.

Format and Collation: Octavo: a-d⁸, e⁴; 36 leaves, the last blank.

Signed leaves: a2-4, b1-4, c1-4, d1-4, e1-2; other leaves unsigned.

Leaves [b7]-[b8], [d5]-[d6], and [d7]-[d8] are at present uncut along the fore edges; leaves [b5]-[b6] give evidence of having been in the same condition, their fore edges being slit apart with resulting roughness; all other leaves in the book are trimmed cleanly with a paper cutter, which missed the eight foregoing leaves because their fore edges lie farther back than the edges of the other leaves. Gatherings a, c, and d are folded so that the watermark shows near the gutter margin at top of leaf 5; gathering b, so that the watermark shows near the gutter margin at top of leaf 6. Leaves trimmed to 11.4 x 16.8 (gutter edges)/17.0 cm. (fore edges).

* The discovery of this manuscript in France was made incidentally possible by a travel grant for more extensive work from the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society, for which the present author is grateful.

¹ Fl. 1300, pupil of Maximus Planudes and nephew of an archbishop of Crete. See John Edwin Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, Vol. I: *From the Sixth Century B. C. to the End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1903), p. 419; cf. Deno John Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 23, 220, 286-88.

² Fl. 1300, secretary to Andronicus II (1282-1328). See Sandys, *loc. cit.*; cf. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 218-20, 292.

Foliation: Leaves
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The fact that the work was done on flat sheets hints that the translation was probably undertaken as a unitary piece of work to be seen through to completion, and that it was not a casual or desultory growth. The business-like attention which the translation and notes as well as the handwriting itself evince conveys the same impression.

In the same hand as the translation and notes, the following Latin inscription (to which my translation is here added) is written on leaf [e3^r]:

Sum Nicolai Nancelii Praelei Bursarii, et amicorum.

Σὺν Θεῷ

Habes, amice, praeceptoris dictata fideliter excerpta, et labore nostro quam fieri potuit, accuratissime descripta, exercitationisque nostrae in thematibus verborum et originibus nominum pervestigandis, fructum haud iniucundum: Utere igitur nostris laboribus non ingratus.

Detur scriptori post mortem gloria Christi.

This is followed on leaf [e4^v] by this inscription, also in the same hand:

Nic. Nancelius me habet.

Ἀρχὴ τῆς σοφίας, φόβος
τοῦ Κυρίου.

Μόνῳ τῷ θεῷ βελτίστῳ
καὶ μεγίστῳ δόξα.

Soli Deo optimo & maximo gloria.

N. Nancelius.

Comparison with holograph manuscripts of works by Nancel in the Bibliothèque Nationale⁴ leaves no doubt that the present

I belong to Nicolas de Nancel, Bursar of the Collège de Presles, and to friends of his.

With God.³

Friend, you have here what was dictated by the preceptor, faithfully and accurately written out so far as possible, together with the not unpleasing fruit of our efforts in running down the roots of verbs and the origins of nouns. Make use of our labors therefore not without gratitude.

May the glory of Christ be granted the writer after death.

Nicolas de Nancel owns me.

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

Praise to the one God, the noblest and greatest.

Praise to the one God, the noblest and greatest.

N. de Nancel.

³ The first word of this line of Greek is neatly written, but the forms of letters after the sigma are puzzling. This appears, however, a pretty sure reading. For help with this and other problems the author is grateful to Professors Chauncey E. Finch and William C. Korfmacher of the Department of Classical Languages at Saint Louis University, and to Miss Catherine Weidle, Rare Books Librarian in the Saint Louis Room of the Pius XII Memorial Library at Saint Louis University.

⁴ These manuscripts include: MS Lat. 7086, "Nic. Nancelii Trachyeni

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handwriting is Nancel's, neat, highly adaptable, becoming larger or more miniscule (often smaller than agate type) in accord with the space available, essentially following the model of roman type, but growing more and more cursive at times. The present manuscript, however, never becomes quite so cursive as some of those in the Bibliothèque Nationale, some of which are medical treatises and thus belong to Nancel's later life.

Ramus and Nancel.—Much of what is known of Nicolas de Nancel is gathered from his Latin *Life of Peter Ramus*, although there are other incidental sources, including his other published works.⁵ Nancel was born in 1539 in Nancel, a tiny village between Noyons and Soissons not far from Ramus' own birthplace in the village of Cuts (in the sixteenth century spelt in many other fascinating ways, including "Qwts"). Individual colleges at the University of Paris, as at other universities, tended to serve students coming from the same geographical areas, and it was no accident that when Nicolas went up to the University in 1548 he was taken into the Collège de Presles. Here Peter Ramus (Pierre de la Ramée, 1515-72), the new principal, some

Noviodunensis, olim apud Turones medici, De peste tractatus amplissimus . . . , Editio secunda . . . ,” sm. fol., 287 ll.; MS Lat. 8473, “Nic. Nancelii Trachyeni Noviodunensis . . . medici Sacrae poeseos Liber septimus. Salomonis proverbialia,” sm. 4to, 62 ll.; MS Lat. 8474, “Nic. Nancelii . . . Liber octavus. Sapientia Salomonis,” sm. 4to, 48 ll.; also MSS Lat. 7460, 8475, 8476, 8477, 8478, 8479, 8480.

⁵ See Nicolaus Nancelius, *Petri Rami Veromandui, eloquentiae et philosophiae apud Parisios professoris regii vita, a Nic[olao] Nancelio Trachyeno Noviodunensi Rami discipulo et populari descripta* (Parisiis: Claudius Morellus, 1599), with this foregoing title page and its own separate pagination in Nancel's *Declamationum liber, eas complectens orationes quas vel ipse iuvenis habuit ad populum vel per discipulos recitavit . . . ; addita est P. Rami, summi oratoris, vita, ab eodem Nancelio eius discipula conscripta . . .* (Parisiis: Claudius Morellus, 1600) — microfilm of Bibliothèque Nationale copy (X. 18084) in the Pius XII Memorial Library, Saint Louis University. The only copies of this work I know are in the Bibliothèque Nationale (2 copies), the Bodleian Library, Marsh's Library in Dublin, and the University of Aberdeen (but this last copy could not be located some years ago when I was in Aberdeen). The first part of Nancel's life of Ramus has been translated (with Latin text on opposing pages) in an unpublished master of arts thesis (1958) at Saint Louis University, *Nicolai Nancelii Petri Rami vita, Translated with Introduction and Notes*, by Martin James Bredeck, S. J. For further discussion of Nancel and his work see also Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 17-26, etc., and references there cited. Details concerning Nancel in the present article are chiefly from these sources.

twenty-four years Nancel's senior, was making a name for himself as scholar and teacher. Moving from the much smaller Collège de l'Ave Maria, where he had attained notoriety in 1543 with the publication of his two spectacularly oratorical anti-Aristotelian works, Ramus had come to the Collège de Presles in 1545, shortly thereafter becoming its head.

Nicolas' tender age — nine years — upon his entrance at Presles showed no extraordinary precocity, since students could do even their elementary schooling at the University under one of the masters (with their numerous assistants). His achievement of his master's degree at the age of fifteen, however, showed at least high intelligence and intense application, since the age of eighteen or twenty was more usual. But this achievement was also a tribute to his master, Ramus, whose incontestable competence as an educator was the product of a simple recipe: a highly schematized "logical" organization of the curriculum subjects (according to what Ramus called "method") plus hard work, to which Ramus' students were inspired by the example of their master as well as by the physical punishments usual at the time, which, Nancel dutifully reports, Ramus administered savagely but always without swearing.⁶

Nancel himself early won Ramus' esteem and affection and began some work officially as teacher at Presles immediately after receiving his master's degree, despite earlier Paris statutes forbidding masters to engage in teaching before they had reached the age of twenty. In his eighteenth year (that is, the year before his eighteenth birthday) he was given a "chair" of Greek at Presles — this would have been around 1557. In 1562 he migrated to the University at Douai to teach Greek and Latin there, but soon returned to Presles to complete some twenty years of service under and with Ramus. Not long after this return he left Ramus for the study of medicine, which he subsequently practiced from about 1568 until his death in 1610. His marriage to the wealthy widow of another physician gave him the means and the leisure in the latter part of his life for continued study and writing.

Since the present translation cannot have been made before 1552, it fits well into the known pattern of both Nancel's and Ramus' careers. Nancel says that in 1548 Ramus was busy learning Greek declensions and simultaneously lecturing on the

⁶ Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, pp. 29-35, 230-269.

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¹¹ "Tum ope lexi
pp. 32, 25.

¹² Nancel, *Petri*

¹³ Walter J. On
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subject⁷ — like many another European humanist, Ramus was learning and teaching Greek at the same time, for the supply of teachers was short and, by and large, never in Western Europe were the standards for competence in Greek on the part of teacher or pupil even remotely comparable to those for Latin. Nancel also reports the community of young scholars (especially mathematicians) working under and with Ramus at Presles and his own close collaboration in preparing Ramus' works for publication.⁸ One gathers that Nancel's own knowledge of Greek did not lag far behind that of his master, for he translated (into Latin, of course) a number of Greek mathematicians for Ramus' use: Pappa's commentary on the works of Euclid, Theodosius, Autolycus, Aristarchus, Hero, Proclus on the first six books of Euclid, and others "whose names I cannot quite recall now."⁹ All these translations of works which Nancel says had never been done into Latin before remained unpublished when Ramus was brutally murdered during the St. Bartholomew Day's massacre¹⁰ (on August 26, for the Massacre ran on for several days). Nancel leaves us in the dark, however, regarding translations he might have made of Greek authors other than mathematicians. He notes that Ramus came to Greek late, but that "with a lexicon and the help of consultants" he did manage to translate the *Letters of Plato* into Latin and to lecture on some of the *Dialogues* of Plato which had been previously studied in the Collège de Presles ("at home" — *domi*).¹¹ Several persons coached Ramus in Greek, including a Ioannes Baugerius (whom I have been unable to identify), and as Ramus studied the language Nancel himself helped him by reciting the Latin from the opposite pages while Ramus followed the Greek text, chiefly Plato and Aristotle, who were almost the only authors except perhaps Demosthenes on whom Ramus lectured.¹² Nancel fails to mention by name Ramus' posthumously published (1601) translation of Aristotle's *Politics*.¹³ The Greek poets (*poetae*), Nancel says, so far as he

⁷ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 25.

⁸ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, pp. 25-26.

⁹ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 30.

¹⁰ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, pp. 29-31.

¹¹ "Tum ope lexicum tum operi submonitorum" — Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, pp. 32, 25.

¹² Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, pp. 25, 32.

¹³ Walter J. Ong, *Ramus and Talon Inventory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 396 (No. 642).

himself knew, Ramus never touched, but Nancel does not mention dramatists specifically.¹⁴

Nancel unfolds a clear picture here. Surrounded by groups of persons interested in Greek, Ramus lived in the midst of a flurry of translation activity, much of it concerned with providing Latin texts for previously untranslated Greek works. Most of the translations, for reasons not clear, remained unpublished at Ramus' death, but not all. Among those which were published, the young Jean Péna's 1557 editions, with Latin translations, of Euclid's treatises on *Optics* and *Catoptrics* and on *The Rudiments of Music* should be mentioned.¹⁵ Péna (1531-57) was another of Ramus' most talented pupils, whose special competence in mathematics, greater than Nancel's, earned him the Regius Professorship of Mathematics before his death at the age of only twenty-six. Ramus' own translation of Aristotle's *Politics* may conceivably belong to a somewhat later period, since it was published only posthumously, but it could very well be a manuscript from this same period in the 1550's which was recovered to find its way into one posthumous edition (1601). The preface, "Typographus lectori benigno," says the manuscript was "found among his [Ramus'] working papers and conveyed to me by an individual patron."¹⁶

In all this translation work, there was a great deal of collaboration, for there is ample evidence that Ramus' better pupils, like those of many other Renaissance savants, worked with him as a team. Nancel has elaborated elsewhere in his *Life of Peter Ramus*

¹⁴ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 32.

¹⁵ ΕΥΚΛΕΙΔΟΥ ὈΠΤΙΚΑ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΤΟΠΤΡΙΚΑ. *Euclidis Optica et Catoptrica, nunquam antehac Graece aedita. Eadem Latine reddita per Ioannem Penam Regium Mathematicum. His praeposita est eiusdem Ioannis Penae de usu optices praefatio . . .* (Parisiis: apud Andream Wechelium, 1557); ΕΥΚΛΕΙΔΟΥ ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ ἈΡΜΟΝΙΚΗ . . . *Euclidis Rudimenta musices. Eiusdem sectio regulae harmonicae. E Regia Bibliotheca desumpta, ac nunc primum Graecè et Latine excusa Ioanne Pena Regio Mathematico interprete . . .* (Parisiis: apud Andream Wechelium, 1557)—copies in the Pius XII Memorial Library at Saint Louis University. Péna also translated into Latin Theodosius of Tripoli's *Three Books on the Sphere—Sphaericorum libri tres . . .* (Paris, 1558.)

¹⁶ ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΟΥ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ΤΑ ΕΥΡΙΣΚΟΜΕΝΑ. *Aristotelis Politica, a Petro Ramo Regio Professore Latina facta, et dialecticis rerum summis breviter exposita et illustrata . . .* (Francofurti: typis Wechelianis apud Claudium Marnium et heredes Io[annis] Aubrii, 1601), fol.A2r-v.

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¹⁷ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 32.

¹⁸ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 32.

¹⁹ Ong, *Ramus, Marnium et heredes Io[annis] Aubrii, 1601*, p. 1.

²⁰ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 32.

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his own close collaboration and that of Omer Talon (Audomarus Talaeus) with Ramus.¹⁷ In this *Life*, Nancel addresses the prefatory letter to Ramus' former pupils as a group. An *esprit de corps* evidently existed at Presles and survived into adult years.

Ramus was, in effect, running a translation factory comparable to the picture factories of Renaissance painters, assembling both workers and materials. In the edition of Euclid's *Optics* and *Catoptrics* just mentioned, Péna's preface to Charles de Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine, identifies Ramus as the collector of the Greek manuscripts on which his edition and translation was based. Nancel states that Ramus had many manuscripts which had been sent him from the Vatican Library and from Fontainebleau.¹⁸

Nothing shows better than this translation effort the ambivalence of the Western European humanists' and of Ramus' own commitment to Greek. Even in the process of learning Greek and promoting its study, Western humanists spent a great part of their energies in converting whatever the Greek had to offer, so far as possible, into the Latin with which they remained on the whole infinitely more familiar.

The fact that in treating this flurry of translation activity Nancel makes no mention of the present translation of Euripides' *Hecuba*, which is certainly part of the flurry, is puzzling at first blush, but on reflection is really not surprising. He does not pretend to give a complete tally of translations by Ramus or anyone else, as has been seen, expressly noting that his recollection is incomplete. At least one other important translation by Ramus himself, since made known, escaped Nancel's notice, namely, the *Politics* of Aristotle, as mentioned above.

Despite Ramus' later abolition of student plays at the Collège de Presles,¹⁹ he had gone through a period of at least token interest in the theater. Nancel reports that when he first came to Presles he acceded to the current Parisian interest in college drama, favoring classical tragedy and comedy over other performances, and even acted as chorus master (*choragus*) in the theater.²⁰ But Nancel here mentions nothing about the *Hecuba*.

¹⁷ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, pp. 40-41, 17-18, etc. See Ong, *Ramus and Talon Inventory*, pp. 82-85.

¹⁸ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, p. 287; Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 15.

²⁰ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 15.

One gets the impression that Ramus' temporary interest in drama was rather reluctant. He was not highly sympathetic to products of the creative imagination, and his lectures on poetry, as Nancel is careful to report, were not always well received.²¹

Provenience of This Translation. — What, then, in sum, were Nancel's and Ramus' own roles in the present translation? Nancel's is fairly clear. Despite the statement that the book belongs to "Nicolas Nancel and friends of his" and the references to "our" efforts and "our" labors, it appears that, whatever the incidental contributions of others (perhaps in running down any of the hundreds of references detailed in the notes), the final product was completely under Nancel's own control. Every bit of writing appears to be in the same hand, and there can be little doubt that Nancel would have under the circumstances made the work of others his own by editing out or adding whatever he thought advisable in making up this holograph.

Ramus' role appears less clear, and greater clarification must await a more lengthy and painstaking study than this present preliminary report. On the one hand, we have Nancel's statement, already mentioned, that Ramus did not touch (*non attigit*) the Greek "poets" (*poetas*), so far as Nancel himself was aware. This seems to preclude Ramus' having been the *praeceptor* who dictated this translation of the *Hecuba*, even though we know that he went through a period of active interest in the production of classical tragedy.

On the other hand, everything favors the presumption that when Nancel refers to his *praeceptor* without qualification he would most likely mean Ramus. In his letter to all of Ramus' former students which introduces his *Life of Peter Ramus*, he uses *praeceptor* over and over again, synonymously with *magister*, and even rather more frequently than *magister* when he is speaking of the need to honor teachers (*praeceptores*) such as Ramus and citing classical authority to make his point.²² After Ramus, Talon would be the most likely person to whom the unqualified term *praeceptor* might refer. Nancel states that he was Talon's pupil (*auditor*) for several years.²³ Talon was working on Greek conjointly with Ramus, and was perhaps more skilled in it at an early date than Ramus was. His "plain style"

²¹ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, pp. 22-23, 32; Ong, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue*, p. 33.

²² Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, pp. 3-6.

²³ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 40.

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Latin translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge* appeared in print in 1547.²⁴ But, so far as I know, Nancel makes no mention of working on Greek specifically with Talon, and he makes a great deal of his collaboration with Ramus.

What makes it less than certain that Ramus was the one who dictated this translation is the presence at the Collège de Presles of various others engaged in Greek translation work and even, as in the case of Ioannes Baugerus, in helping Ramus himself to learn Greek. One of these others just may have helped Nancel, too, and produced this translation in the process. But Nancel gives the unmistakable impression throughout his *Life of Peter Ramus* that Ramus was the one from whom he learned and with whom he did exactly the kind of work which this translation represents.

Moreover, the 1552 date of the edition of the *Hecuba* accords perfectly with the years when Ramus was applying himself to Greek authors. It might be that when Nancel says Ramus did not "touch" the Greek poets, he had in mind chiefly that Ramus did not lecture on them or teach them; or he might have been thinking of Homer and perhaps lyric poets rather than the dramatists. Conceivably, Euripides' *Hecuba* might have been, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, a work which Ramus thought of lecturing on, worked at, but decided not to take up in public.

In the last analysis, the exact relationship of the present translation to Ramus himself remains for the moment unresolved. Final arguments for or against Ramus as translator will have to take into account his competence in Greek, which appears to have been not of the first order, and will have to examine the sensitivity of the present Latin rendition of the Greek text, or its lack of sensitivity. This will entail close work with the present manuscript.

There is, however, no doubt that the manuscript is the product of the Greek translation activity initiated and supported by Ramus at his Collège de Presles. It was dictated by one of the community of scholars at Presles, very possibly by Ramus himself, and taken down by Nancel, who also probably edited it in part and certainly annotated it, possibly with some assistance from others. The manuscript was perhaps destined for eventual, or even immediate, publication, which was, however, apparently never realized.

²⁴ Ong, *Ramus and Talon Inventory*, pp. 465-68 (Nos. 734-737).

It is also entirely possible that this present copy of the *Hecuba* with its interlinear Latin translation was one of the books Nancel had in mind when he says that he had left many of his early literary productions with Ramus only to lose all track of them when Ramus' valuable library was dispersed by plunderers at the time of Ramus' murder.²⁵ In any event, it would appear that nothing more closely associated with Ramus personally has been discovered in recent years.

²⁵ Nancel, *Petri Rami . . . vita*, p. 30.