Nów a while you’ve wàndered a wider plain so
pùt off, stéady Êrato, this heróic
stúff for nów and shift the enórmous lábour
into a lów gear.

You, the band’s lead lyricist, Pindar, let me 5
borrow (just a moment) a new poétic
pick, if I a Látian song to Thebes have
ever devoted.

Trying to, for Maximus, pare down poems,
now I have to weave out of úncut myrtle
crowns; I grow more parched and a purer stream now
has to be sipped from.

When to charming Látium shall the mountains
send you back, Dalmátià, where pásty dìggers
faint-faced, dug down halfway to Hades, surface 15
stained by their gold-ore?

Take me, born a couple of countries closer,
still my laid-back Baìae with pleasant port can’t
keep me nor the trumpeter’s cape well-known through
combat with Hector. 20

Our Carménas dawdle without you, even
Thymbra’s ruler, later than usual, comes and
my Achilles look how he stalls before he
reaches the first turns!
Discussion

It would be tough to find a sterner challenge than translating Aeolic metres into English verse! It is perhaps telling that, to the best of my knowledge, only one verse translation of this poem has been undertaken and even then Nagle opted for an easier metre! However, a quick look at couple of prose translations (Coleman’s and Shackleton Bailey’s) showed—to my surprise!—that the syllable-counts almost match up with the Latin. This motivated me to do Nagle one better and bring the Sapphic stanzas over intact.

Unfortunately English is not equipped to deal with rows of ‘long’ (stressed) syllables, like those that occur at syllables 3, 4 and 5 of the Latin Sapphic:

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
  - u  -  -  u  u  - u  x
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So I have had to recourse to the standard (very trochaic) English version:

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
  - u  -  u  u  - u  x
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My translation, although not literal, is very much grounded in the Latin. In addition to the metre, the progression of ideas is maintained, as are the proper names (with the exception of Dis v.14) and where deviations in sense have been introduced, it has been done with a sensitivity to the allusions and metaphors behind the text; for example: the racing metaphors of the first and last stanzas have been preserved despite some changes.

The biggest change is in the register. The tone of my version is more casual. This change provided the opportunity to produce verse that was not only metrical but also poetic. I hope this change is not too jarring for an occasional poem that presents itself as consciously ‘lower’ (minores v.3) than epic.

Dactylic names and adjectives proved particularly troublesome (vv. 2, 7, 9, 13) as they were restricted to one position, the central first three syllables of the choriamb, making it difficult to work around them. This combined with the two gerundives of the third stanza made it the least successful of the translation. It is some consolation to note that it is not without problems in Latin!

I have followed the OCT except v.1: spatiata.
References


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