
PARASKEVI TOMA – PÉTER BARA (eds), *Latin Translations of Greek Texts from the 11th to the 13th Century (The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400–1500, 143)*. Leiden – Boston: Brill 2025. XXII, 476 pp. – ISBN 978-90-04-70756-6

• LISA DEVRIESE, KU Leuven (lisa.devriese@kuleuven.be)

This edited volume, originating from an online workshop in June 2021, explores translations from Greek into Latin between the 11th and 13th centuries. It does so not through a narrow linguistic or textual lens, but rather by questioning the very motivations and frameworks that underpinned this complex and historically significant activity.

A central premise is that the common explanation of ‘Greeklessness’ – the simple absence of Greek language proficiency in the Latin medieval West – as the main driver for translation is insufficient. While linguistic inaccessibility no doubt played a significant role, the editors argue convincingly that this explanation overlooks several other essential factors: intellectual interest in some source material, the availability of suitable source texts, the presence of competent translators, and crucially, the existence of sufficient motivation to undertake the task of translation. These broader considerations are often neglected in traditional scholarship, which tends to focus on the translated texts themselves, on questions of translation technique (e.g. *verbum de verbo* vs. *sensum de sensu*), or on the repertory of translators and their patrons. What has long been missing is a more comprehensive framework that seeks to understand why translations happened in the first place. This volume makes a notable contribution toward filling that gap.

Rather than claiming to offer a definitive explanation for Greek-Latin translation activity during this period, the volume aims to deepen our understanding of its conditions and contexts. In this, it succeeds admirably. Comprising fifteen contributions from a range of disciplines, it presents a multifaceted approach. The sources discussed include not only medieval manuscripts and texts, but also inscriptions on objects and buildings. The timeframe of 1050 to 1300 is justified: it is sufficiently broad to capture key developments, yet narrow enough to avoid anachronistic generalizations. The exclusive focus on Greek-to-Latin translations is a deliberate and effective editorial choice, preventing the study from becoming overly diffuse.

The volume opens with two general surveys, following the preface. TAMÁS MÉSZÁROS (Chapter 1) offers a diachronic overview of the knowledge of Greek in the Latin West, extending beyond the stated period to help contextualize the subsequent centuries and chapters. He focusses on educational tools and linguistic aids used in Greek-Latin contact. PÉTER BARA (Chapter 2) contributes the longest and most comprehensive chapter, functioning almost as an encyclopedic guide to Greek-Latin translations. Spanning 69 pages, it discusses not only the translators themselves – viewed as agents of knowledge – but also the various historical, intellectual, and institutional conditions that shaped their work across disciplines such as mathematics, medicine, and philosophy. While the richness of this chapter and its extensive bibliography is one of the volume’s highlights, readers should be aware that it is not exhaustive; it does not include every text or translator (e.g. no *Politica* under William of Moerbeke, or no Durand of Auvergne who translated Aristotle’s *Oeconomica* at the end of the 13th century), and should be used as a guide rather than a catalogue.

Rather than examining each chapter in detail, it suffices to note the thematic breadth of the volume. Part 1, ‘Texts and Transmission’, includes contributions on medieval Latin translations of Aristotle’s *Zoology* and the possibility of ascribing translations to certain translators based on the translation method (PIETER BEULLENS, Ch. 3), on the reception history of the Aristotelian *Parva naturalia* (MICHAEL W. DUNNE, Ch. 4), on the Latin Eugenic Recension of the *Stephanites and Ichneutes* (MARC D. LAUXTERMANN, Ch. 5), and on the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus translated by John Saracen (PAOLA DEGNI, Ch. 6). Part 2, ‘Translators and Methods’, focuses on the agents and strategies of translation. This section includes ELIZABETH A. FISHER’s study of bilingualism in 13th-century Constantinople (Ch. 7), DIMITER ANGELOV’s edition of a letter from the Second Nicaean embassy (Ch. 8), and ANNA MARIA URSO’s analysis of Burgundio of Pisa’s *verbum de verbo* approach (Ch. 9). Part 3, ‘Greek-Latin Polemic’, investigates theological debates where translation was shaped by doctrinal concerns, specifically the *filioque* controversy (ALESSANDRA BUCOSSA, Ch. 10) and the debate over leavened vs. unleavened bread (LUIGI D’AMELIA, Ch. 11). Finally, Part 4, ‘Multilingual Practices’, expands the scope to inscriptions and visual culture and includes some reproductions of manuscripts and other works of art. JAMES MORTON (Ch. 12) discusses legal translations in southern Italy; TERESA SHAWCROSS (Ch. 13) examines bilingual liturgical manuscripts; BRAD HOSTETLER (Ch. 14) explores how Latin authors engaged with Greek in-

scriptions on Byzantine objects; and ESTELLE INGRAND-VARENNE (Ch. 15) analyzes bilingual inscriptions in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Throughout the volume, the historical context of each translation is given careful attention. The linguistic dimension is never treated in isolation but always tied to the socio-political and intellectual environments in which the translations emerged. Several centers of translation activity come into view, some explicitly discussed, such as southern Italy, Sicily, Nicaea, and Toledo; others emerge more subtly across the contributions.

Visually, the volume is well-produced, with helpful indices of names, works, places, and passages cited. The writing is accessible without sacrificing scholarly depth, making this a valuable resource not only for specialists in translation studies but also for historians of medieval thought, literature, and intercultural exchange. In sum, this is a thoughtfully edited and rich collection that makes a meaningful and valuable contribution to our understanding of medieval Greek-Latin translations.

Keywords

Greek-Latin translations