

Translating Cultures: Translation, Transmission and Dissemination of Printed Texts in Europe 1640-1795

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Translations and translators were key to the spread of ideas in early modern Europe. Yet, little is known about individual translators and their practices, nor have the networks of patrons, printers, publishers and booksellers that facilitated the production and distribution of these works across borders been fully explored. The participants at this two-day workshop on 'Translating Cultures: Translation, Transmission and Dissemination of Printed Texts in Europe 1640-1795' discussed a range of these issues at the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel, itself a major European depository of early modern printed works.

In keeping with the theme of the conference, that was financially supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), the convenors Gaby Mahlberg and Thomas Munck had gathered speakers from all over Europe with shared interests in the translation and dissemination of texts in the early modern period. A number of specialisms were represented: the history of political thought and political culture, the history of ideas in religion, philosophy and science, and a shared recognition of the importance of lexicography and semantics, alongside a more technical approach to linguistics and the theory of translation.

The first panel on "Translation in Theory and Practice" set the tone for much of the conference by highlighting in particular three points: translation practices varied widely both in time and political context, translations were never straightforward, and translators exercised huge influence through their ability to re-shape and change a text, adapt it to suit different reader communities, or even manipulate texts to fit an agenda which might be

quite different from that of the original author.

THOMAS MUNCK (Glasgow) illustrated patterns of translation across time in early modern Europe on the basis of a sample of political texts. He used the example of Cesare Beccaria's famous treatise on criminal law reform, *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764), to re-examine how an intrusive reorganisation by the work's first French translator, André Morellet, created what was in effect a substantially different book. Some of Morellet's critics accused him of having violated the author's rights, but both versions – the original and the rearranged one – were widely disseminated in translation.

Some translation processes, in contrast, were more closely monitored, especially to prevent a translator from taking such liberties with a text. Thus, ANN THOMSON (Florence) demonstrated how the French Huguenot Pierre des Maizeaux in London delegated a number of translations via his agent Charles de La Motte, who commissioned for instance a French version of William Chillingworth's *A Safe Way to Salvation* in Amsterdam in 1730 and subsequently sent the proofs backwards and forwards between Amsterdam and London so that he and des Maizeaux had the final say on the edition.

The role of women as authors and translators in scientific work was explored in papers by LASZLO KONTLER (Budapest) and SARAH HUTTON (York). From a different perspective, ALESSIA CASTAGNINO (Florence) emphasised that translations were not just seen as individual projects, but that many Italian translators perceived their work as a 'service to the nation' and emphasised the utilitarian aspect of making works available to a wider public in the vernacular. Translations were thus also a way of widening access to works and spreading information for utilitarian and improving purposes (for example in agriculture), within the framework of accepted cultural values and assumptions.

In order to make translations work in their new context, however, works often had to be adapted in significant ways – a process the historian Peter Burke has described as 'cultural translation', while Michel Garneau has employed the term 'tradaption' in relation to

stage plays.¹ This could mean that lengthy passages could be edited out if they seemed irrelevant to, or inappropriate for the new target audience, while whole passages might be rewritten, or explanations added in footnotes and commentaries. According to the linguist GUY ROORYCK (Ghent), these practices were employed by translators to make a text accessible to different audiences and create an independent 'enarrative voice' that could also be useful to evade censorship.

The success and impact of translations varied enormously, in ways that can be difficult to evaluate. A translation might fail because the translator was not sufficiently competent, as LUC BOROT (Montpellier) demonstrated with reference to François du Verdus, whose French translation of Hobbes' *De Cive* suffered from his patchy knowledge of English. Translators of early scientific works might also struggle to find adequate ways of dealing with technical terms and neologisms, as shown by SIETSKE FRANSEN (Cambridge) in relation to multi-lingual texts, the continuing importance of Latin in some fields, and more specifically in translations of the Flemish physician Jan Baptist van Helmont.

As these examples suggest, the quality of translations varied widely. It is rarely clear how translators learnt languages, or how far they relied on dictionaries and other tools. Translation was not yet a recognised profession in its own right. On the contrary, for many translators, their work on a text might have been a by-product of their main occupation. HELMER HELMERS (Amsterdam) analysed how the diplomat Lieuwe van Aitzema, during the first Anglo-Dutch War, published a partisan Dutch history in English to encourage the two warring sides to join forces for the Protestant cause. ASAPH BEN-TOV (Erfurt) showed how early modern translations of the Koran into German were often done by theologians and clergymen and initially indirect, via Latin: for someone as the Lutheran pastor Solomon Schweigger, the reading of the 'Turkish Bible' was hugely sensitive, not least because it could fundamentally affect the understanding of Christian scripture itself, where translation had already created huge challenges.

Some translators, meanwhile, were political

authors or activists in their own right, such as Jean-Jacques Rutledge or Pierre-François Henry, who translated and adapted the works of the English republican James Harrington in order to help promote a more radical direction in the French Revolution, as shown in the papers by RACHEL HAMMERSLEY (Newcastle) and MYRIAM-ISABELLE DUCROCQ (Paris). The significance and sensitivity of politically motivated translation was taken in a different direction by GABY MAHLBERG (Berlin), who demonstrated that another English republican, Algernon Sidney, was in 1793-95 selectively translated into German to warn against the excesses of the *terreur*.

The process of translation of texts could be politically context-sensitive in many different ways. RACHEL FOXLEY (Reading) noted how Marchamont Nedham was rendered with notes in order to emphasise particular interpretations on the one hand, while some Latin quotes remained deliberately untranslated, leaving them open to interpretation on the other. LIEVE JOOKEN (Ghent) explored how competing and nearly contemporaneous French translations of Hume relied on deliberate lexical choices to emphasise different philosophical slants. WYGER VELEMA (Amsterdam) examined the selective use of classical texts by Dutch polemicists in the 1780s. These and other papers led to substantial discussion of the complex relationship between authors, texts, translators and readers, and raised the fundamental question of what makes an 'authoritative' text.

In order to understand the dissemination process more thoroughly, we also noted the need for more work both on the material culture of print, and on the physical distribution and survival of individual copies. MARK SOMOS (Heidelberg) explained the scope of his census of surviving copies and editions of Hugo Grotius' *Mare Liberum* around the world. While the two most frequently cited editions originated in Europe, Somos had also located a rogue edition in Chile, which might

¹ Peter Burke, *Cultures of translation in early modern Europe*, in: Peter Burke/ R. Po-chia Hsia (Ed.), *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 7-38, p. 33; and Marie-Christiane Hellot, 'Le poète qui traduisit: Entretien avec Michel Garneau', in: *Jeu* 133 (2009), pp. 83-88, p. 86.

have hailed from Salamanca, but might also have been produced in Latin America itself.

Overall, the workshop offered a wealth of interesting case studies that gave a glimpse of translators, their aims, practices and output, while also hinting that there still remains a lot more work to be done before a comprehensive picture of the translation landscape in early modern Europe between 1640 and 1795 can emerge. Among the projects that show possible ways to explore this landscape further are the recent Vesalius census², and the database of European Translators in the Eighteenth Century currently being set up at the EUI in Florence³, supplementing the various short-title catalogues and other search tools coming online. There is much scope for other forms of collaborative effort to trace translation networks and their impact in early modern Europe. The conversation is ongoing.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: Translation in Theory and Practice

Thomas Munck (Glasgow): Selective translation, print, and changing political cultures in 18th-century Europe: a comparative view

Ann Thomson (European University Institute, Florence): Pierre des Maizeaux and the business of translation in the early eighteenth century

Alessia Castagnino (European University Institute, Florence): Theories and practices of translation in the long Italian eighteenth century

Panel 2: Translators as Scholars and Cultural Go-Betweens: Politics and Diplomacy

Luc Borot (Montpellier): François du Verdus between English and Latin: which Hobbes is easier to translate, which one is safer?

Helmer Helmers (Amsterdam): The translator as diplomatic agent, the diplomatic agent as translator: Philibert du Bois and Lieuwe van Aitzema

Rachel Foxley (Reading): Nedham: translation, adaptation, opportunism

Panel 3: Translators as Scholars and Cultural Go-Betweens: Science

Sietske Fransen (Cambridge): Multilingual

science: early modern scientists as translators
Laszlo Kontler (Central European University, Budapest): Entretiens with Fontenelle: sociability to science? Behn, Gottsched, Bode, Gunning (1688-1803)

Panel 4: Reading, Cultural Translation and 'Tradaptation': Republicanism

Rachel Hammersley (Newcastle): French translations of Harrington's *Aphorisms Political* and *A System of Politics* between 1791 and 1795

Myriam-Isabelle Ducroq (Paris-Nanterre): Translating Harrington in Thermidorian France: Henry's *Oeuvres politiques de Jacques Harrington, Ecuier* (1795)

Gaby Mahlberg (Berlin): Reading English republicans in early modern Germany: the case of Algernon Sidney

Panel 5: Reading, Cultural Translations and 'Tradaptation': Philosophy and Religion

Sarah Hutton (York): Translation and philosophical reception: the Italian translation of Emilie du Châtelet's *Institutions de physique*

Asaph Ben-Tov (Erfurt): Oriental studies and cultures of translation: Koran translations in early modern Europe

Panel 6: Reading, Cultural Translation and 'Tradaptation': Philosophy

Guy Rooryck (Ghent): Les Lumières traduites, la voix énonciative entre censure et liberté d'expression (Translation and Enlightenment. The enarrative voice between censorship and freedom of expression)

Lieve Jookien (Ghent): The French translations of Hume's *Philosophical essays concerning human understanding* (1748)

Panel 7: Reading, Cultural Translation and 'Tradaptation': Law and the State

² Dániel Margócsy / Mark Somos / Stephen N. Joffe, *The Fabrica of Andreas Vesalius: A Worldwide Descriptive Census, Ownership, and Annotations of the 1543 and 1555 Editions*, Leiden 2018.

³ The project description can be found here: <https://www.eui.eu/DepartmentsAndCentres/HistoryAndCivilization/ResearchAndTeaching/ResearchProjects/European-Translators>

Mark Somos (Heidelberg): Reading Grotius'
Mare Liberum in C17th Europe

Wyger Velema (Amsterdam): Ancient wisdom for troubled times: Late eighteenth-century Dutch translations of the classics

Roundtable Discussion

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