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“In Other Words”: *Translating Philosophy in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, special issue of *Rivista di storia della filosofia*

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INTRODUCTION

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Studies of translation theory and practice have enjoyed a considerable rise of interest in the past several years for a wide variety of periods and fields. It is heartening to see developments in contemporary theory being accompanied by an interest in historical attitudes towards translation¹. Despite notable advances in this area within medieval studies², however, Renaissance scholars have been fairly slow off the mark; although there is an established Italian tradition involving the study of vernacularizations (*volgarizzamenti*)³, and recently several initiatives have furnished precious insights into translation approaches across Europe⁴, in areas such as England⁵, or from the perspective of cultural studies⁶, attention has often centred on translations of literary works, such as of the great Greek and Roman classics. With some notable exceptions, studies in the field of literature have not been matched, in terms of research and advances, by those in more technical fields such as philosophy, medicine, and theology⁷. This may partly explain why many surveys of the history of translation treat the Renaissance rather cursorily: we currently lack an overarching set of results that can be included within a narrative of *longue durée*, although in one case at least we have a (selective) anthology of various relevant writings in English translation⁸.

This special issue aims to help bridge this gap: it provides a flavour of how philosophical translation in particular was conceived (and, especially, practised) in Renaissance Europe. It is also meant to help stimulate a debate concerning the viewpoint of Renaissance (but also other) practitioners of the art of «interpretatio»: when working from Latin or Greek, did they

¹ An outcome has been useful historical overviews such as Norton 1984 and Rener 1989.

² Resulting in interesting initiatives such as the journal «The Medieval Translator / Traduire au Moyen Âge».

³ See, most famously, Folena 1991 and the follow-on volumes Calzona et al. 2003, Lubello 2011, and Accame 2013. Also Guthmüller 1989.

⁴ For some recent initiatives and results see Wilkinson 2015 and Gregori 2016 (particularly the Introduction by Fournel, Paccagnella). Also helpful is Viallon 2001.

⁵ See Brenda Hosington's «Renaissance Cultural Crossroads» project at the University of Warwick, supplemented by various publications such as Hosington 2015, Coldiron 2015, and Denton 2016.

⁶ See Burke, Hsia 2007, Demetriou, Tomlinson 2015, and Newman, Tylus 2015, among others.

⁷ But now see the various outputs associated with a long-standing research group at the University of Warwick on vernacular Aristotelianism; these include Bianchi 2009 and 2012; Gilson 2012; Lines 2013; Lines, Refini 2015; Refini 2015; Del Soldato 2015; Bianchi, Gilson, Kraye 2016; Cotugno, Lines 2016; Muratori 2017; Puliafito 2017; Cotugno 2017a and 2018, and of course the present issue. For vernacular Platonism, see at least Vanhaelen 2012.

⁸ Weissbort, Eysteinson 2006. For a recent anthology of original texts with translations into Portuguese, see Furlan 2016a (which, despite its title, covers from c. 1420 to the start of the seventeenth century).

see the activities of translation and vernacularization, for instance, as identical? Did they (and if so, to what extent) conceive of “vertical” and “horizontal” translations as separate, according to an influential distinction outlined by Gianfranco Folena⁹? Did they adopt a broadly similar approach to translation, regardless of whether they were dealing with literary, scientific, or religious texts? Did they think of translations as clearly separate (or separable) from other forms of interpretation, such as paraphrases or other renderings?

Current translation theory underlines the function of a translation as moving from a source language to a target language. It tends to elide questions about what *kind* of text one is translating, so as to arrive at general considerations on translation theory and practice, thus helping to support a burgeoning field of Translation Studies. But Renaissance translators and theoreticians at least had their doubts about this. Certainly this is true of George of Trebizond’s attack on Theodore Gaza’s translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems*¹⁰. This work, from the early 1450s, refers to various types of translation, depending on the specific kind of work one is translating. George starts by illustrating how to translate histories: in this case, although it would be wrong to add material, it is fine to condense it, since this does not «violate the truthfulness of the historical account» («fidem historiae violare»). In a second case, that of literary or eloquent works, both additions and omissions are permissible, and there is no requirement to follow the order of words of the original – indeed, it would not make sense. This is especially likely to be the case, says George, between languages that are not close: already the order of a text being translated from vernacular to Latin (or vice versa) will vary, and differences are sure to be all the greater between languages that are further apart. Finally, Trebizond introduces the case in which the weighty subject matter is all-important, and eloquence is therefore an only minor consideration. Here the example given is Jerome’s translation of the Scriptures, but extended to Aristotle’s writings. In the case of these texts, which are weightier and harder («graviora difficilioraque»), Trebizond favours the use of literal («ad verbum de verbo») translation:

Sed dicet forsam quispiam non esse possibile hominem, cum traducat, nihil relinquere, nihil addere. Nec id ignoro, et illud scio in tam paucis verbis tam multa committere non erroris esse, sed ignorantiae atque dementiae. Illud verbis, hoc rebus attribuo. Praeterea de addendo relinquendoque regula quaedam teneri solet a doctis. Nam quae historice dicuntur, iis si quis addidit, fidem historiae violavit, sin omisit, non violavit. Brutus in ipso bello Philippico historiam Polybii dicitur convertisse. Id tamen opus posteriores, quia multa perstrinxerat, non traductionem, sed epitomam, id est compendium nominarunt. Quo exemplo Poggius

⁹ Folena 1991.

¹⁰ See the article by David Lines in this issue.

Florentinus, vir et parum doctus et summopere sceleratus, confidens, cum et paediam Cyri et aegyptiacam historiam Diodori transferret, multa vel brevitatis vel fastidii fugiendi causa neglexit. In quo quidem ipsum non vituperarim. *Accedit quod iis in rebus necesse est nonnihil nunc addere, nunc omittere, quas ornate studemus edere. Opus est enim ut, si ornatiuscule volumus dicere, Graecorum verborum ordinem omnino negligamus. Nam [si] a materna lingua in Latinam, que proxime sunt, aut contra, vertenti ordo verborum servandus non est, quod facile intelliget qui periculum fecerit, quanto minus in longius multo remotis linguis ordo verborum servandus erit?*

Idcirco Hieronymus ille, vir doctrina, prudentia, sanctitate precipuus, divinas quidem scripturas, ornatu verborum neglecto, verbum de verbo transtulit. [In] sermonibus vero doctorum¹¹ aut historie, rem, non verba secutus, et adiecit et subtraxit aliqua que tamen rebus non derogant. Id ita factum sibi esse in traductione librorum Eusebii de temporibus ipse praefatur. Cuius auctoritatem plurimi nos facientes et ipsa rerum admoniti natura et pontificis Nicolai V iudicio, his in rebus integerrimo iussuque compulsi, in Aristotelicis quidem traducendis, quantum fieri a nobis potuit, nihil praetermisimus, nihil addidimus, ordinemque ipsum Graecorum verborum ubique conati sumus inviolatum reddere. Minima enim tum propter magnitudinem rerum, tum quia de rebus naturalibus documenta sunt, textus immutatio aut verbi additio subtractiove longe in alienum saepe sensum universam rem rapuit. In aliis vero maiore dicendi usi libertate, nunc evagatiores, nunc contractiores fuimus. Cagulei autem eandem in omnibus esse rationem putantes, ipsi quidem maxime omnium Aristotelem pervertunt et crimen hoc suum in alios minus nocentes reicere non erubescunt. Sed falluntur, credentes vituperatione aliorum sordes suas abluere. Hanc igitur regulam in traducendo tenendam studiosis putamus, ut graviora difficilioraque ad verbum de verbo paene reddant, historica et facilia latius angustiusve, sicuti iudicabunt, complectantur.¹²

George, who has himself translated the *Problems*, is here partly anticipating the response of a potential defender of his target Gaza, whose translation the present work attacks. He starts by conceding that it is practically impossible, in a translation, not to either add to or subtract from the original. As to his own approach in translating Aristotle, George claims that he has, in this case¹³, been highly conservative: inasmuch as possible, he has neither added to nor taken away from the original; he has even observed the word order of the Greek text when that did not lead to misunderstandings. (In so doing he is obliquely condemning the practice of Gaza, who not only provided a rather free translation, but also reordered large sections of

¹¹ Mohler reads: *indoctorum*; see George of Trebizond 1967, p. 326.

¹² George of Trebizond 1967, 326.8-327.6; part in italics quoted also, with some variations, in Monfasani 2006, p. 291.

¹³ It is worth noting that he refers explicitly to other instances (and doubtless other genres) in which he has taken a different and freer approach: «In aliis vero maiore dicendi usi libertate, nunc evagatiores, nunc contractiores fuimus».

the text.)¹⁴ Trebizond thus underlines the weighty character of Aristotle's scientific writings, whose elements should be preserved as much as possible¹⁵.

This passage should not be taken as George's final word on the techniques of translation, nor can one say that his enunciations always correspond to his practice¹⁶. Nevertheless, it is important on several levels: along with the controversy between Trebizond and Gaza more generally it shows that, in the early 1450s, the issue of translation (which had famously reared its head already with Leonardo Bruni's elegant but controversial Latin translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1416-17, leading to Bruni's self-defence treatise *De interpretatione recta*)¹⁷ had not yet been settled to everyone's satisfaction. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the "right" approach to translation continued to be a contentious matter throughout the Renaissance, and that solutions offered tended to depend on various factors, including the kinds of text or the languages under consideration, but also contemporary views on the links between translation and the more "faithful" approach of grammatical exegesis and the more free and productive one of rhetoric¹⁸. As the essays in this issue show, matters were particularly complex when it came to translating philosophical texts into the vernacular. But George's comments are also important because they show that at least some Renaissance translators were sensitive to the issue of style and genre¹⁹: for Trebizond, a free and even eloquent style may be appropriate in the case of a historical, literary, or rhetorical kind of work, but for the Bible and philosophical texts, in which precision is paramount, it is best to remain as literal as possible²⁰. Finally, Trebizond's comments show that, for at least some Renaissance theoreticians and practitioners, a translation is not so much a genre as an operation that can be expressed through a variety of genres or approaches: these may range from a literal (*ad verbum de verbo*) rendering to a paraphrase; the latter may be longer or shorter than the original and aims at conveying a source text's meaning rather than its exact phrasing.

¹⁴ On this point see Monfasani 2006.

¹⁵ Linde 2018, pp. 52-53, underlines this point and rightly observes that Trebizond made similar considerations in the preface to his translation of Aristotle's *Physics*. The distinction between philosophical and other texts is again highlighted in George's comments on the opportunity of neologisms in translation (Linde 2018, pp. 54-56), but it may be that his use of new terms for the *Rhetoric* was due to viewing it as less strongly tied to philosophy?

¹⁶ See Linde 2018, especially pp. 65-66.

¹⁷ See Valero Moreno 2015, pp. 262-284; some supplemental bibliography in Zanobini 2017.

¹⁸ On these ties, particularly for the medieval period, see Copeland 1991.

¹⁹ On the various genres, particularly within scientific subjects, see Paulus 2005 and of course individual studies on figures such as Sebastiano Fausto da Longiano (see Dario Tessicini's article in this issue).

²⁰ There is an implicit attempt here to imitate the original. On the links between imitation and translation, see most recently Cotugno 2017b.

The latter point emerges in a particularly clear way in the wave of new translations into the vernacular of the sixteenth century, for instance in the preface to Bartolomeo Cavalcanti's *Retorica* (first edition 1559), where the author distinguishes between his operation of translating a text or instead adjusting or adapting it («accomodarlo») through techniques such as expansion, specification, illustration, and clarification, all with the goal of embracing Aristotle's teachings («abbracciare la dottrina d'Aristotele»)²¹. But Cavalcanti's comments are less developed than those of Sebastiano Fausto da Longiano, whose *Dialogo del modo de lo tradurre*, published three years earlier (1556), famously provided a five-part model of transposition, which in addition to translation considered other approaches, namely metaphrase, paraphrase, compendium, and explanation²². All of these could represent a means of conveying («trasportare») meaning and expression, usually in either an interlingual or an intralingual mode (although translation proper referred only to the former). Of course, these writings were part of a much broader Renaissance debate on how to translate, a topic explored for French, for instance, by Etienne Dolet's *La Manière de bien traduire* and for Latin by Laurence Humphrey's *Interpretatio linguarum*²³.

Very relevant to these discussions on translation are also two authors who do not receive specific treatment in this collection of essays, but whose ideas provide the undertow for numerous treatments of the topic, especially in the second half of the sixteenth century: Sperone Speroni and Alessandro Piccolomini. Both of them influential members of the Accademia degli Inflammati in Padua, Speroni and Piccolomini gave particular attention to the problem of whether (and, if so, how) it was possible to express in the vernacular the weighty discourses of philosophy. Coming on the heels of long-standing discussions on the Italian language and of Pietro Bembo's proposals in the *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525), the works of Speroni and Piccolomini had to contend with a continuing prejudice about the suitability of the vernacular to express matters previously conveyed mainly by Latin and Greek in a centuries-long academic tradition. In his famous *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542), Speroni favours the position that – just as Greek and Latin represented the vernacular for their speakers in antiquity – so Italian speakers should be able to use their language to address the whole range of cultural topics, including philosophy²⁴. For his part, Piccolomini was among the first to put in train a vast programme of translation and adaptation of the

²¹ Cavalcanti 1559; see Anna Laura Puliafito's essay in this volume.

²² See Dario Tessicini's essay in this volume.

²³ See Dolet 1540 (on which see among others Bocquet 2001) and Humphrey 1559 (on which see most recently Furlan 2016b).

²⁴ Cotugno 2017b.

writings of ancient philosophers (especially Aristotle) into Italian. His efforts led to vernacular works (variously named “paraphrases”, “translations”, “annotations”, and so forth) on Aristotle’s logic, natural philosophy, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*, although he also translated other authors (such as Virgil and Xenophon) and was comfortable turning works into Latin (as he did with the pseudo-Aristotelian *Mechanics* and with the commentary on the *Meteorology* by Alexander of Aphrodisias)²⁵. Both Speroni and Piccolomini point to the importance that the academies’ context could have in developing discussions on and practices of philosophical translation²⁶. Yet this should not be seen as an isolated or exclusive context, as several of the essays in this volume point out.

Three elements unite the following collection of essays. They are all based on translations closely connected with philosophy. They focus both on translations proper and on their paratexts, which often include interesting aspects of translation theory. And they try to set translations into specific vernaculars (especially Italian) within the context of broader translation activities, including into Latin. Each of these points requires a brief explanation.

Taking its cue from Trebizond’s distinction between types of source texts, this collection of essays focuses on technical translations – such as those of philosophy and medicine – as opposed to literary translations, which in general have been better studied. It is our belief that scholars need to analyse Renaissance translations on the basis of assumptions and distinctions current at the time, rather than through modern categories or theories, which (as mentioned above) often emphasize potentially anachronistic commonalities within approaches to translation. Thus the distinctive challenges posed by technical texts for Renaissance translators need to be recognized and explored. Whereas scholars have begun to recognize the importance of studying the phenomenon of vernacularization for areas such as medicine²⁷, vernacular philosophy remains greatly understudied, in part due to a series of false assumptions that have led to a focus on the Latin tradition²⁸.

Furthermore, although we have no quarrel with the importance of paratexts²⁹ and declarations by translators about their ideal readership, we have tried whenever possible to

²⁵ Caroti 2003.

²⁶ Many other examples could be given, including the Accademia Fiorentina and the role played there by Benedetto Varchi or Gian Battista Gelli. On the former, see especially Andreoni 2012.

²⁷ See, for instance, Carlino, Jeanneret 2009.

²⁸ See Lines 2015.

²⁹ On the role of paratexts in philosophical translations of the sixteenth century, see especially Refe 2017, which includes a full bibliography. More generally, see the project “I margini del libro” based in Basel: www.margini.unibas.ch.

complement the consideration of paratexts through an analysis of actual translation techniques. Prefaces, dedicatory letters, and similar materials can tell us a great deal about how particular authors/translators desired to be perceived, whose endorsement they craved, and what kinds of reading public(s) they hoped would give attention to their work. Often these paratexts enunciate an author's theory or methodology of translation – points that certainly deserve further study. But it is the translation itself that exposes one's true method and audience. Elements such as linguistic register, faithfulness (or not) to the “source text”, and use (or not) of technical expressions are more dependable signs of an author's assumptions and intended audience than the notoriously slippery space of the dedication or prefatory letter. We have therefore encouraged our contributors to consider the potential inconsistencies between how a translation is effected and how its author wishes to present it. In some cases, the inconsistencies can be particularly striking and revealing.

Finally, although this series of studies emerges from a research project that focuses on the process of vernacularizing Aristotle's works in the Italian Renaissance³⁰, we believe that translations into Italian should not be considered in isolation from the models and examples provided, say, by translations from Greek into Latin. Many of the translators considered in the following essays were equally at home in Latin and the vernacular³¹. Thus it makes little sense to treat them as monolingual or as writing within a single linguistic tradition. Although Folena's famous distinction between “vertical” and “horizontal” translations remains useful in some ways³², it obscures parallelisms between modes of translation into Latin and the vernaculars.

The following contributions are divided into two main groups. The first considers philosophical works from a range of traditions and their translations in a European context, particularly in Italy, France, and England. The second focuses on translations of Aristotle's works in Renaissance Italy, ranging from scientific and medical works to works of moral philosophy and rhetoric.

Within the first section, the first two essays focus on self-translation, an operation that has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Carlo Enrico Roggia considers in particular the linguistic theory and approach visible in Marsilio Ficino. The specific case-

³⁰ ERC “Aristotle”, n. 335949 (2014-19), PI: Marco Sgarbi (Università Ca' Foscari), with the collaboration of David Lines (University of Warwick) and, previously, Simon Gilson (now at the University of Oxford).

³¹ On the topic, see at least Bloemendal 2015.

³² See, for instance, Gregori 2016.

study centres on Ficino's translation into Italian of the *De amore*, itself closely tied to Plato's *Symposium*. This study reveals how Ficino resolves the tension between a technical and a more natural and accessible language. Sara Miglietti considers instead how and why the sixteenth-century physician Antoine Mizauld translated into French several of his own Latin works on astrometeorology. This article studies the differences between the two versions partly in the light of market pressures and intended readership, and partly in the light of authors' interest in self-representation and exclusive control over their writings.

The next two articles continue the exploration of translation practice in France. Violaine Giacomotto-Charra examines the 1581 translation into French by the Calvinist theologian Lambert Daneau of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Peri kosmou* or *De mundo*. Her study asks why Daneau thought it necessary to offer a new translation, given that Louis Meigret had translated the same work in 1541. She points to differences between the two translations and to the context of Daneau's operation. Jean-Louis Fournel considers the process by which Machiavelli and Aristotle were both, to some degree, conflated in French versions of the two authors. He examines the extent to which the French vision of Machiavelli as an Aristotelian was related to linguistic and cultural considerations active especially in the second half of the sixteenth century.

The first section concludes with Micha Lazarus' article on discussions of Aristotle's *Poetics* in sixteenth-century Italy and Britain. It shows in particular that a crucial passage at the start of the work, referring to a specific (but not named) art through which *mimesis* is expressed, caused a great deal of controversy among Hellenists already in sixteenth-century Italy. When the debate reached the British Isles, it had to contend with taxonomies of poetry that had already embedded themselves in the language.

The second section focuses on Italian translations of Aristotle, from works of science to moral philosophy and rhetoric. David Lines studies Girolamo Manfredi's *De homine* or *Libro del Perché* (1474) against the prefatory epistle, in Latin, which presents the work as a translation. With particular attention to the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* and the commentary on that work by Pietro d'Abano, as well as Latin translations both of the *Problems* and of works of medicine, he asks how the Bolognese physician conceived his work, how this "translation" actually worked, and what kind of public he was addressing in practice.

The following three articles are closely connected with sixteenth-century astronomy and meteorology. Dario Tessicini examines the *Meteorologia* (1542) by Sebastiano Fausto da Longiano, one of the most important literary theorists of his day. It examines in particular the

borders between translations and works classified as compendia, paraphrases, metaphrases, dialogues, and so forth, pointing to the complexity of understandings of what a translation was. Eva Del Soldato takes a close look at Latin and vernacular interpretations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of a specific passage in *Meteorology II*, where Aristotle discusses the properties of the Dead Sea. There Aristotle claims that some writers μυθολογοῦσι in this connection; the Greek word was rendered in different ways, reflecting personal preferences and a shifting cultural landscape. Special attention is given to the translations by the Franciscan Mattia Ferchio and Fortunio Liceti. Matteo Cosci offers a study of how the “after-effects” of comets were viewed in vernacular discussions between 1533 and 1619. He particularly takes into account the view of comets as omens of natural or epidemiological disasters until Galileo’s critical confutation in his *Discorso sulle comete* and points to the consistency between Latin and vernacular accounts.

The last two articles of this section examine vernacular treatments of moral philosophy and rhetoric. Jill Krave studies how and why Giulio Ballino rendered into Italian *On the Virtues and Vices*, then considered a genuine work of Aristotle. The translation appeared in 1564 together with other works of a moral nature by Epictetus and Plutarch. This article strongly contextualizes the translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian work within Ballino’s other production and intellectual activity and analyses the discrepancies between his own pronouncements on translation and his practice. Anna Laura Puliafito examines instead the *Retorica* by Bartolomeo Cavalcanti. This work, first published in 1559, is the first complete handbook on rhetorical writing in Italian and had an enormous influence. The article examines Cavalcanti’s writing technique in the light of contemporary discussions on literary genres and translations, including by Sebastiano Fausto da Longiano. Cavalcanti’s *Retorica*, designed for civic and judiciary use, has an eminently practical application and introduces the “common reader” both to the rules of the art and to their place within the Aristotelian system.

We trust that these essays will move scholarship forward in substantial ways, providing the impetus for further attention to philosophical works and to the practice of translation, without losing the helpful curiosity about context provided by recent research in cultural translation.

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