

GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION
DYNAMICS OF TRANSLATION: NAVIGATING MEDIEVAL TEXTS
AND BEYOND

The current issue of *Translation Matters* stems from a symposium hosted by CETAPS in 2021: *Medieval Metamorphosis: Rewritings, Tradition, and Translation*, which aimed to unite medievalist researchers with translation scholars working in different fields. Two main themes were proposed for discussion: (1) The phenomenon of translation during the Middle Ages, exploring various theoretical aspects and practical examples of translating/transmitting texts and genres between two linguistic codes within the medieval context; (2) Methodologies, strategies and challenges involved in translating medieval texts into contemporary languages, addressing both theoretical considerations and practical instances of translating specific texts and genres. The event was conducted online and involved 12 researchers from 8 different universities.

The idea for organizing this symposium came to me during the completion of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Porto/Free University of Berlin. The dissertation focused on German troubadour texts, which I translated into Portuguese to enhance understanding among the reading audience. As an academic endeavor, I aimed to create a translation grounded in scholarly discourse on medieval translation. However, I soon realized that the state of the art in this field was still in its early stages, and I found little about this topic even in well-known encyclopedias or handbooks – in fact, as pointed out by Warren, "[...] neither *Critical Readings in Translation Studies* (2010) nor *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies* (2013) address medieval topics" (2019, p. 165). I believe that the relative scarcity of reflection on this subject is probably connected to the backgrounds of researchers: medievalists typically do not have a background in translation studies, and translation researchers rarely have a background in medieval studies (let alone the vernacular languages of the medieval period). It should be noted, however, that this does not imply that the field is entirely new. As a result, the forthcoming paragraphs will be devoted to providing a concise overview of select works that have already been undertaken in regard to this topic.

Critical texts on translating *in* the Middle Ages have attracted more scholarly attention than translating *from* the Middle Ages, with many scholars adopting for a comprehensive approach to translation in the entire medieval period (a few examples include Copeland, 1991; Beer, 1997 – in conjunction with the book she edited in 1989; Andersen, 2002; Fresco, 2016; or Borsari, 2020). These approaches offer a comprehensive perspective on the translation of medieval texts during the Middle Ages, often supported by specific examples from various spheres, spaces, or periods of the Middle Ages, and the primary focus revolves around rhetoric, linguistics, or hermeneutics (with Fresco's edited work arguably being the most eclectic one from that set of works in terms of thematic representation, as it touches on other fields of study too). Acknowledging that the concept of translation in the Middle Ages largely entails adapting sources to the context into which they are introduced, other

works consistently approach this subject in connection with practices of textual and information transmission (as is the case with Beer and Lloyd-Jones, 1995; Fraenkel, 2011; Wallis and Wisnovsky, 2016; or Classen, 2022). Moreover, these works share a common thread in addressing the undeniable relationship with the political issues intertwined in translations during the Middle Ages, which is also the focal point of several other works on the subject, most of which employ post-colonial methodologies to examine translation during the Middle Ages (Kabir and Williams, 2005; Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 2011; Campbell and Mills, 2012; Campbell, 2018).

The aforementioned works address translation in the Middle Ages as a broad and extensive theme, employing specific examples to clarify their arguments. However, some works explore translation during the Middle Ages while focusing on a specific chronology (such as Butterfield, Johnson and Kraebel (2023), with its focus on the Later Middle Ages), or a specific geography (such as in Rikhardsdottir (2012) examining England, France and Scandinavia, or in Hamilton and Silleras-Fernandez (2022) focusing on Iberia – covered in the review section of this present issue). It is worth noting that there are also works that concentrate on a specific object of study, exclusively specializing in translating a particular text, text typology, or literary genre during the Middle Ages. The translation of religious texts naturally emerges as one of the most recurring themes in criticism (Pezzini, 2008; Kraebel, 2020 – reviewed in this issue of *Translation Matters*), as is the case with historical or juridical documentation (Smets, Goyens and Leemens, 2008; Benham, McHaffie and Vogt, 2018). The translation of literary texts follows a similar trend, with studies often focusing on specific literary genres (Weiss, Fellows and Dickson, 2000) or authors and works (to avoid an exhaustive list, I will mention only two, each addressing one of the most influential figures in medieval literary history: Ginsberg (2015) on Chaucer and Cornish (2010) on Dante).

In contrast, as previously mentioned, there is a noticeable lack of reflections on the challenges associated with translating texts from the Middle Ages into contemporary languages, and this absence is indeed regrettable. However, such works do exist. For instance, in 2017, Birkett and March-Lyons edited a volume on translating early medieval poetry, a compilation originating from an international conference held at University College, Cork in June 2014. This compilation consists of 12 articles that reflect on translation practices applied to medieval texts, with a specific emphasis on poetry. It adopts a pragmatic approach to translation, using specific authors, genres, or texts as starting points, such as *Beowulf* or *Edda*. Beer also edited a similar compendium in 2019, addressing issues related to the translation of (but also in) medieval texts across 15 chapters, along with an introduction and an epilogue (note that this work was also reviewed in this issue). Likewise, more recently, Isabelle Génin and Jessica Stephens edited a number of *Revue de traduction – Palimpsestes* on translation of medieval texts into contemporary languages (11 articles were included in the issue). These works share the commonality of addressing translation from the Middle Ages from a practical standpoint, which can also at times be seen in works where medieval texts are translated into contemporary languages (although,

unfortunately, this is not always the case). Some examples include Classen's reflections in his 2008 translation of the poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein, or Abbot's reflections in the more recent translation of *Beowulf* (2021), edited by Abbot, Treharne and Fafinski. Certainly, the importance of these works cannot be denied – they are indeed crucial for a better understanding of the difficulties and challenges inherent in translating medieval texts today; however, they generally avoid a direct focus on translation theory. This gap is currently mostly covered not in complete works but in scattered articles across various publications and compendiums (Warren, 2017; Cammarota, 2018; to some extent, Lees and Overing, 2019, although the focus of the authors is on issues related to the understanding of the Middle Ages in the contemporary world); however, there seems to be a need for more in-depth theoretical reflection on these topics.

I would also like to note that lately there has been some conversation not only about translation *in* or *from* the Middle Ages, but also *to* the Middle Ages. Even though the present issue will not delve into this topic, it is interesting to note that this new trend, although still not widely discussed by critics, seems to be emerging alongside the flourishing of neo-medievalism, which tries to reflect about (and even defend) translation of contemporary texts into medieval vernacular languages (Kemmler, 2022; Ferhatović, 2022; Pascual, 2022).

These are some of the most recent or most important works done in relation to the topic of the present issue of *Translation Matters*, which has currently the aim of contributing to the discussion of Translation and the Middle Ages – a theme that, while not novel, is by no means exhausted (if such exhaustion is even conceivable).

The introductory section features an epigraph from *Beowulf*, translated by **Angélica Varandas** and **Luísa Azuaga**, who further elaborate on their translation in an article within this special issue. Both the text and the quote were chosen for their imaginative and fantastical attributes associated with the Middle Ages—qualities that undoubtedly influenced researchers and enthusiasts such as Tolkien and Eco. Indeed, entities that speak, dragons, witches, or melusines are recurring and enduring images from the medieval period that captivated the people of that time and continue to enthrall contemporary audiences. This capacity for fascination forges a link between ourselves and the work's original audience, despite the vast temporal distance separating us. Personally, this is what intrigues me about the Middle Ages: even though they seem so remote, they are remarkably close to us; yet, despite this proximity, they remain remarkably distant.

The articles section opens with a contribution by **Mariana Leite** about universal historiography. Centering on the European context, Leite contemplates the ascent of vulgar languages to the status of cultured languages, culminating in translations of Latin sources that were, in essence, more commonplace and vulgar renditions of the original text and culture. Chronicles establish themselves as conduits for the transmission of worldviews concerning the emergence of the world, shaped within a political context and renovating knowledge based on the culture and language of the destination.

Continuing the exploration of the conceptualization of the world, **Natalia I. Petrovskaja**, who is concerned with the theoretical boundaries of the term “translation” in the period, concentrates on the dynamic interplay between rewriting and veneration for authority. The work scrutinizes an instance of medieval adaptation, starting with Juan de Mena's well-known *Laberinto de Fortuna*, particularly those parts of the text that encompass a geographical depiction of the world. She analyses this description in connection with its source, a 12th century Latin encyclopedia, while exploring notions of translation, adaptation, and reworking as applied to this specific case study.

This article shares some connection with the next article by **Rob King**, which critically examines the poem *Patience* in relation to the version of the Book of Jonah in the Vulgate Bible, by being juxtaposed with the 18th century concept of ‘poetic imitation’. Focusing on the rhetorical practices found in the Latin Vulgate's Book of Jonah, King shows how these are adeptly incorporated into *Patience* with additional layers of complexity tailored to medieval culture or expectations. The article contends that *Patience* employs the same rhetorical processes of verbal parallelism as the original text while introducing new medieval values deriving from the feudal system, while also proposing a redefined understanding of the virtue of patience.

The following article, by **Margarita Savchenkova**, investigates into the connection between travel writing and translation. More specifically, it examines the encounters of Afanasy Nikitin, a fifteenth-century Russian trader, with both East and West, and shows how Nikitin’s encounters are narrated through the lens of translation, resulting in his text being written in Old East Slavic, albeit with parts in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic. Beyond merely adapting the text to the receiving culture, Afanasy Nikitin adjusts the culture of origin to his individual and even religious beliefs and ideas and, as a consequence, his text is the outcome of both a journey and a translation experience.

The subsequent reflection, by **Angélica Varandas** and **Luísa Azuaga**, represents a shift from translation *in* the Middle Ages to the translation *from* the medieval period. The text describes some of the challenges faced by these translators during their process of translating what is perhaps *the* most influential text in Old English (since it arguably served as the starting point for the whole of the English literary canon): *Beowulf*. By reflecting on the translation process, and by focusing on the first three lines of the poem, the authors provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the text, encompassing elements such as production, reception and context. They also conclude that translating medieval texts demands a reading and research approach distinct from translating texts written in contemporary languages, given the heightened incomprehensibility of medieval languages.

The subsequent article, by **Richard Huddleson**, is also centered on translation from the Middle Ages. Employing a practical example (*Entremès del Pasquedó* at the 2022 Out of the Wings Festival), the article navigates the intricacies linked to translating and presenting medieval dramatic texts for a contemporary audience. It works with various layers of translation, considering linguistic, temporal, and contextual dimensions (production, reception, and even presentation). In this context, the article scrutinizes the multiple stages

of translation that culminated in an experimental work capable of capturing the dynamics of the stage while underscoring the translator's visibility in the text.

The next article in this section, by **Kelly Washbourne**, discusses archaizing processes in translations of medieval texts, reflecting on the peculiarities of strategies such as patina, pastiche, appropriation, or revitalization. Washbourne emphasizes that, despite contemporary aesthetics largely disapproving of this practice, there are some critics who do defend its usage, and the impulse to archaize is not exclusively modern, having been identified in early premodern thinkers. However, there is no unified theory for this strategy, and thus, the historical taxonomic question is presented as a starting point for future investigations.

The last two articles from this section differ slightly from the previous texts, as they adopt a more essayistic approach, evoking reflections on translation experiences. The first essay, authored by me, **J. Carlos Teixeira**, discusses an experimental translation class conducted as part of the "Introduction to German Culture in the European Context" course at the University of Porto, which focuses on medieval German lyric poetry, particularly the *Minnesang* genre, exploring themes of love, honor, and power. In the 2023/2024 edition of the course, 17 students from diverse cultural backgrounds translated the initial stanza of Walther von der Vogelweide's poem *Under der linden*, and the essay reflects on the challenges and decisions involved in translating the poem across different languages.

The next essay – and last article –, "Beyond Bardcore: Biography of a meme in ten translations" by **Javier Adrada de la Torre**, analyses 'the rise and fall' of a virtual meme with medieval content in the light of Translation Studies and multimodal translation. In 10 phases, the author traces the emergence and development of the meme and its adaptability to the context – past, present, future – culminating in its death and later rebirth – the essay itself.

The special issue concludes with three book reviews, all on medieval themes. **Cassandra Artacho Rodríguez** provides an evaluation of *Biblical Commentary and Translation in Later Medieval England: Experiments in Interpretation*, edited in 2020 by Andrew Kraebel for Cambridge University Press; **Maria Joana Gomes** and **Mariana Leite** review *Iberian Babel: Translation and Multilingualism in the Medieval and the Early Modern Mediterranean* edited by Michelle M. Hamilton and Nuria Silleras-Fernandez for Brill; and **Iolanda Rodríguez Aldrei** discusses *A Companion to Medieval Translation* edited by Jeanette Beer for Arc Humanities Press (2019). All three offer new perspectives on some of the questions that have been scrutinized in this special issue.

The dynamics of translation offer a portal into a culture that might otherwise seem irretrievably remote. Whether verbal or otherwise, they serve as a lens through which we can gain deeper insights into how individuals from that era translated and perceived the world. By delving into these translation processes, this issue aspires to make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing dynamic of understanding, perceiving, and dialoguing about the medieval world: of navigating medieval texts and beyond.

J. Carlos Teixeira

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Teixeira, J.C – Guest Editor’s Introduction

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