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Translation and Authenticity in a Global Setting



McElduff Siobhán and Sciarrino Enrica (eds.),
**Complicating the History of Western Translation.
The Ancient Mediterranean in Perspective.**

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Siobhán McElduff and Enrica Sciarrino, eds. *Complicating the History of Western Translation. The Ancient Mediterranean in Perspective*. St. Jerome Publishing: Manchester, 2011. Pp. 234. £25.00. Pb.

This volume explores how translation became a key medium of cross-cultural interaction in the ancient Mediterranean, by articulating and mediating contacts and exchanges among the peoples and communities who lived in the area. The editors Siobhán McElduff and Enrica Sciarrino consider the history of translation in the ancient Mediterranean as a key part of the history of Western translation. Their collection of thirteen essays brings together diverse disciplines such as Mediterranean studies, historiography, cultural theory and translation studies.

This collection inaugurates an interdisciplinary dialogue between translation studies and the field of ancient Mediterranean research and aims to promote exchange in terms of both methods and information. On the one hand, the ancient Mediterranean constitutes a mosaic of languages and therefore a fertile ground for testing translation theories. On the other hand, translation studies centres on cultural mediation and exchange, and offers the tools to examine ethnic categorisations, multifold conceptions of identity and the ways these articulate relations of power and modes of resistance and critique.

This thought-provoking research brings to focus examples suggesting that translation between the great variety of cultures and languages surrounding the Mediterranean was at the time a constant necessity. The scholars contributing to this volume all share a common field of research, namely the ancient Mediterranean as a complex frame of cross-cultural interaction. Their essays reveal the prevalence of translation in this region and engage with different perspectives, such as translation of Greek myths, lyric poetry or philosophy into Latin, bilingual inscriptions on stone, and translations of political, ethical and religious works.

The volume is organised thematically into five sections, focusing on the following topics: (a) the translator's authority and its boundaries; (b) the ways in which translation articulated ethical and political categories, and the forms of power inscribed in them; (c) the co-existence of the source text and its translation and the interaction between the two; (d) the ways in which certain cultures eschewed translation in an effort to guard their cultural identity; and (e) the opposition between "translation before translation theory and translation after translation theory" (159) examined through the study of translation practice developed by the Hittites and the Egyptians.

The first section begins with Kristopher Fletcher's essay "A Handbook for the Translation of Greek Myth into Latin. Parthenius, Gallus, and the *Erotica Pathemata*," which draws attention to the mediator's role and introduces the reader to the translator's workshop. Parthenius of Nicea constitutes an illustrative case of a powerful individual translator who renders "Greek myth into a form suitable for Roman poets" (12). He endeavours to adjust these Greek myths in such a way that they "will still be the 'same' myths even in a Latin context" (14). Catullus, on the other hand, as Elisabeth Marie Young demonstrates in her contribution, introduced an unknown genre into Roman culture, through his translation. Translating lyric poetry was a truly "perilous venture" (28) at that time, especially when the target culture appeared reluctant to assimilate virtues inscribed in the Greek lyric tradition. Han Baltussen's work concerning the translation of Greek philosophy by Cicero completes the first section by posing the question of how translating can heal one's wounds from a personal loss. Baltussen focuses particularly on "how translation gave Cicero a way out of his predicament of his daughter's death and political isolation" (38). All three essays address the issue of the translator's 'authority' and the need to question traditional conceptions of the translator's power to control or direct the target text. What is the purpose of the multiple additions and omissions made during the act of translation? What are the criteria for deciding what should be translated? As the essays aptly suggest, the translators' permanent concern has been to produce a text which could fit the context of the target culture; in order to achieve this aim, they made frequent adjustments every time they thought they were necessary.

The second section of this volume focuses on monumental bilingual or multilingual inscriptions and explores the role of translation in the "recording of treaties or achievements" (49). In "Bilingual Inscriptions and Translation in the Ancient Mediterranean World," Jennifer Larson illustrates how engraving messages on stone in different languages shows an intention of "addressing the needs and

interests of each linguistic audience,” rather than adhering to an ideal of fidelity (51). Sophia Papaioannou focuses on Augustus’ *Res Gestae*. Here, translation is used to publicise a great man’s achievements. The issues raised in both essays of this section concern the latent ideological and political nuances implied by the act of translating. The individuals who ordered these monumental inscriptions deployed the public character of these monuments as a field in which they could serve their personal interests. Therefore, a new role of translation in this region is revealed, that is, the construction and dissemination of political agendas and especially those linked to the personal ambitions of powerful individuals capable of controlling the public discourse of inscriptions.

Moving on to the next section, Dries de Crom deploys as a case study the translation into Greek of “Jewish religious texts from the late 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE” (77), in order to challenge the established conception of translation as “motion in a certain direction” (79), that is, from source to target text. De Crom provides evidence that translation often has to do “with languages’ differing statuses and with strategies to influence and change hierarchies of languages, texts and traditions” (80). Consequently, concepts like ‘source’ and ‘target’ are ideological constructs, while translation is considered to be an ongoing process. Edith Foster, on the other hand, offers an analytic approach to Lucretius’ translation of Thucydides and focuses on the translator’s political interests. “When Lucretius chose to integrate famous passages from Thucydides’ *History* into his poem, he was choosing an easily recognizable paradigm” (90). It was therefore, the target audience, as well as Lucretius’ political aims, that determined the text chosen to be translated. The last paper of this section, “Horace and the con/straints of translation” by Diana Spencer, investigates Horace’s efforts to turn “through the translation act in its broad sense, what was most authentically ‘Greek’” into a “vigorously Roman” discourse (104). Horace’s “translation programme” suggested that the Greek lyric poets could be “(re)patriated as Roman *maiores*” (108). These three scholars suggest that the co-existence of translation and the source text did not imply an unmediated presence of the source culture, but rather linked this culture to the visions of the target community and sustained an attempt to construct and consolidate the cultural superiority of the latter.

The fourth section opens with Jan P. Stronk’s contribution, which examines how Herodotus and Ctesias use translation in order to allow the appropriation of histories of the oriental world by their “fellow-Greeks” (118), in a form “that would make sense to the Greeks” (123). Both Herodotus and Ctesias take oral stories from the oriental past and try to integrate them into a Greek context. Daniel Richter in “How not to translate. Lucian’s Games with the Name(s) of the Syrian Goddess,” examines the work of Lucian of Samosata: “*De Syria Dea*” (On the Syrian Goddess). Richter reads this work as a “spoof of ancient processes of religious syncretism, translation and identification (what classicists call *interpretation graeca*)” (132) and suggests that Lucian fails deliberately in representing and translating Syrian divinities into a Greek religious context. This failure, Richter underlines, shows that the “meaning of all things is culturally constructed” (117) and reveals possible inadequacies of translation. Resistance to translation is also the topic of the third paper of this section, where Bradley Buszard reveals how Plutarch’s etymologies aim to “preserve the individuality of a Greek tradition” (157). Accordingly, as the author argues, resistance to translation was deemed to be a key means for securing a community’s cultural heritage and reinforcing its identity.

The last section consists of two essays about the Hittites and the Egyptians. Dennis Campbell explores how translation was instrumental in the way the Hittites were able to contact and appropriate foreign traditions. Thomas Schneider, in “Three Histories of Translation. Translating in Egypt, Translating Egypt, Translating Egyptian,” examines the role translation had in Egypt, as well as “the importance of Egypt as a symbol of translation” (176). This is not a major role, since the Egyptians avoided translation except from one form of their language into another. What we have here is more a ‘transcription’ rather a ‘translation,’ which allows the author to claim that Egypt remains “an untranslatable object” (160).

As the editors argue, the Mediterranean Sea constitutes the “perfect metaphor for how languages in this region overlapped and flowed into each other” (2). Indeed, as the volume demonstrates, translation emerges as a complex and variable process through which communities interact with each other and appropriate different traditions. Yet the volume is not confined to exploring historiographical data, but raises some broader theoretical questions about the interlinking of translation theory and ancient Mediterranean studies: how can models provided by translation studies be modified and reformulated so that they can be deployed in the study of the ancient

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Mediterranean? The anonymity of the translator, for instance, is a common phenomenon in ancient times and a possible obstacle in using a modern sociological translational theory. This explains why theoretical frameworks need to be adapted in order to allow us to describe and explain cross-linguistic and cross-cultural exchanges in the ancient Mediterranean. In addition to advancing translation theory and enriching our conceptions of translation, such an attempt introduces the reader to unknown aspects of the ancient Mediterranean world and especially the ways in which translation can help to illustrate cultural discourses and wider social and political relations of the period.

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