

THE MEDIEVAL POSTMODERN IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

ANTHONY PYM

UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI, TARRAGONA, SPAIN

“...they quote the case of elephants, a species occurring in each of these extreme regions [India and around the Pillars of Hercules], suggesting that the common characteristic of these extremes is explained by their continuity.” (Aristotle, *On the Heavens* 2.14)

Studies of European medieval translation practices have developed in relative independence of Translation Studies as an academic interdiscipline. This, I suggest, has been much to the detriment of Translation Studies as a whole. Many of the ideas and models most in tune with medieval translation are nevertheless reappearing in certain contemporary fields, in new guises, via deviously fashionable detours, and mostly without knowledge of their past. The weight of history, if known, might thus help balance many of our current debates. That is part of what I propose to investigate here.

The other part is perhaps more intriguing. The areas of possible convergence between the medieval and the postmodern, at least in terms of European history, reveal some shared opposition, I propose, to a third term, namely the model of translation inherited from the long Renaissance (at least in the European context), from what I shall broad-brush as the “modern”, extending to the adjective “modernist”. In many aspects, the modernist idea of translation as a confrontation of source and target is just as inadequate to the medieval as it is to the age of electronic communication. That model once firmly supported theories of equivalence, the illusion of equal national languages, and a certain primacy of individual authors and translators. So my argument here is not really that the medieval and the postmodern are somehow the same as each other (there are certainly more differences than similarities), but that they mark out the interim: they stand at two ends of that period where the “source vs. target” mindset oriented the practice and theorizing of translation, along with national language policies and the general politics of mediation. To do away with that simple “source vs. target” might thus be to sketch a medieval postmodern, not as any unified historical space, but as ground for interesting questions.

1. Localization as a thought experiment

I begin at the end. How do you analyze the translation of a website? The question is entirely legitimate as part of contemporary research. Yet when you get down to the actual analysis, on virtually any multilingual site of our age, the problems seem strangely familiar to medievalists. For example, exactly what text was the website translator was working from? What order should we put the various language versions in? How are they related between themselves? Are the pages really versions of each other, or of myriad intervening updates? What do we do with all the text and images that do *not* appear to be translations (because they are not in the text that we suspect was the start)? What are we to make of the numerous retranslations, not just over time (updates are still fairly easy to identify) but also for different linguistic varieties and specific social groups? And how can we assume, given the technical, iconic and linguistic complexity of the texts, not to mention their constant modulation, how can we assume that there is any one translator whose isolated work might be evaluated?

Such questions all concern the general production frame now known as “localization”. They quickly reveal that a website cannot be analyzed in the same way as the standard modernist translation of a published novel, say from English into Spanish. The traditional model of translation equivalence (start text here, target text there, and a translator somewhere in between) does not apply, or at least looks unhappy when co-opted into the localization frame. Further, if we ask whether versions of a multilingual website are equivalent to each other, the question is nothing like the issues the professionals themselves might discuss when working on the project. Speak with the people in charge of the website localization and you will mostly find a remarkable *lack* concern for equivalence, and a fascinating abundance of effort invested in what we might variously term cultural adaptation, product re-engineering, and the like. Those latter questions are certainly the more interesting ones in this day and age. They actually lie at the base of a relatively new approach to cross-cultural communication.

Website translation is one of the fastest growing sectors of the contemporary translation industry. The others would be in software and technical documentation. In all those areas, the talk is now of “localization”, rather than “translation”, for a set of diffuse reasons. There are new words in town, and they are not here arbitrarily. Medievalists might be interested in this, if only because they, as much as anyone, have trouble with the traditional model of translation.

So here I will attempt a thought experiment. Let us take the most general features of localization, especially the things that are so big that they are rarely actually seen, and test to what extent similar features can be found

in medieval translation practices. The exercise should bring out the significance of the similarities and perhaps the importance of the differences.

Here, in a large nutshell, are some general tenets of what I take to be localization processes (on which, see Esselink 2000, Pym 2004, 2010/2014):

1. When texts are localized, they are translated and adapted for a new locale. Our websites and software programs are thus localized, not just translated.
2. A locale is a social group defined by features that are linguistic, cultural, and sometimes economic. Locales are much smaller than entire languages or cultures. You localize for a locale.
3. Localization works from one text to produce texts for many different locales. This “one-to-many” principle differs from models where there is just one start text rendered into just one target text.
4. Localization does not work from an accidental start text, but from a text that has first been prepared so that it can be localized easily. This preparation is called “internationalization” (a misnomer, since nations have nothing to do with it, but there it is). The localization process thus starts from an “internationalized version”, which is far from a source in any strict sense and is thus better named as a “start text”.
5. Localization is usually carried out by teams that comprise experts in various fields (software engineering, graphics, terminology, translation, management, marketing).

The above features should hold for the localization of both websites and software, which was where some of the terms were developed. They apply particularly well in the case of multilingual business websites, although not always across the board.

Now, how might they apply to medieval translation? Let me test them, in order, taking as my slice of medieval translation the work from Arabic in the Hispania in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (see Pym 2000), which may or may not be representative of other centuries but remains substantial enough to be provocative.

1.1. Translated and adapted?

“Translated and adapted”, which could be a layman’s understanding of localization, is a phrase that might well apply to many medieval texts, if not to most. This is well attested by the attention paid in recent years to the continua of marginal annotations, glosses and commentaries, all provided by translators, often as part of the same project: the translators of the age felt relatively free to explain and comment on their texts, as indeed they were to leave out sections they considered inappropriate. In twelfth-century translations of Arabic proto-science (which had itself often been translated from Greek and then Syriac), the two concepts “translation” and “adaptation” might nevertheless be seen as having a functional separation. The many literalist translations of authoritative sources, often only dimly understood, result in a Latin that must have sometimes been so opaque that the secondary “adaptation” discourses became necessary. That is, the very difficulty of the start texts meant that there were two separate ways of dealing with them: literalist translation *or* relatively free adaptation (the notion of a middle way would not be formulated until 1533, by the Valencian scholar Joan Lluís Vives in his *De ratione dicende*).

This division in turn allowed for a pronounced tendency toward scholia and commentaries as such, some of which can also be understood as the result of retranslation combined with radical omission. Clagett provides the prime example in his 1953 analysis of Adelardus de Bada’s work on Euclid’s *Elements*. The first Latin version of the text indicates translation directly from an Arabic manuscript; the second includes didactic commentaries and omits much of the proofs; the third puts the proofs back in. The fact that translators or their rewriters could work on the same text in three different ways shows the limits of literalism and its active relation with adaptation.

If we now return to the localization frame, something strangely similar is in evidence. The ideology of localization, at least as a marketing ploy, is that cultural adaptation is necessary (and so are highly-paid cultural adaptors, it seems). The reality of the translation technologies, however, is that enhanced productivity ensues from sticking to the glossaries and the translation memories – a lot of the actual translation work within localization projects is actually quite literalist, or at least based on a concept of text-reuse that rides roughshod over any idea that each utterance gains meaning in a specific situation. The two sides are thus present: text reuse for the small things, and often a degree of cultural adaptation for the larger things, especially at the iconic levels that clients can see and pay for. The relation between these two types of solutions does not obey the same logic as in the medieval frame (where literalism necessitates adaptation), yet roughly the same two sides are present.

1.2. Translated for locales?

The locales addressed in localization projects are typically smaller than entire national languages or whole linguistic cultures. In the case of business software or computer games, they might be very specific indeed, defined by users' very particular prior experience and preferences for specialized language. Was there anything like such locales involved in medieval translation processes?

In the medieval frame, one might say there were nothing but locales. The social groups involved in the transmission process were typically so small that it is sometimes possible to count them one by one, albeit rarely with names (the detective work is typically difficult, yet the numbers are small and the copies of texts were also of very reduced numbers). What is missing from medieval translation projects is not on the level of locales, but on anything like the national frame. In Hispania in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries we have translations going into a range of Romance varieties (variously recognized as Galician, Leonese, Aragonese, Catalan, or Majorcan), all of which blend into each other, mixing their features, making it hard to treat them as anything but a dynamic dialect chain. Even the national cultures imposed by laws in the thirteenth century were not especially linguistic: Alfonso X commanded translations into a language recognizable as Castilian, and he conceivably edited them in the interests of standardizing a national language, yet he is supposed to be the author of the *Cantigas* in Galician. Perhaps similarly, the court of Jacme I of Aragon-Catalonia had a language recognizable as Catalan-Majorcan, but the king himself wrote his autobiography in Aragonese. This was an age where choice of language could be determined as much by genre as anything like a national preference; the territorial principle of language occupying land did not yet concern translations.

Instead of that territorial principle, and alongside the question of genres, the medieval view was of a hierarchy of languages, where some languages were considered superior to others, basically because they were closer to divine revelation (Hebrew, Greek and Latin all had divinely inspired versions of the Bible, and some writers also admitted revelation in Arabic and Sanskrit). Translation then usually flowed downwards on the hierarchies, from divine inspiration to languages of state bureaucracy, and occasionally to the patois. In the twelfth century, the reigning idea is still that this downward movement of translation had as its purpose the improvement of the target language, so all kinds of borrowings and calques were considered quite legitimate – hence the relative opacity of the translations. From the thirteenth century, admittedly, there is greater concern with the quality and standardization of the languages of state (the discovery of paper in Europe brought about a greater reliance on written records, bureaucracy and accountancy). Yet it was not until the Renaissance, when the very terms used to describe translation in Romance languages were altered (from *traslad-* to *traduc-*), that translators started to think seriously about the start and target languages as being on the same footing, with equal values. And that is when one could begin thinking about translation in terms of equivalence, albeit without the technical term for it.

Prior to the Renaissance, the role of medieval Latin was in many respects like the that of international English today. It belonged to no one, was used by all, could accept multiple interferences, was rich and expansive and uncontrolled, and would in turn tend to be imposed on the languages of lesser ideological standing. No one seems to have been overly concerned with cleaning it up. Indeed, when there was ideological control on the level of anything like a government or state, it tended to be highly individualistic and not formulated on the social level of language: it is always *this* particular abbot, *this* particular king, in a configuration of individualized power surrounded by identifiable intellectuals. In sum, yes, on both the political and linguistic fronts, the term “locale” would seem very highly suited to much of what was going on.

1.3. One-to-many translation?

The key to most localization projects is the way in which one central “internationalized” version is produced prior to translation into many languages, in a way that effectively replaces the notion of the unique source text. There is some evidence of this happening in medieval practice. To take a very important example, a Latin translation of the Quranic text was carried out in the north of Hispania in 1142-43; printed in Basel or Zurich in 1543, it went on to spawn translations into Italian in 1547, German in 1616, and Dutch in 1641, effectively shaping the European view of Islam for some five centuries (see Bastiaensen 1995). A second example might be dated from 1264, when one Habraym (“iuii”) is recorded as translating the text known as *La Escala de Mahoma* (The Ascent of Mohammed) from Arabic into Castilian, and the text was then rendered from Castilian into French by the Italian Bonaventure de Siene (“notaire et escriven”), who was also working for Alfonso X – this second translation might have influenced Dante’s *Divina Commedia* (according to a series of polemical assumptions that have no need to concern us here). That is, there are clear cases where one initial translation becomes the start text for further translations.

At the same time, though, one hesitates to see these initial translations as “internationalized versions”, that is, as texts whose sole purpose was to allow for the easy production of further translations. In both the cases just

cited, the initial step constituted a functional translation in itself, with immediate readers and dedicated financing. True, one might argue that both translations were commissioned precisely in order to orient the Christian understanding of Islam on a millennial scale (the Quranic translation came with a set of texts underscoring the evils of the prophet), and that their “international” function was thus in some way intended from the beginning. Yet that would be pushing the point – the medieval context lacked the degree of centralized production and distribution technologies for multiple reproduction that are now so easily assumed in localization projects.

In fact, a closer correlative of one-to-many production is quite possibly the pre-print transmission process by which copyists would constantly update, correct or otherwise adapt the translation, in a process that might in itself be considered a mode of translation. To understand this, you first have to appreciate the extent to which the languages (especially the Latin of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) was unstandardized, malleable, in constant interaction not just with the Arabic structures being brought in by the translators but also with the vernacular dialect chains that were also informing understanding. When d’Alverny (1954) locates 45 manuscripts Avicenna’s *De anima*, there are numerous variants, within at least three different traditions, with the differences actually indicating a rewriting of the institutional translation process itself (in fact removing the key role of a Jewish translator in the employ of the Toledo cathedral). The copying process thus brought about incremental changes that were frequently linguistic but could also be ideological. That kind of constant rewriting is not the same as one-to-many production from an internationalized version, but it is very similar to the processes by which websites and software are constantly updated and adapted.

1.4. Establishing the start text?

The key novelty in localization processes, I have argued elsewhere (Pym 2004), is not so much the adaptation process (there have always been adaptations) as it is the way the internationalized version often prepares or pre-translates the future translations. This can involve several processes, including the conversion of certain culture-specific elements into place-markers, the glossing of particular difficulties (as in Hollywood scripts prepared for future dubbing processes), writing in controlled languages, and allowing greater spaces for textual expansion. This degree of planning and foresight is virtually unprecedented in translation history. It finds no strong correlative in the medieval field.

One notes, however, that medieval manuscript variants affected not just the distribution of translations but also the actual constitution of the translation project itself. In highly institutional contexts – perhaps at the cathedral of Toledo in the twelfth century and more certainly under Alfonso X in the thirteenth century – the first step in the process was to establish the Arabic text that the translators were going to work from. This meant locating as many manuscript versions as possible, identifying the most reliable, interpreting the resulting text, and putting in the missing diacritics accordingly. One of the most elaborate accounts of such activities concerns the 1455 translation of the Quranic text by ‘Isa de Jabir for Juan de Segovia, who then translated it from Castilian into Latin (Cabanelas Rodríguez 1952; d’Alverny 1989). This could involve very considerable work – few in the medieval context would have doubted Vázquez-Ayora’s dictum that “translation is an act of interpretation” (1979: 205); one struggles these days to appreciate the extent to which texts were “communicative clues” (as relevance theory would put it), requiring considerable heuristic prowess. This establishing of the start text is not at all the same as the process by which internationalized versions are created in localization processes, yet their respective places in the production process do more or less map onto each other.

1.5. Teamwork?

Localization projects are carried out by teams of professionals with complementary skills. This is largely thanks to the electronic technologies that these days allow for several translators to work on the one project at the same time, and for quick successive revisions to be made to extensive texts.

Something like this teamwork is not difficult to find in medieval practice, at least in Hispania. The 1153-54 translation of Quranic documents was commissioned by the abbot of Cluny and carried out by Robertus Ketenensis and Hermannus Dalmata (the main translators into Latin), to whom was added the Mozarab “magister Petrus Toletanus”, the abbot’s own notary Petrus Pictaviensis, and a native informant named “Mahumeth”, although the abbot seems to have mentioned him only some years later (d’Alverny 1948: 71; Kritzeck 1964: 229). The team was thus significantly multicultural and multilingual: a travelling Englishman, an equally travelling intellectual possibly from the area we now know as Croatia, a French scholastic theologian able to control the Latin (and worthy of the client’s trust, since he was the abbot’s secretary), a Christian who had grown up in Islamic Toledo (and who was thus presumably bilingual in Arabic and Romance), and a

probably subservient native informant who was accorded no real name to speak of. The mix obviously makes sense in terms of complementary language skills and hierarchical control (the client's Latin was going to edit out anything inconvenient that came from the Arabic).

This very complementarity, however, raises an interesting question: given that the Arabic speakers were unlikely to have mastery of Latin (property deeds among the Mozarabs of Toledo could be in Arabic and Romance, not Latin), what common language did the team use to discuss their work? There is some paratextual evidence that one of the methods used in the twelfth century was to discuss the Arabic text in Romance, and for the Latinist then to write down the results of that discussion. That is, there are traces of a two-step translation process, the first into oral Romance, and the second into written Latin. With the Alfonsine translators of the thirteenth century, the Romance became the written translation, thus perhaps simplifying the process. However, about half the translations were still done by teams comprising at least a pair of translators (often a Jew and a Christian, but not always), and there was a series of secondary editors, variously named as a "corrector" (*emendador*), a "writer of glosses" (*glosador*) and an "organizer into chapters" (*capitulador*). In at least one instance the king himself is mentioned as making the final edit of the text, just in case there were any doubts about who was in control.

The complex localization teams of today thus find a potential correlative in the Alfonsine translation projects. One hastens to add, though, that the current localization teams are responding to the technical complexities of electronic texts and their communication, whereas the medieval teams were largely assembled because of linguistic difficulties and the perceived need for political control.

2. The medieval postmodern

My thought experiment has revealed several areas of convergence, plus a few very significant differences. Let me first survey the common features: degrees of adaptation alongside degrees of literalism, transmission to locales as social frames much smaller than the nation state, a limited use of "one-to-many" translation processes, corresponding concern with "pre-editing" as preparing the start text prior to future translations, and common use of teamwork, to the extent that the investment of responsibility in an individual translator might be the exception rather than the rule. If that were all, we might easily talk about the medieval postmodern, as a facile conflation of common elements.

The purpose of the exercise, however, is not just to bring out striking coincidences. Aristotle knew that there were elephants in India and Africa, at the two extremes of the known world, and enlisted this as one of his proofs that the earth was a sphere. But this was not his only proof, and it was not sufficient (he did not allow for two different species of elephants), and he also had to measure how much of the earth separated those two extremes. Here, by insisting on the common elements, I hope not to have unified two separate species, and I would instead aspire to have isolated the significance and indeed the exceptionality of that which historically *separated* the medieval and the postmodern: the long modernist Renaissance, with its print culture and national languages.

3. It's the technology, stupid!

What about the points of significant difference between the medieval and the postmodern?

Considered carefully, they all concern communication technologies in some way. They could point to the underlying role of media, as sketched out by Littau (2011), although I hesitate to proclaim any "medial turn" (or any turn at all!) and the causal relations seem to me rather more subtle than claims along the lines of "word-for-word translation is a practice congruent with scribal culture" (Littau 2011:268). As Littau's forays actually show, technologies open spaces within which many active decisions can be made; there is little one-to-one mapping.

I noted that in both medieval and localization practices there is a basic division between literalism and adaptation, and that the two logics work to compensate for each other. The underlying technological reasons are nevertheless very different in each case. Medieval manuscripts, especially prior to the age of paper, were expensive to produce, difficult to come by, and insufficiently encoded (thanks to the lack of diacritics and language standardization). Hence recourse to literalism and the need to work on the start text prior to translation. In localization, the benefits of literalism for text re-use and the logic of internationalization are based on precisely the opposite technological capacities: the instant reproducibility of texts and the geometric growth in memory capacity mean that there is an abundance of information that can be embedded either in the internationalized version or in the various databases that are used to standardize and control translation. The strange thing is that the medieval under-encoding and the postmodern super-encoding should lead to superficially similar configurations of translation practice.

The history of writing technologies, however, is not a simple progression from parchment to print to electronic communication. In between the parchment and print there was the age of non-print paper, in use in

Hispania from the thirteenth century. Paper was marginally cheaper and more easily transported than parchment, allowing for initial oral translations to be written down and then revised, in some cases more than once (the Alfonsine corpus has some significantly different re-translations). Prior to paper, it would presumably have been possible to note down tentative versions on wax tablets, which could be discussed and were then erased as the definitive translation was written. With the advent of paper, though, successive full revisions were carried out, and those tentative versions could then circulate among intellectuals and nobles. Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal (1951) speculates that the final parchment versions would then virtually be only for the monasteries and chanceries. Given this extended rewriting process, readers were presumably more aware of working with unfair copies; every text prior to the final parchment was potentially revisable. Print, on the other hand, meant that a definitive translation could not only be circulated far more widely, it could also be read as a perfected text in its own right. In the terms of Walter Benjamin (1936/1980), who was thinking more of sculpture and film, paper would support a regime of “perfectibility”, of potentially infinite revisions toward a goal never reached, as opposed to the relative fixity and hence locational “aura” of both parchment and print. Indeed, the age of print would tend to support the double illusion of the established start text and the final target text, and thus a regime of relative equivalence, of relatively equal languages, and of relatively individual responsibility for the target text. Pre-print technologies did not fully sanction the illusion of the definitive start text, nor of the definitive translation. Retranslation and modification were thus always possibilities, as they are in the days of electronic publication, when a further update is always in the wings and we are never sure which version we are looking at.

This same extreme difference between the communication technologies explains why the use of teamwork is superficially similar but responds to profoundly opposed causes. In the medieval case, complementary competencies were needed because of the under-coding, a frequent lack of linguistic knowledge, and the concerns of political control in the face of an unfathomable alterity. In the localization frame, on the other hand, the teams are needed because of the multimedia super-encoding, the complexity of which is beyond the ken of most individual participant. We have seen that, in between these two extremes, print allowed for the concentration of sufficient skills in the individual translator. When Étienne Dolet posited, in 1540, that the translator should completely understand the start text and language, and that liberty was preferable to word-for-word servitude (1830:14-16), he tellingly assumed an individual translator who had access to mastery on both side of the equivalence equations. Perhaps not by chance, Dolet was a printer, as well as a translator. The age of the individual translator somehow lies between the medieval and the postmodern.

With respect to linguistic environments, postmodern locales are unlike medieval intellectuals in that groups with the same interests and language can communicate simultaneously from all over the world, breaking up both the temporal and geographic dimensions of national space. Medieval groups, on the other hand, depended very much on physical proximity: the teams had to share the same place and time, and were thus far more subject to political control. In the postmodern frame, the ease and relative instantaneity of electronic communications breaks up the illusory cultural and linguistic unity of the nation state; in the medieval world, the delays, uncertainties and social restrictions of cultural communications made the illusion of national homogeneity difficult to create. Both frames are heterogeneous and multilingual, but achieve these qualities thanks to precisely the opposite efficiencies in communication.

And then the most obvious difference, so large that it is often not seen. Medieval books were heavy and expensive, and knowledge of written languages was highly restricted to narrow intellectual elites, which inevitably depended on power bases in the church or in the nobility. Medieval translation practices, at least in the field of written translation, were thus necessarily elitist, without any pretence at massive social dissemination. Our technologies today, on the other hand, allow translation activities to be engaged in by vast sections of Western societies, if they want to, at minimal cost and with only basic technological requirements: the younger the user, the better they generally are at getting online machine translation to work. This is a huge difference, and one that suggests a repositioning of academic work on translation. Until the recent past, researchers have enjoyed an implicit pact with translation professionals (the people who get paid for translating), presuming to help them and to train more for the future. Now that technologies allow the potential democratization of translation, researchers might fruitfully turn their attention to the many wider segments of society that could benefit greatly from the dissemination of simple knowledge, such as how (not) to use free online machine translation. Our pact with the elites, in evidence since the Middle Ages, must now be radically questioned.

4. Why Translation Studies needs the medieval

There are two main reasons why I think the academic discipline of Translation Studies should be paying more attention to European medieval translation practices. The first is clear enough from the above: we are in the midst of a major change in communication technologies, and a long time frame is needed in order to appreciate the profundity and possible consequences of that change. That is, the medieval can help us think about where we stand in time, and how technologies open possibilities.

The second reason is perhaps not so obvious. Thanks largely to those same communication technologies, we are also in an age of globalization and ideological reactions to globalization. In Translation Studies, the major reaction has been a series of calls for a “decolonized” discipline, opening out to non-Western concepts and practices of translation, and more than occasionally denouncing the previous imposition of Western ideologies. Such debates have helped stimulate some important and intriguing research, and we are now beginning to realize how extensively diverse the various concepts of translation have been across cultures and throughout history. We can now play in a much wider field. One of the downsides of that chain of events, however, is the fabrication of Western translation as having been just one thing over its history. This can be seen, for instance, in the way Douglas Robinson (1991) construes “mainstream Western translation theory” as a product of Christian theology that borrowed domination ideology from classical Rome, or in Lawrence Venuti (1995) when he assumes that Western translation practices have promoted transparent discourse since antiquity, or again in Maria Tymoczko (2007) when she reduces Western translation theory to something called “transfer”, which can then be opposed to a wealth of more exciting ideas from elsewhere (for a critique of these positions, see Pym 2011). Not surprisingly, when I lecture China I find students there quickly assuming that Western translation practices have indeed been forever based on servitude to the source, transparency and transfer, since that is broadly what the best-known American theorists are now saying about their own tradition. If, however, you throw medieval practices into the mix, and if you then attempt to make sense of why localization has appeared as a field, the dominant views of Western history are forced to become rather more nuanced, as indeed are the many voices now calling for something better, for something that is axiomatically “non-Western”.

Those two reasons (the attention to technology, and the West vs. the Rest) can be brought together. If, at base, the history of translation rides on the history of technologies, then non-Western cultures are bound to be working from alternative traditions. A major influence on thirteenth-century translation practices in Europe was, I have posited, the learning of how to make paper. Of course, the Chinese had had paper since the second century, so one might expect the consequences of that particular technology to date from much earlier there than in Europe. And then, the major change in Europe was certainly the printing press, dating from the mid fifteenth century. But the Chinese had movable type technology in the eleventh century, so once again they should have explored the consequences well ahead of the West. There can be no doubt that pre-Modernist translation practices offer numerous diverse paths that await exploration, and the simple history of technologies can suggest why this might be so.

In fact, the real mystery is how, and why, the modernist Western translation form (the one that developed between the medieval and the postmodern) was disseminated all over the world, roughly following the construction of railways and the use of the steam press. That is, steam technologies, in the nineteenth century, brought the imposition that anti-globalizing forces now want to react against. But their struggles need not, and perhaps should not, reduce the West to just one timeless and continuous opponent, as if there were only one kind of elephant in the world.

Without investing too much in the term “postmodern”, we might yet see European medieval translation as a vital source of concepts, models, and points of reference for the complexity of our shared present, in the West and elsewhere.

References

- Alverny, Marie-Thérèse d'. 1954. 'Avendauth?'. *Homenaje a Millás-Valllicrosa*. 2 vols. Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. Vol. 1. 19-43.
- Alverny, Marie-Thérèse d'. 1989. 'Les traductions à deux interprètes, d'arabe en langue vernaculaire et de la langue vernaculaire en latin'. Geneviève Contamine ed. *Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen Age*. Paris: CNRS. 193-206.
- Aristotle. 350 BC. *On the heavens*. Trans. J. L. Stocks. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/heavens.html>. Accessed April 20134.
- Bastiaensen, Michel. 1995. Contribution to *Translators through History*. Ed. Jean Delisle & Judith Woodsworth. Benjamins / Unesco. 197-200.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1936/1980. 'L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de la reproduction mécanisée'. Trans. Pierre Klossowski. *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. Vol. 1.2. 709-739.
- Cabanelas Rodríguez, Darío. 1952. *Juan de Segovia y el problema islámico*. Madrid: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Madrid.
- Clagett, Marshall. 1953. "The Medieval Latin Translations from the Arabic of the Elements of Euclid with Special Emphasis on the Versions of Adelard of Bath", *Isis* 44: 27-28, 38-42.
- Esselink, Bert. 2000. *A Practical Guide to Localization*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Littau, Karin. 2011. "First steps towards a media history of translation". *Translation Studies* 4(3): 261-281.

- Menéndez Pidal, Gonzalo. 1951. "Cómo trabajaron las escuelas alfonsíes". *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 5(4): 363-380.
- Pym, Anthony. 1997. *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Pym, Anthony. 2000. *Negotiating the Frontier. Translators and Intercultures in Hispanic History*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Pym, Anthony. 2004. *The Moving Text. Translation, Localization, and Distribution*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Pym, Anthony. 2010/2014. *Exploring Translation Theories*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pym, Anthony. 2011. "Translation theory as historical problem-solving". *Intercultural Communication Review* 9: 49-61.
- Robinson, Douglas. 1991. *The Translator's Turn*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.
- Tymoczko, Maria. 2007. "Why European Translators Should Want to De-Westernize Translation Studies. Plenary talk to the European Society for Translation Studies Conference, Ljubljana, September 2007. http://videlectures.net/est07_tymoczko_wet/. Accessed April 2014.
- Vázquez-Ayora, Gerardo. 1979. "Semiostylistics: Stylistics plus Interpretation." *Babel* 25(4): 204-206.
- Vives, Joan Lluís. 1533. *De ratione dicendi*. Lovanij: ex officina Rutgeri Rescija.