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THE ITALIAN TRANSLATOR'S ART AND CRAFT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL INSIGHTS¹

Abstract

This article seeks to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the role played by translators in the circulation of ideas and texts in eighteenth-century Europe, with a focus on the Italian context. Over the past few years, historians have begun to carefully consider translations as sources for analysing historical phenomena, drawing on methodological insights from fields such as Translation Studies and Cultural Transfer Studies. More specifically, notable attention has been directed toward all those actors involved in the translation process, including publishers, editors, patrons of publishing projects, and, of course, the translators themselves. After a historiographical introduction aimed at highlighting theories and methodologies of potential interest to historians, the article first sets out the debate on the significance of the translator's "craft" for the controlled transmission of knowledge of "public utility". Secondly, it explores some examples of strategies of paratextual intervention adopted by translators to adapt various genres of texts. In doing this, the article suggests implications of the study of the translators' biography and activity in approaching the intellectual and cultural history of the Italian Enlightenment.

Keywords: social history of translations, translators, 18th century Italian publishing market, paratexts, translation practices, cultural negotiation.

Introduction

From the second half of the seventeenth century, every corner of the European continent saw a noticeable increase in the overall number of translations printed. This would reach never-before-seen levels in the following century in terms of the number of copies produced, the variety in the types of works proposed, the speed at which such projects were

¹ This article is the result of research conducted over the last years, especially working on the project "NEGOTIATINGNEWS. Negotiating and disseminating medical knowledge in the eighteenth-century Italian periodical press", funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research – Programme "Avviso 247 – Young Researchers".

completed, and their widespread geographical distribution.² In London, Paris, and Amsterdam, as well as in Lisbon, Berlin, and Venice, publishers, printers, booksellers, and translators devoted special attention and energy to furnishing readers with an increasing number of works translated from the main European languages. At the same time, people of letters and scientists began to discuss the contribution that translations could make to the formation of new literary genres, languages, and theories and to the controlled and mediated distribution of various types of texts and knowledge of “public utility” that reflected the interests and needs of readers.

During the Enlightenment, the debate on translation contexts was rooted in the conviction that “betraying” the original text was “an obligation towards society”³ to educate and illuminate the public. This principle was believed to apply not only to adaptations of literary works but also to philosophical, economic, political, and, above all, scientific and technical writings, from which a wide range of readers could benefit. Now that Latin was losing its function as a universal language solely for the elites, and broad sections of the population were able to read, but only in their own language, interest in modern theories and techniques in agronomy, medicine, and botany in American and London political gazettes, British novels, German poetry collections, as well as economic and institutional models of organisation could be assuaged by commissioning specific translation projects. These were completed by publishers and translators who could mediate culturally and adapt the original texts to the distinctive requirements of the target context.

These general reflections also apply to the Italian context. As is widely known, the period between the second half of the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth century saw significant advancements in the production and consumption of books in the Italian peninsula, which, although with obvious quantitative and qualitative differences, were in line with what happened in the other European areas. The production of books progressively underwent considerable transformations – both in terms of printing practices and bookselling – and during the

² An excellent overview of the production of translation in 18th century Europe is provided by the works of F. Oz-Salzberger, ‘The Enlightenment in Translation: Regional and European Aspects’, *European Review of History*, vol. 13, 2006, pp. 385–409; and ‘Enlightenment, National Enlightenment, and Translation’, in A. Garrett (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 2014, pp. 31–61.

³ M. Lombardi, ‘Ragione, pazzia, ordine e caos: Voltaire traduttore di Calderon’, in M.G. Profeti et al. (ed.), *I secoli d’oro e i Lumi: processi di risemantizzazione*, Alinea, Firenze, 1998, pp. 117–165: 132.

sixties and the seventies, thanks to these developments and thanks to the gradual progress of education, there was a significant increase in the number and social composition of the public, interested in a great variety of books, including texts coming from other countries.⁴ It is, therefore, not by chance that at that precise moment, translations started playing a more and more critical role within the European and also Italian publishing market, becoming a remarkable business for the publishers and a focus of public debate as a vehicle for providing instruction and promoting the spread of “useful” knowledge.

Although, in eighteenth-century Italy, it was still not possible to speak of translation as a “trade” or a recognised and valued profession, translators were nevertheless beginning to receive greater recognition and were somewhat sought-after by publishers. This was especially true if they had proven skills in those languages, such as English, which were not frequently spoken but were often translated, or when it was thought their work could add a specific tone to a publication, enrich it, and, therefore, make it unique and more competitive on the market. While for some men of letters and publishers, the specific contribution of translators was essential for the successful completion of their publishing projects, irrespective of the type of publication that had been worked on – so much so that it was ranked on a par with that of the authors – for others, their work was essentially the mere transposition of words from one language to the other, devoid of originality and any intellectual merit. This last fact was the reason it was often deemed superfluous to print the translator’s name on the title page or mention it in other parts of the text, such as letters of dedication and the foreword.

This article aims to investigate this phenomenon, focusing primarily on the Italian context. It starts with an introduction to those theoretical and methodological developments in Translation and Literary Studies that may be of potential interest to historians. Then, the following section discusses the positions taken in the debates regarding the usefulness of translators’ work. Finally, the article provides examples of strategies implemented by translators, highlighting the aspects that need to be considered to understand their value as cultural mediators.

Towards a social history of translations in early modern Europe

⁴ L. Braidà, ‘Censure et circulation du livre en Italie au XVIII^e siècle’, *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2005, pp. 81–99, and R. Pasta, ‘Mediazioni e trasformazioni: operatori del libro in Italia nel Settecento’, *Archivio storico italiano*, vol. 172, 2014, pp. 311–354.

It is enough to look at the most recent contributions in the field of *Translation Studies* to realise the importance that the study of translators has assumed. Since the 1990s and early 2000s, a rich and lively debate has ensued, sparked by Lawrence Venuti's pioneering and seminal works on the invisibility of translators and those of Anthony Pym on the necessity to "humanise" the history of translations.⁵ This debate has evolved to underscore the importance of restoring visibility and recognition to translators, acknowledging their pivotal role in intercultural negotiation and key function in exchanging ideas between different contexts. It is no coincidence that a "sociological turn" has recently occurred within Translation Studies, with a significant shift of scholarly attention from "texts" to "translating subjects".⁶ In the space of just under fifteen years, conferences, books, articles, and thematic issues of journals dedicated to translators have multiplied to such an extent that the English scholar Andrew Chesterman suggested to begin to adopt the term Translator Studies.⁷

Similarly, great attention is now being given to the role of the translator in Literary Studies. In this regard, it is sufficient to recall the valuable work of Michel Espagne, who, in his well-known studies on cultural transfer conducted with Michael Werner,⁸ drew the attention of scholars to the importance of analysing *l'histoire des traductions* as a privileged perspective from which to investigate, in a new and more comprehensive way, the processes of transfer of *objets culturels* from one context to another, recognising and enhancing the contribution of the agents who, at various levels, become protagonists of such mediations, such as publishers, merchants, travellers, diplomats, artists and, of

⁵ L. Venuti, *The Translators Invisibility. A History of Translation*, London-New York, Routledge, 1995; A. Pym, 'Humanizing Translation History', *Hermes-Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, vol. 42, 2009, pp. 23–48. Among the many other relevant works see at least J. Delisle, *Les traducteurs dans l'histoire*, 2nd edition, Ottawa, Ottawa University Press, 2007.

⁶ On the so-called "sociological turn" see D. Merkle, 'Translation Constraints and the "Sociological Turn" in Literary Translation Studies', in A. Pym, M. Schlesinger, D. Simeoni (eds.), *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies. Investigations in homage to Gideon Toury*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, Benjamins, 2008, pp. 175–186, and C.V. Angelelli (ed.), *The Sociological Turn in the Translation and Interpreting Studies*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, Benjamins, 2014.

⁷ A. Chesterman, 'The Name and Nature of Translator Studies', *Hermes-Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, vol. 42, 2009, pp. 13–22. Cf. also K. Kaindl, K. Waltraud, D. Schlager (eds.), *Literary Translator Studies*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 2021.

⁸ M. Espagne, M. Werner, *Transferts. Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle)*, Paris, Éditions Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1988.

course, translators.⁹ In this regard, to accurately assess the nature and scope of the transformations undergone by the *objets culturels* within the receiving culture, it is crucial to examine both the characteristics of the “material vectors” (the forms taken by the texts) and the actions of the various “social vectors” involved in the translation process. Each of these figures, as the French scholar reminds us, has specific objectives to achieve through their work, which can be influenced by a series of factors, including their personal “motivations” or “history”, as well as their “economic dependencies”, their “ideas about what should be communicated to a new context to fill an intellectual gap”;¹⁰ and – one might add – their social or professional relationships, or their adherence to broader, shared projects, such as those promoted by governments, academies, or scientific and literary societies.

All of these methodological and theoretical proposals have provided historians with valuable insights. Gathering and integrating into their work suggestions from the field of Translation Studies and the study of cultural transfer, historians are beginning to pay close attention to translations in their research on cultural and intellectual history, acknowledging their nature of “complex conceptual laboratory” and their value as “documents of singular value”¹¹ to deeply understand historical phenomena and explore how ideas were re-elaborated and adapted to fit new cultural, social, and political contexts. The eighteenth century has proven to be an ideal research field for analysing these dynamics, mainly because, as highlighted in the introduction, during that period translations became an extraordinary vehicle for the circulation and reception of a large number of texts and ideas, making them a tool for shaping new scientific, political, economic, philosophical, and historiographical languages.¹²

⁹ M. Espagne, ‘La fonction de la traduction dans les transferts culturel franco-allemands au XVIII^e et XIX^e siècle. Le problème des traducteurs germanophones’, *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 98, 1997, pp. 413–527.

¹⁰ M. Espagne, ‘Il ruolo della traduzione nella genesi del Neoclassicismo’, in G. Cantarutti, S. Ferrari, P.M. Filippi (eds.), *Traduzioni e traduttori nel Neoclassicismo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2010, pp. 13–22: 9.

¹¹ G. Imbruglia, R. Minuti, and L. Simonutti (eds.), *Traduzioni e circolazioni delle idee nella cultura europea tra '500 e '700*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2007, p. 2. See also A. Castagnino, ‘Le traduzioni e la ricerca storica: primi bilanci e prospettive di ricerca’, *Società e Storia*, vol. 180, 2023, pp. 287–316.

¹² L. Kontler, ‘What is the (Historians’) Enlightenment Today’, *European Review of History*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, 357–371. Cf. also S. Stockhorst (ed.), *Cultural Transfer through Translation. The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2010, and the above-mentioned works by F. Oz Salzberger.

Among the leading scholars to take up the challenge of systematically integrating the study of translations into historical research is Peter Burke, among the first to argue for a new sub-discipline, the Cultural History of Translation.¹³ A field of investigation that aims at studying translations from a cultural-historical perspective, interrogating sources on the basis of a precise set of questions, namely “what was translated?”, “from which and into which languages?”, “by whom?”, “with what intentions?”, “in what manner were translations made?”.¹⁴ Burke gives specific examples of how the method he described could be used. He analyses different genres of published works, such as historical writings, and makes a preliminary assessment of the main translation methods used in early modern Europe, finding common trends and looking for the “human component” that concretely brings such processes into being. Although Burke’s interpretation requires some adjustments – particularly by including more case studies – his overall picture is quite interesting. He observes, for example, that, in the modern era, translators came from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from the humanist philologists, who endeavoured to vernacularise Greek and Latin texts, to the men of culture, who translated subjects of shared interests – so historians tackled historical works, artists treatises on architecture, and so on – and diplomats, Protestant refugees, members of the clergy and religious orders, including Jesuits. On this varied landscape, female translators occupied a place that was anything but insignificant. Throughout the modern age – and even before it – many women translated foreign literary works because translating this particular genre of text was considered an exercise that had nothing to do with creativity and the free expression of one’s ideas. In fact, the strategies deployed to adapt texts, the targeted use of notes and forewords, and the changes made to other peritextual elements were an opportunity for women’s contribution to emerge in all its richness. In this respect, the eighteenth century marked an important stage in the development of women’s translation activities, in which they managed, more steadily and more systematically, to go beyond the limited confines of literary texts. Their work was considerably important in the area of scientific, philosophical, and historiographical translations, as demonstrated not only by English and French translators¹⁵ (such

¹³ P. Burke, R. Po-chia Hsia (eds.), *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Cf. P. Bret, J. Peiffer (eds.), *La traduction comme dispositif de communication dans l’Europe moderne*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2020, and G. Mahlberg, T. Munck (eds.), *Ideas across borders: translating visions of authority and civil society in Europe, c.1600-1840*, London, Routledge, 2024.

¹⁴ Burke, Po-chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ On the role of women as translators, see also M. Agorni, ‘A Marginal(ized) Perspective on Translation History: Women and Translation in the Eighteenth Century’,

as Elizabeth Carter and Émilie du Châtelet), but also by Spanish ones (eminently represented by Josefa Amar y Borbon), Venetian, Bolognese and, especially, Neapolitan female translators (such as Giuseppa Eleonora Barbapiccola and Mariangela Ardingelli, respectively translators of *Principes de la Philosophie* by Descartes and *Vegetable Staticks* by the English botanist Stephen Hales). On a more general level, following Burke's reflections, we should note that there were no "professionals" in modern Europe, in the current and proper sense of the term. Yet, on the one hand, some individuals had systematically translated, under commission and in return for financial compensation, a good number of works during their "careers", while on the other, there was a widespread practice of collective work involving teams of disparate collaborators, as in the case of the versions of the *Holy Scriptures* produced in England, Sweden, and Bohemia.¹⁶

Translators as mediators of knowledge of public utility

Keeping Burke's remarks in mind, let us now shift our attention to the situation in the Italian peninsula. Generally speaking, alongside the proliferation of publishing companies, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw an intense theoretical debate on translations. On the one hand, this debate concerned practical issues, but on the other, it also centred around the question of the "usefulness" of translations to the general renewal of the target context, both in linguistic and literary terms, but also more generally in cultural and social terms.

In Italy, as in other areas of Europe, the theoretical debate arose "in the field" from the difficulties encountered when vernacularising certain Greek and Latin classics or translating from and into the various European vernacular languages. It involved not only writers and translators but also printers, censors, and all the other roles in publishing.¹⁷

The crux of the debate was not only the strategies needed to adapt literary works, but also more specific issues relating to the difficulties involved in adapting certain scientific, philosophical, economic, and political concepts and terminology from one context to another. One of the distinctive features of most debates on translation was that they led to a kind of assessment of the possible impact of translation activities on

Meta, vol. 50, no. 3, 2005, pp. 817–830.

¹⁶ Burke, Po-chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Cf. A. Brettoni, 'Idee settecentesche sulla traduzione: Cesarotti, i francesi e altri', in A. Bruni, R. Turchi (eds.), *A gara con l'autore: aspetti della traduzione nel Settecento*. Roma, Bulzoni, 2004, pp. 17–52.

more general issues, such as the transformations that were taking place in reading customs. On the one hand, note was taken of the capacity of translations to exponentially expand the range of texts on offer to a steadily increasing number of readers, targeting their specific interests and curiosities. On the other hand, as mentioned at the start of this section, there was discussion of their key role as instruments for promoting works of “public utility”, that is to say, books that could facilitate the widest possible dissemination of new knowledge and acquisition of the latest theoretical and practical skills, which could be deployed in various professional areas.¹⁸

Regular references to the importance of the function and contribution provided by translators were also discussed in the forewords or the letters of dedication proposed by publishers or translators themselves at the start of their works. One interesting example of this is the words of the former Venetian Jesuit Alessandro Zorzi at the end of the 1770s in the introduction to his project for the publication of the *Nuova Enciclopedia Italiana*, in which he acknowledged that any “vernaculariser” committed to making a “book useful [...] to all family men” contributed to the progress of his “nation”.¹⁹

Equally significant, of course, were the reflections developed by publishers or translators in their forewords or dedications, which frequently emphasised the idea that the translation could enhance the original work, making it more suitable for the needs of the new audience. Some of the many eloquent examples to illustrate this are found in the Italian versions of scientific works. A good example of the suggestions proposed by translators, who very often were members of the same scientific academies that had the means to promote and finance translation publishing projects, is the foreword written by the Paduan physician and professor Luigi Arduino for his version of the work by the Swedish chemist Johan Gottschalk Wallerius.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, these pages followed Arduino’s dedication to a member of the Venetian patriciate, Giovanni Zulian. In the foreword, the Venetian scholar clarified that the main objective of his work had been to fill in the gaps not only for “educated amateurs and scholars of pastoral matters” who did not understand foreign languages but also for the “rough peasant population”. As he states a little further on, to make “clearly intelligible” to everyone any work that might prove

¹⁸ Cf. G. Barsanti, V. Becagli, R. Pasta (eds.), *La politica della scienza: Toscana e Stati italiani nel tardo Settecento*, Firenze, Olschki, 1996.

¹⁹ A. Zorzi, *Prodromo della Nuova enciclopedia italiana* [Siena 1779], ed. by G. Catoni, A. Ingegno, M. Spallanzani, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, Siena, 1989, p. XV.

²⁰ J.G. Wallerius, *Elementi di agricoltura fisica e chimica [...] traduzione dal francese del dottore Luigi Arduino [...]*, Venezia, Foglierini, 1791.

“most appropriate for guiding their steps towards perfection, and to remove from their minds the false opinions and the prejudices that oppose its progress”,²¹ he considered any strategy of textual adaptation legitimate, including notes and comments on the topics and cases discussed by the author. On the same wavelength, we find the foreword added to the Italian version of *Principles of Agriculture and Vegetation* by Scottish chemist Francis Home, first published in Milan in 1763 and reprinted in Venice the following year.²² Once again, the author of that introduction, the printer Giacomo Caroboli, articulates and analyses the objective difficulties hypothetical readers might encounter – despite being “learned and cultured” – when reading the terminology of agronomy in a foreign language, be it English or French. According to him, all members of the public, including peasants, should be allowed to overcome the linguistic obstacle, to “understand” the content of useful works, and to benefit from a work of translation produced in a manner that was accurate and suited to their needs.²³

Indeed, as it is easy to guess, very similar observations can also be found in the peritext of Italian editions of economic and political writings, which may have had their own specific “utility” in drawing readers’ attention to certain debates in Europe on topics of potential interest for understanding the structural changes taking place in society and the institutions of various states in the Italian peninsula.²⁴

However, this aspect of the debate on translation practices should not overshadow the fact that there were also diametrically opposed positions among the literati and, above all, printers, who refuted the exceptional nature of the work of translators and equated it with the mere substitution of words from one language to another. This is self-evident, if we consider that publishers often saw no value in printing the name of the author of the translation on the title page or in their notes to readers. This practice may also have been justified in some circumstances, as the translation process was limited to minimal stylistic and linguistic adaptations of previous Italian versions already available on the market and required no particular intellectual effort on the translator’s part. In

²¹ Wallerius, *Elementi di agricoltura fisica e chimica*, pp. XI–XII.

²² F. Home, *I principi dell’agricoltura e della vegetazione [...] tradotta dal francese con una nuova prefazione e note del traduttore*, Venezia, Caroboli e Pompeati, 1764.

²³ ‘Al lettore’, in Home, *I principi dell’agricoltura*, p. XVII.

²⁴ V. Becagli, ‘La diffusione della fisiocrazia nell’Italia del Settecento. Note per una ricerca’, in P. Barucci (ed.), *Le frontiere dell’economia politica. Gli economisti stranieri in Italia dai mercantilisti a Keynes*, Firenze, Polistampa, 2003, pp. 63–83; A. Trampus, ‘La traduzione settecentesca di testi politici: il caso della *Scienza della Legislazione* di Gaetano Filangieri’, *Rivista internazionale di tecnica della traduzione*, vol. 6, 2002, pp. 19–44.

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to meet the growing demand from readers of translated books, publishers were forced to work at a fast pace to get a substantial number of volumes to print – quickly so they could beat the competition – and to rely on people who were very often on the margins of the “literary crafts”. Alongside influential authors such as Gaspare Gozzi, Scipione Maffei, or Melchiorre Cesarotti, for whom translation may have been a helpful activity that complemented the success of their cultural projects, there was also room for the “semi-literati” or “mercenary writers” who, according to Giuseppe Baretti, were always available to the various printers, giving in to their every request to “earn a little something translating from French or English”.²⁵

Translators and book market

Regardless of how well they were paid or how much they were valued intellectually, translators were greatly sought-after in the publishing industry and could get involved in projects for the most disparate reasons. As Michel Espagne suggests, it is useful to reflect on the reasons that might have led a translator to specific publishing propositions. First, assignments could come from various clients, such as members of scientific academies or other cultural institutions, whose programmes and objectives included promoting the dissemination of “useful books”; or, naturally, the work might have been requested by individual printers or publishers, who periodically updated their catalogues with one or more works they considered of potential interest to their target audience. At times, the relationship between publishers and translators was far from idyllic. Sometimes, there could be divergent or even irreconcilable positions regarding what translation strategies should be employed to meet the audience’s specific demands or, more generally, even regarding typographical matters. Publishers could decide to get rid of translators even after the work had started, if the latter did not adhere to instructions or their work did not find favour with readers. Translators could also decide to leave their assignment in the face of hindrances or shortcomings on the part of the client. One very clear example of this is the story of the Venetian abbot Tommaso Contin. In 1767, he was engaged to translate *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des égaremens de l’esprit humain par rapport à la religion chretienne* – better known as *Dictionnaire des hérésies*

²⁵ G. Baretti, *Gl’Italiani, o sia Relazione degli usi e costumi d’Italia di Giuseppe Baretti. Tradotta dall’inglese con note del traduttore*, in *Opere di Giuseppe Baretti scritte in lingua italiana*, vol. 6, Milano, Pirotta, 1818, p. 97.

– by the French abbot and professor François-André-Adrien Pluquet.²⁶ As Contin states in a “Letter from the translator to the printer”, which he wanted to include in the second edition of the translation, the first project he undertook was left unfinished due to the unprofessional behaviour of one of the two printers tasked with bringing the *Dizionario* to print, the Venetian Vincenzo Radici. Not only was Contin forced to abandon his initial plan – which consisted of adding notes and comments to the original edition – thereby betraying the trust and “the commitment he had made [...] to the public”, he also had to defend his name and “resort to legal action”, thus losing “so much leisure time” that could have been used for the activity of adding notes and enhancing the work.²⁷

Of course, whether they were in the “category” of celebrated writers and scientists or were lesser-known figures on the intellectual landscape, translators were also brought to this work for personal reasons: namely, a willingness to contribute to the progress of their country, by giving their fellow countrymen access to classic or modern works that had had considerable success in Europe and had the potential to inspire renewal in various fields, ranging from the political to the scientific and literary. Those with this motivation often handled the entire process, selecting texts and getting personally involved in every stage of the textual and paratextual adaptation of the original, frequently adding notes and forewords in which they expounded their project. This is a clear and effective example of how translations could be used as a tool, alongside other cultural activities, to convey one’s message. At times, these translators bore the cost of the publication themselves. This was the case of Friulian priest Pietro Antoniutti, chaplain of the doge Ludovico Manin, a prolific translator of numerous English and Scottish publications he considered to be some of the most thought-provoking about the political and cultural condition of Venice before the fall of the Republic and during the first Austrian occupation.²⁸

Lastly, it is important to remember that, on some occasions, authors who wished to promote their work all over the Republic of Letters would seek out a translator who could quickly produce a satisfactory version. This was an effective practice, although some translators and printers would declare, falsely, in their forewords or dedications, that they had

²⁶ F.A.A. Pluquet, *Dizionario dell’eresie, degli errori, e degli scismi* [...], Venezia, presso Gian Francesco Garbo, 1771.

²⁷ ‘Lettera del traduttore allo stampatore’, in Pluquet, *Dizionario dell’eresie*.

²⁸ See A. Castagnino, ‘La plume du traducteur. Le prêtre Pietro Antoniutti médiateur culturel entre Venise et la Grande Bretagne (années 1780-1820)’, in M. Magne (ed.), *Prendre la plume des Lumières aux Romantismes. Pratiques de l’écrit dans l’Europe de la fin de l’époque moderne, actes élargies du colloque (Nice, 13 novembre 2015)*, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2019, pp. 53–66.

received a copy of the original from the author and that their intervention was done purely for commercial reasons, to make their edition more appealing to the public. One of the most frequent accusations directed at publishers and translators by their competitors was that they had worked from reprints, pirate editions, or less accurate and less complete versions of the original, and were thus offering a poor product to the Italian public. Similarly, competition between printers could centre around the “traductions-relais”²⁹ or “second-hand translations”. This widespread practice involved working from, usually, French translations of books in lesser-known languages. This stratagem was commonly employed in the eighteenth century for German or English books, which reached readers’ hands, as the Sienese Abbot Pietro Crocchi skilfully put it, having changed “language on reaching the Loire or the Seine, as if they had changed clothes” and, thus, having lost “the masculine robustness of [their] style”.³⁰ The ability to boast that they had entrusted the task of translating an English author to someone with an excellent command of the language was a feature to which publishers always gave prominence – and never hid – in forewords or on the title page itself, since it was deemed an added value that would guide the choice of potential customers.

The translators at work

If we wanted to find an immediate and concise definition for every translation project that sought to stay faithful to the original author while making the necessary changes to adapt the work to the new context, we could use three words: enrich, correct, and improve. These three verbs were guidelines for successfully meeting the needs of different target readers.³¹

²⁹ On the “second hand translation” and its cultural implications see G. Roche, *Les traductions-relais en Allemagne au XVIIIème siècle. Des lettres aux sciences*, Paris, CNRS Edition, 2001.

³⁰ ‘From P. Crocchi to J. Boswell, Siena 2 gennaio 1769’, in J. Boswell, *The General Correspondence of James Boswell (1766–1767)*, ed. by R.C. Cole, New Haven-Edinburgh, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 133. For example, it should be noted that much of the most innovative English historiographical work was made accessible to Italian readers through translations that relied on existing French versions.

³¹ A basic overview of the Italian translation market is provided by A. Castagnino, ‘Il “bisogno” di traduzione. Lettori, editori e strategie di traduzione nell’Italia del XVIII secolo’, in L. Braida, B. Ouvry-Vial (eds.), *Leggere in Europa. Testi, forme, letture, XVIII–XXI sec.*, Roma, Carocci, 2023, pp. 147–170.

The first need to take care of was getting rid of any element that might offend the morality, “sentiments”, and “spirit” of every “good Catholic”.³² Statements and arguments against the morality and principles of Catholicism were edited or given a completely different meaning through a series of precise measures ranging from omitting a single word, sentence, or chapter, to completely rewriting paragraphs. Here, more than in other circumstances, the reader had to be protected, and the translator was asked to act as a censor.³³

Publishers and translators could decide not to deliver an absolute, almost “superstitious” adherence to the original and a strict “page by page”, “word by word” equivalence. This was for other reasons, too, such as the desire to simplify the form, style, or vocabulary of the original, to make it more understandable and more suited to the level of knowledge of specific categories of readers. Not all translators, however, considered it necessary or even appropriate to alter or “mutilate” the original text when its subject was religious, moral, or political, preferring instead to adapt only the peritext, by adding elements like footnotes, which could provide readers with the information and the “antidotes” to resist the “poison” of philosophers or other Protestant authors. An example of a translator who mastered this strategy perfectly is offered by the aforementioned Pietro Antoniutti. In his versions of David Hume’s *History of England* and William Robertson’s *History of Scotland*, he defended his decision to remain faithful to the texts of the two historians, explaining that he believed it was more useful to include long forewords and a series of “warning” notes to counter any expressions that “seemed to insult the Faith” and to help the less discerning reader understand that the impartiality of the two authors was clouded by their being, in one case, an atheist and, in the other, a minister of the Presbyterian Church.³⁴ By doing this, Antoniutti and the many other translators who opted for this solution were enabling the reader to “draw from the original source” and, thanks to the explanations or guidelines provided in their notes or forewords, to get an idea of what might be false and incorrect in certain theses or arguments.

³² *Dissertazione preliminare*, in Pluquet, *Dizionario dell’eresie*, p. XV.

³³ Particularly paradigmatic is the case of the Tuscan translation of the *Histoire des deux Indes* by Abbé Raynal, analysed by S. Landi, ‘Censura e legittimazione del discorso politico. La traduzione toscana dell’*Histoire des deux Indes* dell’abate Raynal’, in N. Guasti, R. Minuti (eds.), *Traduzioni e circolazione della letteratura economico-politica nell’Europa settecentesca*, special issue of *Cromohs*, vol. 9, 2004, pp. 1–13.

³⁴ W. Robertson, *Storia di Scozia [...] dall’Originale Inglese recata nell’Italiano idioma da Pietro Antoniutti*, Londra [but Venezia], per A. Millar e T. Cadell [but Giovanni Gatti], 1784; and D. Hume, *Istoria dell’Inghilterra di David Hume [...] Volgarizzata dall’abate Pietro Antoniutti*, Venezia, Tipografia Parolari, 1818–1820.

As one might easily guess, the paratext was one of the areas of most significant intervention by translators. First, they were able to identify strategies for adapting the format, adding indexes of names or by subject, dividing the text across several volumes, or reorganising the content into different sections or chapters to highlight key elements of the author's ideas. One of the main objectives of translators was not only to provide readers with editions purged of possible dangers but also to improve the readability of the text and its "understandability" by different categories of readers. To achieve this, the two preferred instruments were the foreword and footnotes.

As we have already seen, publishers and translators used forewords essentially to present and justify the value of their editorial and cultural projects to the eyes of the public. At the same time, they served to place the work within the broader context of its author's other output, to point the way toward a specific reading of the themes described, and to suggest which parts deserved more consideration. A similar discourse can be made for the footnotes. As we have already seen, a rich system of notes could be justified by the need to warn readers about passages that were dangerous in moral or religious terms, without interfering too invasively with the text proper. No less importantly, they could be used to add comments to correct certain of the author's statements or enhance the original work by clarifying terms and concepts with additional explanations, incorporating some of the information provided in the original, and offering further bibliographical references, often related to texts or other translations available in the catalogue of the same printer! Footnotes were also used for broader commentary to place the work more firmly in the target context and give readers a better understanding of the content. In this regard, it is interesting to consider the case of scientific texts. In these publications, the peritext provided space for digressions and lessons, in which comparisons could be made between the experiences and cases described in the original text and those that were specific to the Italian context, thus facilitating the readers' understanding. In some instances, printers and, especially, translators could decide not to restrict their observations to the space in the notes or the foreword and could choose to collect all their theories and considerations into additional volumes.

The most frequent forms of intervention in the peritext were not limited to incorporating a new system of notes, forewords, or additional volumes but even involved complementary documents and iconographic or cartographic elements. Many printers devoted special attention to these aspects and produced figurative elements of a high standard, including plates and illustrations specially created for the edition by

important engravers and artists, or based on a reworking of the models already present in the original edition. As I have already mentioned several times in these pages, we should not underestimate the fact that the work to enhance the iconographic and cartographic elements and the stylistic and linguistic modernisation of a text often stemmed from considerations that were principally commercial in nature. It was frequently the case that more than one Italian version of the same foreign work was available on the market. Therefore, it was essential for printers to make their edition stand out, by “adorning” it with features that made it, so to speak, unique and, therefore, interesting to potential readers. The fact that competition between publishers to release a first or better Italian edition of a European bestseller was far from sporadic is evident, for example, in the arguments made in announcements of publication and, of course, in some of the judgements included in the peritext of the translations themselves. Forewords, for example, and footnotes could contain explicit references to previous editions already on the Italian market and rather negative opinions of the work done by other translators and printers, who were accused of using different source texts than the original or, more generally, of producing volumes of inferior typographical quality and poorly translated ones.

Conclusions

As I have tried to suggest, offering some food for thought, eighteenth century Italy had a growing awareness of the crucial role translators could play in the cultural renewal of society. Far from performing a simple linguistic transposition, they worked on multiple levels on both text and paratext to transform the original edition. By using footnotes and prefaces as “places” where they could sway the readers toward a specific interpretation of the text, they transformed and reshaped the original theories, ideas, and concepts. Whatever motivation there may be behind the production of a given translation, a specific mediation work is always carried out; and focusing on this mediation work could offer us an innovative key to deepening the understanding of the dynamics underlying the processes of reception and circulation of ideas and texts.

To properly investigate their activities, it is fundamental to focus on all the elements brought under scrutiny, among others, by Espagne and Burke, detecting and reconstructing the profile and biography of translators. Translators could have precise goals to achieve with their work, which may result from a personal initiative or, on the contrary, may be influenced by editorial or business logic. Their professional relationships and careers in the literary or publishing world could influence

their choices and provide numerous chances to work, meet authors, and come into contact with “useful” texts to translate; but not everyone could have the necessary linguistic competencies to complete the work, or the same opportunities to access the original editions.

Tracking and identifying translators can be quite challenging, especially because, as mentioned, there are many lesser-known and forgotten figures alongside well-known names. Therefore, conducting research by examining prefaces or editorial introductions to translated works becomes essential, where biographical references and translator names may be found. Additionally, investigating the correspondence of authors and those involved in translations and archival material connected to the editorial process can be helpful in this task.

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