

Siobhán McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation: Surpassing the Source*. *Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies*, 14. New York; London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. ix, 266. ISBN 9780415816762. \$125.00.

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Students interested in translation will enthusiastically welcome the volume under review, which can be placed alongside other recent achievements in the field, such as M. Bettini, *Vertere: un'antropologia della traduzione nella cultura antica*, Torino 2012 (BMCR [2013.04.26](#); the two volumes on occasion discuss the same material); J. Glucker, C. Burnett (eds), *Greek into Latin from Antiquity until the Nineteenth Century*, London-Turin 2012 (BMCR [2012.07.53](#)); S. McGill, *Plagiarism in Latin Literature*, Cambridge 2012; C. Bonnet, F. Bouchet (eds), *Translatio: traduire et adapter les Anciens*, Paris 2013 (BMCR [2013.10.55](#)), to be added to the volume's general bibliography.

The main goal of McElduff's investigation is to shape and elucidate the concept of translation in Roman literature from Livius Andronicus to Gellius, a concept that does not entirely overlap with our modern notion of it. She shows how such an idea is a rather static one with no significant evolution, since Roman practices of translation maintained across time their foundational objective both to appropriate and control the products of other cultures, especially the Greek one. Also, the articulation of this concept is much more nuanced than ours, as also confirmed by the fact that the Romans did not have a specific word to denote translation. A useful appendix on *Roman Terminology for Translation* (189-96), lists the most recurrent terms. Readers, however, would have benefited from a compilation of all the explanations of metaphorical value, which are scattered throughout the volume.

The book is divided into an introduction and six rich and informative chapters that carefully account for the role of translation in Roman culture across time, texts, and genres. Although some sections may seem too descriptive, they will certainly help non-specialists to grasp the context more easily.

In the Introduction (1-16) McElduff, after illustrating the principal focus of her research (Roman literary translations from Greek), reviews some of the past approaches to Roman translation,¹ the interrelation of translation and intertextuality, which is crucial to Latin literature, and the specificity of Roman translation practices, which owing to their variety and complexity resist reductive treatment as rough precursors of ours. She also points out that even material conditions of reading were different and that translation from memory was probably quite a common practice as well as epitomising and excerpting, in that they were at the heart of the selective criteria operating in ancient translations. As a result, Roman translators were not sensitive to the aspect of fidelity to the original text, which is the general rule in modern translation and perhaps our greatest source of concern (to some extent the original text may represent an obstacle to natural and felicitous rendering and stylistic congruity); by contrast, they approached the Greek source with much more freedom and were interested in emphasising their translating skills as a way to show their control over it, which makes translating tantamount to *aemulatio* and sometimes even alien to our understanding. Control may certainly be identified as a key theme in the volume that will guide the readers through the following pages, in which McElduff attempts to pin down a history of Roman theorising about translation (the Romans appear to have been the first to engage 'theoretically' with this issue). Roman culture coming to grips with Greek texts cannot be detached, especially in its

early stages, from Rome's military domination of Greek territory: translation practices are convincingly portrayed by McElduff as deeply ingrained in their own historical context. In most cases, however, they were conceived as elite translations (this is another concept key to the author's analysis), in that they were aimed at educated addressees who were bilingual or had a perfect command of Greek.

Chapter 1 (17-38), also serving as a kind of introduction, focuses on Greek as an essential component of elite Roman identity. Greek came to overshadow the other languages spoken in the Roman Empire, as proven by the silence of literary sources. After devoting a few pages to the complex figure of the *interpretes* (especially in military contexts), the chapter offers some insights into official translations of the *senatus consulta* into Greek, the lingua franca of the Greek East, which stand out for being strikingly unidiomatic. Amongst these official translations, Augustus' *Res gestae* presents a certain number of deviations from standard Greek that, owing to the political overtones of the text, might in fact be intentional choices rather than errors, targeted at a provincial audience rather than a Roman one.

Chapter 2 (39-60) tackles the core subject of the volume: literary translation. Starting from the canonical authors of the archaic period, Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius, and pointing to a nexus of socio-political factors that spurred Roman elite to appropriate Greek culture in a delicate phase of military expansion and cultural innovation, McElduff chooses to discuss epic translations (*Odussia*, *Punica*, *Annales*). We might perhaps want to recall the long-standing prejudice against the lack of originality of Latin literature as being a derivative product or, to borrow Niebuhr's words, a 'totgeborene'. Therefore, the author does justice to early Roman translators in giving prominence to their effort to shift material from one cultural and linguistic baggage to another and produce 'Romanness' (incidentally, Romans prior to Livius had no tradition of epic, which also raises the issue of a target audience). Some additional thoughts on Ennius' practice in translating of Greek tragedies, which he most likely accessed already equipped with *scholia*, might have added one further strand alongside epic.²

In Chapter 3 (61-95) the focus shifts to translating drama and revolves around Plautus' and Terence's prologues as the most representative *loci* for the origins of Roman dramatic forms. The intrinsic 'ambiguity' of Roman translation practices, which combine faithfulness to the model with substantial alterations of it, is exemplified by Plautus' attitude towards Greek texts. After shedding light on the Plautine formula *vortit barbare*, in which McElduff spots a military overtone (the playwright despoiling Greek texts corresponds to Roman generals absorbed with looting Greek art), she draws attention to the pervasive presence of Greek elements in Plautus' comedies: this tendency is to be interpreted as Plautus' ability to represent Greekness, or rather a stereotype of it, onstage as a category of Roman hegemonic discourse. In Terence's prologues, some of which the author discusses at length, translation appears to be entangled with the problem of *contaminatio* (she offers a fine analysis of *diligentia* and *neglegentia* on p. 88-89) and the selective reworking of scenes from different Greek models. Plagiarism (*furtum*) begins to enter the scene and the relationship with Greek sources now also has to face the rise of a Roman comic tradition. As a marginal observation, it would be worth investigating the meaning of *locus reprehensus* in Ter. *Ad.* 13-14 against that of *locus integer* at lines 9-10 in light of the author's thoughts on *verbum de verbo exprimere* at line 11 (p. 93).

Chapter 4 (96-121) is devoted to Cicero exclusively. His ruminations on translation pervade much of his works, oratorical and philosophical, whereof McElduff duly selects the most representative cases. The orator, in Cicero's view, both has a civilising force—he shapes the raw inert materia of primitive man's mind—and is the only possible translator. In *De Oratore* (1.154-55) Crassus illustrates his practice of translating Greek orators as a training activity to improve his own

command of Latin language. Working on Latin authors is perceived as hindering, whereas translating Greek texts frees and helps Latin style (this is a way of acknowledging Greece's cultural superiority). Elsewhere, Cicero emphasises the elite nature of philosophical translations, which are done for those who know Greek, and accounts for the need of having the right sort of people as translators. The translator is in fact requested not to translate literally, but to reproduce the power of words (*vis verborum*) and, in doing so, let his voice and personality surface (*iudicium*), which is what the *interpres* is incapable of doing (*Off.* 1.6 is an emblematic passage alongside *Opt. gen.* 14). The translating process, from Cicero's self-referential perspective, ideally should end up replacing the Greek original.

Chapter 5 (122-56) picks up on Cicero's translating ambitions to demonstrate how four poets of the Late Republican and Augustan periods, namely Catullus, Horace, Lucretius, and Germanicus, heavily drew on Greek sources with the ultimate purpose of calling attention to their own personal voice. After offering a close-reading of Cat. 50-51 as a diptych, in which 50 functions as a translation preface, the final stanza of 51 is construed as Catullus' response to Sappho's poem 31 («as a translator's afterword», p. 130). On 116, which McElduff casts as a pseudo-translation preface that is followed by no translation, the reader is left wondering whether the iambic tone adopted by the poem may perhaps account for non-translation, unlike 50-51 and 65-66. Horace, strikingly blurring or erasing the linguistic difference between himself and his Greek models, not only appropriates Greek lyrics, but also aims at a place as a new member of the Greek canon, although he writes in Latin (*Ep.* 1.19; *Od.* 1.1; *Od.* 1.32). In *AP* 128-36 he shows how crowded the field of translation is and hints at making common material private through a creative process as the only way to success. Lucretius was not the first to engage in a translation of Greek Epicurean philosophers; nonetheless, he never mentions his predecessors. In *DRN* 3.1-10 he steps out of the Roman paradigm of translation as contention with the Greek model (in the specific case Epicurus); however, despite the acknowledged poverty of Latin, his very effort to spread Epicurus' philosophy by forging a technical language tailored to scientific argumentation points to competitiveness and aligns itself with traditional Roman ideas of translation, which Germanicus' *Aratea* also follows.

Chapter 6 (157-85), rounded off by a one-page conclusion (187), examines the post-Ciceronian landscape of translation theory. This section is packed with insightful interpretations, but in its overview it is a bit too dense (McElduff somewhat abruptly dismisses Petronius and does not touch upon Seneca *tragicus*). It deals with the two Senecas' approach to translation, which for both continues to remain inseparable from the underlying idea of change and improvement (for Seneca the Younger it also has a moral scope). After briefly discussing Petronius, Attius Labeo, the *Ilias Latina*, Quintilian, and Pliny the Younger, the chapter offers some concluding remarks on Aulus Gellius: he is presented as the first not to condemn the practice of word-for-word translation and to show a more respectful attitude towards Greek originals and the rendition of *verba singula*, which finally appears to gesture towards modern ideas of Western translation practices (*NA* 11.4).

In conclusion, perhaps some sections might have benefited from a neater structure, given the abundance of material made available to the reader; moreover, some discussion of other important figures (e.g. Ovid) might have been included (all the more since the author also dwells upon Parthenius of Nicaea, p. 122-26). This study, however, certainly succeeds in making sense of Roman translation practices and providing both basic and advanced tools for Latinists interested in the topic. Also, McElduff, by foregrounding the culturally and historically encoded components of Roman translations, rightly warns against the recourse to fallacious modern categories to interpret translation practices in antiquity.

1. The concept of *Pathetisierung* may have gone out of fashion, but in my view it deserves mention, since it effectively points to one of the most distinctive features of several Roman translations; cf. e.g. G.G. Biondi, *Mito o mitopoiesi?*, MD 5, 1980, 127, n. 7.

2. Cf. K. Lennartz, *Non verba sed vim: Kritisch-exegetische Untersuchungen zu den Fragmenten archaischer römischer Tragiker*, Stuttgart 1994 (present in the bibliography).