Meta
Journal des traducteurs
Translators' Journal

META

ELLIS, Roger (Ed.) (1989): *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer
CONTAMINE, Geneviève (Ed.) (1989) : *Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Éditions de CNRS

Brenda Hosington

Volume 38, Number 1, mars 1993

La traduction et l'interprétation dans le nord du Canada
Translation and Interpretation in Northen Canada

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/003133ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/003133ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)
1492-1421 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Hosington, B. (1993). Review of [ELLIS, Roger (Ed.) (1989): *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer / CONTAMINE, Geneviève (Ed.) (1989) : *Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Éditions de CNRS]. *Meta*, *38*(1), 124–126. https://doi.org/10.7202/003133ar

■ ELLIS, Roger (Ed.) (1989): *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer.
■ CONTAMINE, Geneviève (Ed.) (1989): *Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS.

These two volumes make a most timely appearance given the current rash of books and articles devoted to the subject of medieval translation. It is convenient to discuss them together, as they have many points in common other than the obvious one suggested in their titles, yet at the same time differ in several important ways.

Both volumes are proceedings of conferences held on translation in the Middle Ages, one (*The Medieval Translator*) in Cardiff, Great Britain, the other (*Traduction et traducteurs*) in Paris. The editorial practices differ greatly. The French work constitutes a collection of "textes réunis," most of which seem to be in their original, spoken form; the English represents only a selection of the papers read at the conference and these have been re-worked into written form. Not surprisingly, therefore, the overall quality of the English papers is much better. On the other hand, of course, the range of topics discussed is narrower. The two Introductions, too, could not be more different. Maurice Pergnier asks the general and rather old-fashioned question, "Est-il une science de la traduction?" and follows up with that other old chestnut, "traduttore / traditore," "traduction littérale / traduction libre," and "traduire les mots ou le sens?". It is rather a curious introduction to a selection of papers dealing, not with the general and theoretical concerns of translation, but with extremely specialized and at times esoteric aspects of translating in the Middle Ages. Roger Ellis, by contrast, is a medievalist with a special interest in translation and this is reflected in his introductory essay, which is an excellent overview of the subject addressed by the conference papers: the role of medieval translators and the ways in which the theoretical and practical aspects of their craft overlap. Ellis also reminds us that the gap betweeen literary composition and translation was far narrower than in succeeding centuries: many translations were prized as highly as "original" works while "an understanding of medieval literature is much enhanced by an appreciation of the different theories and practices of the medieval translators" (p. 1).

The French volume is divided into four sections: "Traductions et adaptations," "Traducteurs et centres de traduction," "Langues savantes et langues vernaculaires," and "Mobiles et méthodes." Naturally, space will not allow for discussion or even mention of all 24 contributions. However, some especially retained our attention on account of their originality or particular focus.

The articles in the first section range from a very technical discussion of Syrian and Arab renderings of Aristotelian logic to a more general, chronological study of Irish traditions of epic. Bernard Flusin's article, "De l'arabe au grec, puis au géorgien: une Vie de saint Jean Damascène," is a very well presented analysis of the role played by embellishment in translation. The significance of his findings goes well beyond that of his chosen

hagiographical text. The translation centres discussed in section two are Southern Italy, Amalfi, Sicily and Naples while individual translators studied include Don Scotus and Gerard of Cremona. Once again, hagiography inspires an excellent paper: François Dolbeau's "Le rôle des interprètes dans les traductions hagiographiques d'Italie du Sud," in which the role of the "translator" is to explain and improve a text already translated orally by interpreters. Marie-Thérèse D'Alverny's article also deals with double translation: "Les traductions à deux interprètes: d'arabe en langue vernaculaire et de langue vernaculaire en latin." It uses examples of translations made in Toledo, Cyprus and Damascus to show how texts were often translated a first time by simple interpreters, then polished by more skilful translators. Of the four papers in the section on specialised and vernacular languages, Claude Budirant's is the most interesting. In "La traduction dans l'historiographie médiévale: l'exemple de la *Chronique des rois de France*," two translations, one thirteenth-century and interlingual, one fifteenth, are compared and a special focus is placed on the language used. In the fourth section, Jean-Pierre Rothschild's "Motivations et méthodes des traductions en hébreu du milieu du XII^{e} à la fin du XV^{e} siècle" summarizes roughly one hundred translators' prefaces and postfaces and discusses the significance of the old wine in new bottles topos to translation; it is a fascinating and original piece. Pascale Bourgain's "Le sens de la langue et des langues chez Roger Bacon" examines the philosopher's statements on neologisms, polysemy, equivalence and the "génie" of each language in the light of translation, which he called "le second degré dans la connaissance d'une langue." Bacon, like others, saw translation as a means of language acquisition.

The eleven articles in *The Medieval Translator* range over various topics, although all except one focus on Middle English works and translators. They discuss translation as *adaptation*, where the translator acts as literary critic, interpreting and changing the original to suit the audience (Rosalind Field on the romance, *Ipomedon*); as *expansion* of the original, dictated often by poetic habits but also by an intention to edify or to focus on one theme in particular (Anne Savage on Old English translations from Latin); and as *transposition*, bringing together two or more sources and blending them into a new work (Stephen Medcalfe on Usk's *Testament of Love*). Several articles are discussions of individual translators, the most original of which is perhaps Alexandra Barratt's "Dame Eleanor Hull: a fifteenth-century translator." Contrary to what has always been assumed, anonymous translations were not always the work of men. The colophon on this glossed and paraphrased translation of the Penitential Psalms reveals that the author is a noblewoman. This also shakes up our belief that only men translated in exegetical vein. Other essays discuss the translator as author, compiler, commentator, proving that in the Middle Ages these distinctions were blurred; the role of the translator was far more wide-reaching than it has been for the past two hundred years or so.

The multiple faces of translation and the multiple roles of the translator are provocatively discussed in the first two articles of the volume, which both caution us against facile assumptions. Rita Copeland's "The Fortunes of 'non verbum pro verbo': or, why Jerome is not a Ciceronian" should be compuslory reading for any student of translation history or theory. It challenges our belief that we know the meaning of that seemingly transparent phrase, "sense-for-sense or word-for-word." Copeland shows how it originated in Roman rhetoric but underwent so many transformations in patristic hands that its meaning was changed completely. Translation itself took on a different nature, played a different role. Like the language used to describe it, it became paradoxically a sign "of both continuity and rupture." The translation model offered is thus a dual one: it both displaces and replicates the original text. David Burnley warns us about too confidently elaborating any model for medieval translation, however. In "Late medieval trans-

lation: types and reflections," he reminds us of the little we have to go on in translators' prologues or prefaces and of the virtual non-existence of any theory *per se*. The translator relies heavily on his own self-perception: he is also "enditer," that is, compiler or author. As such, he may elaborate or paraphrase, for his task is to illumine the "darkness" of the original text. Modern students of medieval translation have under-estimated this role and consequently misunderstood much of medieval translation practice.

These two volumes on medieval translation are valuable companion pieces. Both are well documented with ample footnotes and indices. While they cater mainly to the medievalist, they also contain essays of general interest that contribute to our knowledge of translation and translators and challenge some of our long-held beliefs concerning this elusive art.

BRENDA HOSINGTON
Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada