

TRANSLATING THUCYDIDES:

the metadiscourse of Italian humanist translators



By Marianne Pade

In 1452 Lorenzo Valla finished what became the standard translation of Thucydides for the next several hundred years. Identifying the central themes taken up by Valla in the dedicatory letter to Pope Nicholas V, this article will discuss Valla's letter, as well as his glosses on the translation, in the context of contemporary translation theory. It will also briefly sketch the sixteenth-century reception of Valla's translation.

My contribution in this volume on the metadiscourse of Renaissance humanism will address a number of metatexts in which Renaissance humanists commented on translations, sometimes those by others, but very often their own. In the latter case, the metatexts constitute a specific sort of writer–reader interaction regarding the translations. The purpose may be to explain the purpose of the translation, or of translation in general, its use for the intended reader(s), how it had been done, or how it should be done.

Fifteenth-century Italy witnessed an explosion both in the production of Latin translations from the Greek and in metadiscursive writings on translation. These may take many forms, but it is possible to point to a number of recurrent themes. From the early fifteenth century, we find the humanist metadiscourse on translation at work in correspondence between humanists, in dedicatory letters, in fully fledged treatises on the subject, but also in annotations to translations that were meant to be copied alongside the text itself.

When humanism crossed the Alps from Italy, humanist translation theory came with it, although it had to be modified in order to accommodate new reader communities. Even though, or perhaps because, the cultural export from Italy was so successful, the overwhelming Italian influence also generated resentment in some areas.¹ Nevertheless, Transalpine writers would often express their criticism of Italian cultural preponderance in the very classicizing Latin and literary forms that were so skilfully promoted by

¹ See Cowling 2012.

the Italians. In this article I shall trace the formation and development of humanist translation theory by looking at metatexts concerning translations of one author, namely Thucydides. My point of departure will be Lorenzo Valla's hugely influential 1452 translation of the *Historiae* into Latin. The prefatory letter of dedication to Pope Nicholas V, who commissioned the translation, shows Valla as a writer fully attuned to contemporary trends in humanist translation. In the sixteenth century Valla's Latin version was in its turn the basis of further vernacular translations, just as there were vernacular translations made directly from the Greek.² All these translations are accompanied by a more or less extensive apparatus of paratexts.

Lorenzo Valla

By the end of the 1440s it was clear to most people that what was left of Byzantium would soon fall to the Ottoman Turks. The West was reluctant to send military help to the East, but the humanist Pope Nicholas V, wishing to salvage what he could of Greek culture, planned to have what was known of Greek literature at the time translated into Latin. Lorenzo Valla's (1407–1457) translation of Thucydides was part of the Pope's impressive project. Valla began work on the translation early in 1448; according to the autograph postscript of the presentation copy, the *Vaticanus latinus* 1801, the translation was finished in 1452. In the *postscriptum* to the presentation copy, Valla sanctions it as the *archetypus* of his translation, revised and corrected by himself.³

Valla's Thucydides enjoyed a wide manuscript diffusion that continued well into the sixteenth century. I know of twenty-two MSS containing the entire text of Valla's translation, two lost ones, and one manuscript containing a fragment that seems to have come from a copy of the complete text.⁴ It was first printed c. 1483.⁵

² Some of these are discussed below in the paragraph on *Reception in the Sixteenth Century*. For a more thorough list, see Pade 2003, 113–117.

³ “Hunc Thucydidis codicem, qualis nullus, ut opinor, unquam apud ipsos Grecos uel scriptus uel ornatus est magnificentius, idem ego Laurentius, iussu sanctissimi domini nostri domini Nicolai diuina prouidentia pape Quinti, recognoui cum ipso Ioanne, qui eum tam egregie scripsit. Ideoque hec meo chirographo subscripsi ut esset hic codex mee translationis archetypus unde cetera possent exemplaria emendari,” Vat. lat. 1801, f. 184r, autograph note. Cp. Manfredi 1994, 243–44, no. 384. On the use of the word *archetypus* in humanist Latin, see Rizzo 1973, 308–317.

⁴ See Pade 2000; 2003, 122–25; and 2008b.

⁵ [c. 1483], [Treviso]: [Johannes Rubeus]. H *15511. This edition is the only incunable containing Valla's translation. For a list of sixteenth-century editions, see Pade 2003, 125–26.

The letter of dedication to Nicolas V – in context

a. The appropriation of the original

Text 1

Like Aeneas in Virgil, highest Pontiff, I can now say – and because it is in verse, even chant: “what joy to have escaped so many Argive towns and to have kept my direction through the midst of foes” [*Aen.* 3,282–83]. I do feel as if I had escaped from Argive towns and from the midst of foes, having now finished the campaign you ordered me to embark upon. Residing in Rome to oversee the affairs of the city themselves, Roman generals such as Augustus, Antoninus Pius and many others used to delegate especially foreign wars to their commanders. Like them – your dignity makes me use that comparison – you yourself attend to worship, holy ceremonies, divine and secular law, peace, wealth and the welfare of the Latin world. Others were assigned different missions, but, as if we were your prefects, or tribunes or commanders, those of us with a mastery of both languages were ordered to bring as much as possible of Greece under your rule, that is to translate Greek books into Latin for you.⁶

Valla’s imagery is interesting for several reasons. It reminds us that Nicholas’ commissioning of the translation must be seen against the background of contemporary politics, in which the military successes of the Ottoman Turks threatened to eradicate Byzantine Greece as an independent state and, presumably, to sever the cultural tradition that in Greek-speaking areas went back, uninterrupted, to the time of Homer. That danger was to be met with weapons of the intellect, and Greek culture could to some extent be salvaged in the Latin West. However, the metaphors do not suggest that Valla and his fellow translators should travel to Greece to learn from its old and venerable culture, but that they bring it under Latin rule. Valla goes on to praise translation as a kind of commerce that is even more useful than

⁶ “Quod Eneas apud Virgilium, Nicole Quinte summe pontifex, id ego nunc possum dicere et, quia carmen est, etiam decantare: ‘iuuat euasisse tot urbes Argolicas mediosque uiam tenuisse per hostes’ [*Aen.* 3,282–83]. Nam ex Argolicis urbibus atque ex mediis hostibus euasisse mihi uideor, militia iam quam mihi imperaueras perfunctus. Etenim quemadmodum romani olim imperatores, qualis Augustus Antoninus alique permulti (tua dignitas facit ut hac utar comparatione), Rome considentes ac per sese urbana negotia procurantes, bella presertim peregrina ducibus demandabant, ita tu, cum sacra, religionem, diuina atque humana iura, pacem, amplitudinem, salutem latini orbis per teipsum cures, mandasti cum alia aliis tum uero nobis, quasi tuis prefectis, tribunis, ducibus, utriusque lingue peritis, ut omnem, quoad possemus, Greciam tue ditioni subiiceremus, id est ut grecos tibi libros in latinum traduceremus,” Vat. lat. 1801, f. 1r. The most comprehensive reading of Valla’s preface so far is in Regoliosi 2001.

trade in material merchandise. What was traded in translation nourished the intellect and refined one's style.⁷ Moreover, we would have had no communication, no 'commerce' with God, had not the Old Testament been translated from Hebrew and the New from Greek. To translate from a foreign language into Latin was at least as useful as conquering foreign lands and adding them to the Roman Empire.⁸

At the end of the paragraph, Valla returns to the military image, comparing translation to the acquisition of new provinces by the Empire. Though the images acknowledge the value of what is acquired, whether by conquest or trade, in both instances the end result is that what has been foreign becomes Latin property, comes under Latin dominion.

That translation is useful – that the translated texts may instruct and enrich our intellect – was a commonplace. However, Valla also resembles many other fifteenth-century humanist translators in his insistence that the value of translation transcends merely making the foreign accessible. To stay with his imagery, it actually brought foreign cultural manifestations under Latin rule, integrating them into the Latin cultural orbit. In the famous letter on his translation of Plato's *Phaedo* (1404–5), Leonardo Bruni formulated this golden rule:

Text 2

I follow a Plato whom I represent to myself as a man who knew Latin and was able to express his own opinions in it [. . .] Plato himself asks me to do that, for a man who wore a most elegant aspect among the Greeks surely does not want to appear crude and clumsy among the Latins.⁹

⁷ See Regoliosi 2001 for Valla's indebtedness to Quint. *inst.* 10,5,2–3 in this passage.

⁸ "Nam quid utilius, quid uberius, quid etiam magis necessarium librorum interpretatione, ut haec mihi mercatura quedam optimarum artium esse uideatur? [...] Siquidem ex rebus quas ista transferendi negotiatio nobis apportat animi aluntur, uestiuntur, roborantur, ornantur, delectantur ac prope diuiniore efficiuntur [...] Adeo nullum cum Deo nos Latini commercium haberemus, nisi Testamentum Vetus ex hebreo et Novum e greco foret traductum. [...] non minus tibi gloriosum est, romane pontifex, libros graecos qui reliqui sunt transferendos curare quam aut Asiam, aut Macedoniam, aut ceteram Greciam romano adiicere imperio," *ibid.* ff. 1r–v. Valla used the trade comparison already in the dedicatory letter to his 1434 translation of Demosthenes' *Pro Ctesiphonte*, cp. Lo Monaco 1986, 163.

⁹ "ego autem Platoni adhaereo, quem ego ipse michi effinxi, et quidem latine scientem, ut iudicare possit [...] Hoc enim ipse Plato praesens me facere jubet, qui cum elegantissimi oris apud Graecos sit, non vult certe apud Latinos ineptus videri," BRVNI *ep* 1,1 (1,8 M.) When possible I refer to Neo-Latin texts with the sigla used by Johann Ramminger in *Neulateinische Wortliste* (www.neulatein.de).

As Johann Ramminger has shown, it was probably in this very letter that Bruni coined the immensely successful neologism *traducere/traductio* for to translate/translation, a metaphor that in itself shows the effort to integrate the foreign text into the Latin cultural context.¹⁰ As James Hankins put it, Bruni wanted to “pull his Greek author into the Latin world, to imagine how he would have written had Latin been his native language.”¹¹ Some thirty years later, Valla alluded to this passage in the preface to his translation of Demosthenes’ *Pro Ctesiphonte* (or *On the Crown*).¹² The translation was made in open and admiring competition with Bruni’s 1407/1421 version: where Bruni had surpassed all others in his earlier translations, in the *Pro Ctesiphonte* he had surpassed himself.¹³ However, with usual lack of modesty, Valla declared that he set out to compete with three great orators, Leonardo Bruni, Cicero, whose translation of the speech – if it ever existed – is lost,¹⁴ and Demosthenes:

Text 3

[*I emulate*] Leonardo, intending to reach the goal by a different road; Cicero, hoping to steer the same course as he claimed to have done (see n. 14); and Demosthenes to make sure that, if at all possible, he is not, through me, made to speak Latin any worse than he spoke Greek on his own.¹⁵

¹⁰ Ramminger 2015–2016, with copious discussion of earlier literature.

¹¹ Griffiths, Hankins & Thompson 1987, 10 and n. 5.

¹² For the complicated question of the date of Valla’s translation and the preface, I follow Lo Monaco 1986 and 2000, 396–397. For the fifteenth-century Latin translations of the oration, see Monfasani 1976, 61–68.

¹³ “Ita enim fere constat, in aliis translationibus a Leonardo omnes, in hac autem etiam ipsum a se fuisse superatum. Adeo omnem vim Demosthenis nitoremque expressit et quemadmodum si Ciceronis extaret illa conversio hic non scripsisset, ita post se scribendum non esse< >, qui fecit ne Tullianam magnopere desideremus,” Lo Monaco 1986, 162. For Bruni’s translation, see Accame Lanzillotta 1986.

¹⁴ The spurious *De optimo genere oratorum* presents itself as Cicero’s preface to his translation of the *Pro Ctesiphonte* and the opposing speech by Aeschines – also translated by Bruni. The famous passage, “Converti enim ex Atticis duorum eloquentissimorum nobilissimas orationes inter se que contrarias, Aeschini et Demostheni; nec converti ut interpres, sed ut orator, sententiis isdem et earum formis tamquam figuris, verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis,” (*opt. gen.* 14), was quoted *verbatim* in St Jerome’s letter to Pammachius (§ 5), a core text for humanist translation theory.

¹⁵ “nunc ad emulationem trium maximorum oratorum me exerceo: Leonardi, Ciceronis, Demosthenis. Leonardi quidem ut alio itinere secum ad metam perveniam; Ciceronis vero, ut quem cursum tenuisse se dicit eundem ego teneam; Demosthenis autem ut non peius loquatur per me latine, si fas est, quam per se grece,” Lo Monaco 1986, 163. As stated by Regoliosi 2001, 456–461 it is the *emulatio* of the original that for Valla makes translation a worthwhile exercise.

Valla probably aimed to surpass the original: explaining how one should go about recreating a text like Demosthenes' speech in Latin, he says that the translator must almost "vie with the author himself" (*cum ipso auctore certandum*).

Valla's wish that Demosthenes should not be made to speak Latin less well in the translation than he had himself spoken Greek echoes Bruni's famous statement about Plato (see Text 2), and I believe there are other allusions to Bruni in the preface. It has often been noticed that Bruni's treatise *De interpretatione recta* (On the correct way of translation) was to some degree neglected by his contemporaries.¹⁶ We have already seen that Valla was very aware of Bruni, both as a translator and as a theoretical writer on the *ars interpretandi*. Therefore one would assume that he would have gone to some length to acquire a copy of the *De interpretatione*. In the treatise, Bruni repeatedly stresses the importance of the careful rendering of figures of speech and thought and of prose rhythm, and the final section of the treatise discusses the subject in detail.¹⁷ Clearly Valla agrees with Bruni that the translator should respect these characteristics of the original, but in order to "vie with the author himself," with the aim of surpassing him, Valla is convinced that the translator must transform them:

Text 4

Often one must let go of the specific characteristics of the Greek and rethink them, finding parallels to figures of speech and thought, only to preserve the rhythm.¹⁸

I have not come across other fifteenth-century writers who emphasize the importance of rendering prose rhythm in translations. However, as Ronald Witt has shown, from Bruni's generation onwards there is a growing tendency among writers of humanist Latin to avoid the accentual patterns of the medieval *cursus* and a preference for a quantitative prose rhythm.¹⁹ This process has been seen as a key factor in the genesis of classicizing prose,

¹⁶ E.g. Botley 2004, 41 and n. 173 (I know of 11 manuscripts of the work). It should, however, be noticed that Gianozzo Manetti quotes the *De interpretatione recta* extensively in *Apologeticus* V. On this, see now den Haan 2016, 123–139.

¹⁷ E.g. "His vero exemplis abunde patet neminem posse primi auctoris maiestatem servare, nisi ornatum illius numerositatemque conservet" (These examples should suffice to show that one cannot render intact the grandeur of the original writer, if one does not preserve ornaments and rhythm), BRUNI *interp* 29.

¹⁸ "Est enim relinquendus frequenter character ipse grecus, excogitandus novus, pariende figure, numeris omnino serviendum," Lo Monaco 1986, 163.

¹⁹ Witt 2000, 509–514 (and *passim*).

and clearly both Bruni and Valla view translation as part of their attempt to recuperate a classical prose style.

Only a couple of years after Valla wrote the dedicatory preface to Nicholas V, Niccolò Perotti presented a similar idea to the Pope in the dedication of his Latin translation of Polybius.²⁰

Text 5

Can we offer the soul any sweeter nourishment than the reading of history? Especially when, as in this work, important and varied events are related in a brilliant style, and delightful language is sprinkled with starry phrases. In a single work Polybius has proven himself, to my mind at least, to be a most accomplished historian, an excellent orator, as well as an outstanding philosopher. [*Therefore it was a great pleasure to translate Polybius*] because I hoped that I would win considerable renown among our people, if through me a writer of his great fame would not remain a foreigner but become Roman and, giving up his native language, learn to speak Latin.²¹

Polybius is not simply translated into Latin, he actually ceases to be foreign and becomes Roman; and, in what is perhaps the most radical part of the image, he not only learns to speak Latin, but ceases to use his own language (*omissa gentili lingua*). Like Bruni's Plato (see Text 2), the Polybius of Perotti is pulled into the Latin world.

As Paul Botley has remarked, this appropriative attitude towards the Greek cultural heritage did not go unnoticed among the Greeks themselves. Michael Apostolis, an impoverished Greek teacher, wrote indignantly that:

Text 6

if someone were to say that the Italian teachers translate Greek into their own language and manner very ably and appropriately, what does this have to do with the Greeks and their learning? It is rather a great offence which deserves strong penalties. In this way they are

²⁰ For Perotti's translation of Polybius, Reynolds 1954; Milne 1989; Pace 1988, 1989 and 1991; Bononi 1999; d'Alessandro 2001 and 2007; Pade 2008a, and Charlet 2011.

²¹ "Quis enim suavior animo cibus offerri potest quam lectio historiae? Huius praesertim, in qua cum magnitudine ac diuersitate rerum gestarum splendor quoque uerborum coniunctus est, et suauitas orationis quibusdam quasi luminibus sententiarum respersa, ut mihi uideatur uno in opere Polybius et summus historicus et orator maximus et optimus philosophus fuisse [...] quod non mediocrem me apud nostros homines gloriam consecuturum sperabam, si mea opera tam praeclarus auctor ex peregrino aliquando Romanus factus esset et omnia gentili lingua latine loqui didicisset," N. Perotti, letter of dedication to Nicholas V of his translation of Polybius I–V a. 1454. Text from my forthcoming edition of Perotti's letters of dedication.

trying gradually to obliterate the Greek language, and have practically made the Greeks into Romans.²²

b. Reception in the Roman world

The ‘province’ assigned to Valla was not an easy one; on the contrary, he clearly wanted to make quite sure that Nicholas was aware of the difficulties he had encountered in his endeavours to perform the task given to him. Translating the eight books had been like conquering eight cities, protected by inaccessible peaks. But he was not the only one to think so. Everyone admitted that Thucydides was hard and stony, not least in the speeches. Even Cicero, who was called “the Greek” by his contemporaries, says as much in *Orator*: “these speeches contain so many and so obscure thoughts as to be barely intelligible.”²³ Moreover, Valla’s patron, the Greek Cardinal Bessarion, had been abroad and was therefore unable to help him. However, Thucydides was worth it all:

Text 7

For of Greek historians, Thucydides is like the porphyry of marbles or the gold of metals. He has such dignity, such power, he inspires such unconditional belief – which is paramount in history writing – that readers never doubt his account [...]. He and Herodotus are unquestionably the most eminent Greek historians, as Sallust and Livy are among ours. This is attested by both Cicero and Quintilian. Cicero said that “*Herodotus* flows like a peace-ful stream without any disturbances; *Thucydides* advances more rapidly and describing war his tone is also somehow warlike”; and Quintilian that “history has been written by many with distinction, but no one questions that there are two far superior to the rest, whose very different excellences have won them almost equal praise. Thucydides is close-textured, concise, always pressing himself hard: Herodotus is pleasing, transparent, expansive. Thucydides is better at the tenses emotions, Herodotus at the more relaxed: Thucydides at set speeches, Herodotus at dialogue.

²² “Εἰ δέ τις φαίη τοὺς Ῥωμαίων πορθμέας εὐθέτως καὶ ὡς προσήκει διερμηνεῦν τὸν ἔλληνα ἐς τὴν σφετέραν φώνην τε καὶ συνήθειαν, τί τοῦτο πρὸς Ἑλληνας καὶ σοφίαν αὐτῶν; μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν καὶ ἀδικία μεγίστη καὶ πολλῶν ἀξία τιμωρίων. τούτῳ δὴ τῷ τρόπῳ κατὰ μικρὸν τὰ κείνων ἀφανίζειν ἐπιχειροῦσι, καὶ οὕτως ἀνθ’ Ἑλλήνων ὅσον οὐκ ἦδη Ῥωμαίους πεποιήκασι,” quoted from Botley 2004, 168. English translation by Paul Botley, *ibid.*

²³ “Nam omnium confessione arduus est saxeusque Thucydides, cum ceteris in locis, tum uero in orationibus quibus octo eius referti sunt libri, ut Ciceronis, quem grecum sue etatis homines appellabant, uerbis constat dicentis in *Oratore*: ‘ipse ille contiones ita multas habent abditasque sententias uix ut intelligantur’ [30],” Vat. lat. 1801, f. 1v.

Thucydides excels in force, Herodotus in giving pleasure.” Highest Pontiff, this is how Thucydides is in Greek. If you should deem that in my translation he preserves the same dignity, I shall forget all my toils.²⁴

Valla here describes the qualities of the Greek Thucydides to Nicholas, both in his own words and quoting ancient testimonies. As a translator, Valla takes the reception of Thucydides in the Latin world into account and uses it as a guide for his own work, in which he aims at recreating the *Historiae* in Latin as they were perceived by Cicero and Quintilian. The focus of fifteenth-century translation theory on the rendering of style made it necessary for translators to pay conscious attention to the stylistic characteristics of the original. Bruni had clearly done that with Plato’s *Phaedo*. In the letter quoted above (see Text 2), Bruni describes Plato’s elegance, the method and subtlety of his arguments, and how the fruitful and divine viewpoints of the interlocutors are related with such astounding jollity and incredible richness of language. His speeches were easy flowing and graceful, with nothing laboured or forced. Bruni sums up:

Text 8

This is how Plato is among the Greeks. If I don’t also show him like that to the Latins, I hope they realize that he has been made a lesser writer because of my deficiencies and that they are reading not Plato, but my nonsense.²⁵

²⁴ “Etenim Thucydides [...] talis est inter historicos grecos quale inter marmora prophyreticum, aut inter metalla aurum. Tanta in eo grauitas, tanta uis, tanta sine ulla, ut sic dicam, scoria fides, quod est in historia precipuum, ut ista qui legunt uera prorsus fuisse non dubitent [...] Hic igitur sine controuersia atque Herodotus ita inter grecos historicos extitere principes, ut inter nostros Sallustius ac Liuius, quod testatur tum Cicero: ‘Alter enim sine ullis salebris quasi sedatus amnis fluit, alter incitator fertur et de bellicis rebus canit etiam quodammodo bellicum’ [*Orat.* 39]; tum Quintilianus: ‘Historiam multi scripsere preclare, sed nemo dubitat longe duos ceteris preferendos, quorum diuersa uirtus laudem pene est parem consecuta. Densus et breuis et semper instans sibi Thucydides, dulcis et candidus et fusus Herodotus; ille concitatis, hic remissis affectibus melior; ille contionibus, hic sermonibus; ille ui, hic uoluptate.’ Habes itaque, summe pontifex, qualis sit grece Thucydides, quem si a me traductum censebis eandem seruare dignitatem omnis mei laboris obliuiscar...” Vat. lat. 1801, ff. 1v–2r. I have used Donald A. Russel’s 2001 translation in the Loeb series for the Quintilian quote.

²⁵ “Est enim in illo plurima urbanitas, summaque disputandi ratio, ac subtilitas, uberrimae divinaeque sententiae disputantium mirifica jocunditate, et incredibili dicendi copia referuntur. In oratione uero summa facilitas, et multa, atque admiranda, ut Graeci dicunt χάρις. Nichil est enim insudationis, nichil violenti [...] Eiusmodi quidem apud Graecos est Plato, quem ego nisi apud latinos quoque talem ostendero; aperte sciant, illum

We recognize the emphasis on *how* the Greek writer was in the original and the need to render that. Like Valla, Bruni also used the reception of a Greek author, the way he was perceived by Latin writers, as an argument for the stylistic choices that he made in his translations. In the preface to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he criticized the medieval translator (Robert Grosseteste) for his barbarous Latin style: as we know from Cicero, Aristotle strove to be eloquent, and his books were splendidly written in a high rhetorical style.²⁶ So clearly Bruni's choice to aim at a rhetorical style in the translation was justified.

The reception of a Greek author in the Latin world became a topos in translation literature. In the dedicatory letter written to accompany his 1430 translations of Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, Francesco Filelfo mentioned several times that Xenophon had been known as *musa Attica* (he is so called by Cicero, *orat.* 62 and Quintilian, *inst.* 10,1,31), complaining that his own Latin could not do justice to Xenophon's splendid style, which even Cicero had admired.²⁷ Many years later, when he had translated the *Cyri paedia*, Filelfo wrote to Pope Paul II that of course he was not so conceited as to claim that his style could match the elegance and refinement of Xenophon, the *musa Attica*. One reason was that as a translator he was not free, he could not use his own *inventio*, but had to follow the original.²⁸

In his dedicatory letter to Nicholas V, Perotti too compares Polybius to a Roman writer, namely Livy. In his reworking of Polybius' Greek text into Latin, the *Commentaria de primo bello punico* from around 1420, Bruni had clearly stated that he wanted to supply what was missing in Livy's *Ab urbe condita*; had that part of the *AUC* survived, he would never have undertaken

meo vicio deteriorem factum, nec se Platonem legere putent, sed meas ineptias," BRVNI *ep* 1,1 (1,8 M.).

²⁶ "Atqui studiosum eloquentiae fuisse Aristotelem et dicendi artem cum sapientia coniunxisse et Cicero ipse multis in locis testatur et libri eius summo cum eloquentiae studio luculentissime scripti declarant," BRVNI *praef Aristoteles eth Nicom.*

²⁷ "Sed in hac traductione id mihi molestum fuit, quod non eiusmodi divina haec oratio apud nostros appareat qualis apud Graecos effulget et tanquam sol aliquis irradiat. Quis enim Musam Atticam (ita nanque Xenophontem prisci cognominarunt) dicendo apud nostros expresserit? Quis talem hanc Agesilai laudationem, quam ipse etiam eloquentiae deus Cicero pluribus in locis et unice laudavit et maiorem in modum admiratus est, ulla dicendi arte, ullo ingenio, ulla demum exercitatione pro dignitate interpretari se posse vel crediderit vel sperarit?," Filelfo 2012, 19–20.

²⁸ "Non enim sum adeo impudens ut velim me a quoquam existimari ita eleganter et perpolite sonoram illam ac suavem Xenophontis orationem expressisse ut etiam ipse Musa Attica debeam appellari, praesertim cum et aliud sit aliorum inventa interpretandi, et aliud nostra scribendi munus," Filelfo 2012, 105.

the work.²⁹ Perotti appears to have valued Polybius more in his own right. In a long passage in the letter to Nicholas, he compares Polybius and Livy, mentioning that Livy had relied heavily on Polybius' third book in Book 21 of the *AUC*. The differences between the two were that Livy's narrative was sometimes rather brief; and that he was more prone to report portents, oracles and visions, whereas Polybius tended to insert moral precepts into his History. Livy reported entire speeches, whereas Polybius preferred indirect speech (at this point in the margin of cod. S.12.2 of the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena, Perotti added *Comparatio Liuii ac Polybii*, Comparison between Livy and Polybius). To Perotti's taste, Polybius was never longwinded but Livy was sometimes too brief, and he preferred the mottoes and sentences of the Greek to Livy's portents.³⁰ Perotti was definitely aware of Polybius' style and historiographical technique, and his remarks must be based on personal observation, since, as far as I am aware, we have neither the classical nor the contemporary sources for such a comparison.

Even though Perotti evidently preferred Polybius to Livy on some points, he used the Roman historian as stylistic model in his translation. Critics have accused him of introducing unnecessary additions to the original, but on closer inspection these often consist of Livian phrases. Moreover, in his preface, Perotti mentions that Livy regularly reports entire speeches whereas Polybius prefers *oratio obliqua*. At least once Perotti actually transposes Polybius' indirect discourse into direct speech, complete with an apostrophe that of course is absent from the original.³¹

We have a rather extreme example of what insistence on the literary forms of the target culture might lead to in a letter by Guarino Veronese

²⁹ "Cuius libri si exstarent, nihil opus erat novo labore," Baron 1928, 123. On the *Commentaria*, see Reynolds 1954 and Ianziti 2012, 61–88.

³⁰ "Nam ut de reliquis taceam, manifestissimis argumentis deprehendi potest Titum Liuium Patauinum, historicorum apud Latinos principem, hunc potius quam Fabium Pictorem (*AUC* 1,44,2) aut Pisonem (*AUC* 2,32,2; 2,58,1; 25,39,15), quos ipse memorat, secutum fuisse, quippe et in iis, in quibus Polybius illos reprehendit, Polybii sententiam haud obscure sequitur, et ita nonnunquam illius uestigiis inhaeret, ut mihi quidem uigesimus primus liber Liuii ex tertio Polybii libro fere ad uerbum translatus esse uideatur, ac nihil sane inter eos interest, nisi quod Liuius aliquanto breuius res gestas refert, Polybius diffusius, Liuius portenta ac prodigia plurima et oracula ac uisiones deorum commemorat, Polybius his omnibus dimissis praecepta quaedam interserit ad uitae institutionem necessaria. Postremo Liuius contiones integras atque directas, Polybius obliquas exponit. [...] Verum equidem in Polybio breuitatem non desidero, in Liuiio interdum fortasse aliquid latius. Flosculi uero sententiarum, quos operi suo Polybius inserit, magis profecto mihi mentem implent quam portenta Liuii atque prodigia," N. Perotti, letter of dedication of Nicholas V, see n. 21.

³¹ For this, see Pade 2008.

dating from 1427. His long-time friend Girolamo Gualdo had asked Guarino to translate some or all of the twenty-third book of the *Odyssey*. The translation itself is unfortunately lost, but in the letter Guarino explained to Gualdo how he had worked:

Text 9

I have translated the verses you asked for into Latin and send them to you. Some I translated almost literally, but there were passages where I more or less summed up the content, as I have seen that our Virgil often did. When a group of objects can be taken one by one, as for instance when you make bread, he thought it sufficient to say ‘the tools of Ceres’ (*Cerealia. . . arma*), in order not to bore the reader by listing baking tools or diminish the poem’s dignity by stooping to the base and the common. Homer, on the contrary, is very careful to describe all particulars and diligent in his rendering of the smallest detail.

Guarino goes on to say that he had used the Virgilian method in translating the passage about Odysseus’ bed. He had simply summed up Homer’s long description about how the olive tree was cut down, etc., in a few words.³²

Some years later Leonardo Bruni translated, or rewrote, the speeches of Odysseus, Achilles, and Phoenix from *Iliad* 9,222–605 in rhetorical Latin prose. He wanted to show how ridiculous it was to maintain that rhetoric had been invented by the Sicilians Corax and Tisias when Homer, who wrote centuries before them, could write speeches that were almost perfect in their eloquence, making use of high as well as middle and low style. For his own pleasure, Bruni decided to translate:

Text 10

Homer’s speeches into Latin as an orator. Leaving out the epithets, which are characteristic of poetry, but not at all appropriate in

³² “Curavi ut versus illos Homeri tibi traducerem in linguam latinam. Eos tibi transmitto, in quibus nonnulla ex verbo ferme converti, quaedam summatim exposui, quod a Virgilio nostro factitatum animadverti. nam cum plura particulatim intelligenda sint, ut in pane faciundo, satis habuit dicere ‘Cerealiaque arma’ (*Aen.* 1,177), ne pistoria enumerans instrumenta fastidio afficeret auditorem vel ad infima et vulgaria descendens, carmini dignitatem auferret. Homerus contra in omnibus exponendis rebus poeta diligentissimus et usque ad minutissima accuratissimus cum lecti ab Ulixē facti mentionem faceret, cuiusdam oleagini trunci delationem descripsit, deinde ad rubricam directum, tum perforatum pedibus impositis expressit; quae singula paucis dixisse contentus particularia tacui, quocirca eos versus (*Od.* 23,190–204) tibi latine <o>missos, graece scribere neglexi.” GVARINO *ep* 408, a. 1427. For a more thorough discussion of this letter, see Pade 2013.

rhetoric, I forged the sentences and the other words into rhetorical prose, following the order of the original.³³

Bruni here uses, if not the reception into Latin of Homer, then the later development of rhetoric to explain his method of translation.

Valla's prefatory letter to his Thucydides is probably more grandiose than most other examples of the genre. Still, its main themes are fairly typical of fifteenth-century humanist discourse on translation. Other contemporary writers describe humanist translation as a process that renders foreign cultural manifestations subject to Latin rule and integrates them into the Latin cultural orbit (e.g. texts 2 and 5); they try to give the reader an idea of the stylistic qualities of the original and use the reception of the Greek author by classical Latin writers to explain their own translation choices. Much of this is found already in Bruni's letter to Niccolò Niccoli on his translation of Plato's *Phaedo*, a letter that actually circulated with the translation itself from an early date, a clear indication that it was seen as an important message from Bruni to readers of the translation, not just to Niccoli.³⁴

Valla's glosses: a corollary to his translation

Valla's translation of Thucydides is, as mentioned above, extant in twenty-two complete manuscripts, including the dedication copy to Nicholas V. A number of the early manuscripts contain a set of glosses composed by Valla. Some of these are transmitted in one or more of the early manuscript copies of the translation, but not in the dedication, a clear indication that although Valla in the *postscriptum* to the Vat. lat. 1801 declared it the *archetypus* of his translation, it was in fact not the exemplar of later copies.³⁵

The glosses or *marginalia* found in early manuscript copies of Valla's translation may be divided into three categories: *notabilia* or rubrics, which mainly draw attention to interesting passages in the text; translations from

³³ “[...] has Homeri orationes oratorio more in latinum traduxi. Relinquens enim epitheta, que propria poetarum sunt – oratori autem nullo modo congruunt –, sententias eius ac verba cetera servato eorum ordine solutam in orationem conieci,” BRVNI *or Hom* pp. 66–68. For the complicated question of the date of Bruni's *Orationes Homeri*, see Thiermann 1993, 118–129.

³⁴ Browsing Lucia Gualdo Rosa's monumental *Censimento dei codici dell'epistolario di Leonardo Bruni*, one sees that the letter to Niccoli enjoyed a wide diffusion also outside Italy from an early date, thanks to a number of manuscripts of Bruni's works copied for collectors at the Council of Constance in 1416–1417. For early manuscripts of the letter, see Gualdo Rosa 1993–2004, I 11, 69, 77, 150, 232; II 9, 89, 151, 162, 246, 276, 291. On the early diffusion of Bruni's *Familiars* in general, see Gualdo Rosa 1991.

³⁵ For this see Pade 2000 and 2010, 290.

Greek scholia or of information from other Greek writers, e.g. Plutarch or Marcellinus' *Vita Thucydidis*; and comments on the Latin wording of his translations, which is the group that interests me here.

I mentioned that some of the glosses were not in the dedication copy. The reason why I do not hesitate to attribute them to Valla all the same is that they include translations of Greek scholia (and very few scribes knew Greek well enough to translate them on their own account), and that, in one gloss, Valla speaks of his method of translation in the first person singular. Opposite a passage in Pericles' speech at the end of Book One, Valla remarks upon the many *homoiopota* and antitheses in the orations, saying that he has tried to render these also in Latin.

Text 11

Multa sunt similiter cadentia et contraposta et talia apud Thucydidem que in Latino reddere laboravi (there are many similar cadences and antitheses and the like in Thucydides that I have tried to render in Latin, I 141,4)

Valla here quotes Quintilian's discussion on prose rhythm in rhetoric and historiography (*inst.* 9,4,18), a passage he had actually also commented upon in his glosses on the *Istitutio oratoria*, where he said that there were many such passages in Thucydides ("Multa sunt huiusmodi in Thucydide [. . .]").³⁶ In this passage, Valla not only uses the ancient critic, in this case Quintilian, to describe the style of the Greek author (cp. above texts 7 and 9), he also strives to render the speech figures described by Quintilian:

καὶ οἱ τοιοῦτοι οὔτε ναῦς πληροῦντες οὔτε πεζῶς στρατιᾶς πολλάκις ἐκπέμπειν δύνανται, ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων τε ἅμα ἀπόντες καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν δαπανῶντες (*Hist.* 1,141,4)

Atque huiusmodi homines non sepe aut naues implere possunt, aut pedestres exercitus emittere, quod *ab re familiari sunt absentes pariter et absumentes* (tr. Valla)

Valla's reading of the *Istitutio oratoria* prompted another gloss commenting on the translation. Quintilian had noted that Sallust often translated Greek expressions, in other words made loan translations, one of them being the Thucydidean φιλεῖ γίνεσθαι that becomes *amat fieri* ("Ex Graeco vero translata vel Sallusti plurima, quale est [vulgus] amat fieri," *inst.* 9,3,17). In his glosses on Quintilian, Valla refers to a passage in Book Two of the *Histories* where Thucydides used the expression (2,65,4); but the gloss on the loan translation is in Book Three:

³⁶ Valla 1996 *ad loc.*

Text 12

Mos suus loquendi Thucydidis, ut Sallustius eum imitatus “uulgus amat fieri” (an expression often used by Thucydides and imitated by Sallust when he says “it generally happens [cp. *Iug.* 34,1]” 3,42,1).

Bruni had repeatedly criticized the medieval translator of Aristotle’s *Politics* (William of Moerbeke, c. 1215–1286) for simply transliterating Greek works when there were perfectly good Latin expressions for the same concept.³⁷ In general, Valla does not transliterate Greek terms, but perhaps Bruni’s strictures towards Moerbeke’s Latin made him careful to explain the Graecisms or loan translations that he did use: they were, in fact, sanctioned by *usus auctorum* in that they had already been adopted by classical, authoritative writers like Sallust.

We have a related example in a series of nine glosses that explain Valla’s rendering of the Greek ὄσον οὐ or ὄσον οὐκ by *tantum non*, an expression he has already discussed in the *Elegantiae*: “[. . .] quem modum loquendi a Graecis mutuati sumus” (an expression we have borrowed from the Greeks, *eleg.* 2,31). The longest of the nine glosses is opposite a passage in Book Four on the preparation of the Syracusans for a war that was almost upon them:

Text 13

tantum non idest pene, uidelicet quia tantum hoc abest quod res iam iam sit presens. Hunc Grecorum loquendi modum multi sunt Latini imitati (*tantum non*, that is ‘nearly,’ ‘namely’ because it is not any further away than as to be as good as there already. This Greek expression has been imitated by many Latin writers, 4,45).

Valla here not only explains the Latin *tantum non*, he also carefully points out that the loan translation is not a newly coined expression but, on the contrary, is attested in good, classical Latin.

In a few instances Valla comments on rare words or rare expressions he has used in the translation. One gloss explains the difference between two kinds of envoys: “Legati in pace dicuntur. Caduceatores in bello” (they are

³⁷ E.g. BRUNI *interpr* 95. For Bruni’s translation of the *Politics*, now see Schütrumpf 2014 with earlier literature. In 1441, Bruni sent a copy of his translation of the *Politics* to Alfonso of Aragon in Naples, where Valla got to see it. He criticised Bruni’s Latin in the translation in a letter of 1446, but evidently still respected his judgement. Cp. Valla 1984, 276–277, and letter 34, *ibid.*, 288–289. On the influence of Bruni’s translation on Valla, see moreover Pade, forthcoming.

called legates in peacetime and heralds in war, 4,118,13).³⁸ Another is on the expression *demereor te* (I deserve well of you), which Valla also discusses in the *Elegantiae* and in his glosses on Quintilian: “*demereor te est obsequio te prosequor et meritis*” (I deserve well of you, that is I attend you loyally and according to your deserts 8,65,2).³⁹

The glosses I have discussed here all comment on the translation rather than on the Greek text, and they touch upon themes current in the contemporary metadiscourse of translation. Valla uses the reception into Latin literature, if not of the *Histories* themselves then of the genre of historiography, to explain his translation choices (see Text 11), and he is careful to explain to the reader that the loan translations *amat fieri* and *tantum non* are not his invention, but have been used by *auctores* for many centuries (see texts 12 and 13).

At this point it might be reasonable to ask whether this set of scattered notes, though clearly reflecting contemporary issues, are in fact part of the humanists’ metadiscourse on translation. Are they a soliloquy for which the reader is only an unintended public, or are they in fact intended as writer–reader interaction regarding the translation? Their material transmission suggests the latter. Not only are they written carefully into the margins of the Vat. lat. 1801 by the copyist, Johann Lamperts von Rodenberg, but selections from them are actually found in twelve other manuscript copies of the translation. The paratextual apparatus was clearly seen as an integral part of Valla’s work. Moreover, there is reason to believe that Valla had specific readers in mind when he penned the glosses in the margins of his text, not just Nicholas, learned as he was. A number of early copies of the translation were commissioned by friends or pupils of Valla’s, collectors of books with humanist interests. Some of them are known to have possessed other works by Valla and, as I have shown elsewhere, their copies of his Thucydides were made from Valla’s personal exemplar and contained his glosses. These people were discerning readers, probably au courant with contemporary trends in translation theory, and they would be able to appreciate Valla’s reflections on his own translation practice. Suffice it here to mention Jean Jouffroy, who had studied with Valla in the 1430s and who commissioned the present Vat. lat. 1799 already in 1452; the Englishman William Gray, who knew Valla in Rome and also had a copy of the

³⁸ Cp. Paul. Fest. p.47: “(*caduceatores*) legati pacem petentes”; and Serv. *Aen.* 4,242: “unde secundum Livium legati pacis caduceatores dicuntur: sicut enim per fetiales, a foedere, bella indicebantur, ita pax per caduceatores fiebat.”

³⁹ Cp. Valla 1996 Quint. *inst.* 1 pr. 3: “‘Demereor te’ est ‘de te bene mereor,’ ut apud Ovidium: ‘Crimine te potui demeruisse meo’ [*ep.* 2,28]”; and *eleg.* 5,99: “Demereor quoque pro ‘bene de aliquo mereor’ accipitur cum accusatiuo, [...].”

Thucydides made in the year it was completed (now Kk 4. 2 of the University Library in Cambridge); and Miguel Ferrer, secretary of Pope Calixtus III, who probably knew Valla from his years in Naples and whose splendid copy is dated 1457 (now Stockholm, Royal Library, cod. 4).⁴⁰

Reception in the sixteenth century

One of the questions this volume seeks to answer is the role played by metadiscourse in the dissemination of Renaissance humanism. With regard to translation, it has been shown that the Italian humanists' metadiscourse had a definite impact on translation theory in other parts of Europe.⁴¹ A salient example of this is Etienne Dolet's use of Bruni's *De interpretatione recta* in his *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en une autre* (Lyon, 1540). An important difference between the two treatises is that Dolet wrote about translation into French, which at the time did not have the prestige of Latin; but apart from that one may almost see *La manière* as an abbreviated version of Bruni's tract.⁴² Luther's famous *Sendbrieff von Dolmetschen* (1530) has a very different format from either Bruni's or Dolet's tract. It is first and foremost a propaganda text for Luther's Reformation, and is not a scholarly text. It is also a complaint that his translation of the New Testament had been stolen and reprinted by a certain Hieronymus Emser, who published it under his own name. Still, it is possible to recognize the influence of humanist translation theory, for instance in the principle that the translation should correspond to the sense of the original, not necessarily to its wording.⁴³

Valla's translation of Thucydides also crossed the Alps. It was twice translated into the vernacular. Claude de Seyssel's (1450–1520) French rendering, begun before 1515, was printed in Paris in 1527 and reprinted nine times.⁴⁴ Seyssel included Valla's preface in his translation, which became very popular,⁴⁵ but his own dedication of the first version to Louis XII tells us little about his views on translation. He does however lament the fact that many Greek and Latin historians had never been translated into

⁴⁰ See Pade 2000, 262–266.

⁴¹ See Gualdo Rosa 1985, 185 ff. and Berti 1988, 252.

⁴² For this see Pade, forthcoming. For the reception of humanist translation theory in France, see Norton 1984.

⁴³ See Lefevere 1977, 7–9. For Berthold of Henneberg's ordinance of censorship of translations into German (1485) and its humanist background see Ramming 2015–16, 46–48.

⁴⁴ See Boone 2000, 570–74. On Seyssel's translations, see also Chavy 1973 and Dionisotti 1995.

⁴⁵ See Burke 1996, 135.

French, although they contained much that was useful for people in public positions, and he stresses that Thucydides was a writer worthy of his new reader, the French king.⁴⁶

The second vernacular version is Hieronymus Boner's German translation, which left out Valla's preface. The translation was completed in 1532 and printed in 1533 at Augsburg. In the dedication to Herr Eiteleben von Rüsach, Boner declares that he published the translation in Eiteleben's name "zu ewiger löblichen und Ritterlichen gedächtnis [. . .] dann der [*i.e.* Thucydides] schreybt von den aller ritterlichsten thaten" (Thucydides 1533, sig. iir). The theme of knighthood is evident also in the many woodcuts of the edition, and the overall impression is that Boner aimed at a different public than Seyssel.

However, the Latin version remained important. After the *editio princeps* it was reprinted – in more or less revised form – in France, Germany, Switzerland, and England for almost the next 400 years. In the first couple of hundred years after its completion, Valla's translation was often severely criticized by editors. In the last two centuries, discussions have mostly focused on the translation as a source for the Greek textual tradition.

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse the reception of Valla's Latin Thucydides in detail, and with it of his discourse on translation. Instead I shall use the reactions of one student of Thucydides as an example of how the translation was perceived. Henri Estienne was probably the severest sixteenth-century critic of Valla's Thucydides. He edited it several times, but still complained about its lack of consistency and bad Latin. Estienne evidently did not appreciate Valla's very rhetorical translation; for him, the Latin translation should not substitute the original, as Valla clearly aimed to do, but be an aid to understanding it.⁴⁷ Estienne's strictures may be indicative of how, at least in France, the role of Latin had changed by the middle of the sixteenth century. To a large degree, the vernacular had taken over as the medium in which one could compete with the ancients for richness and elegance of expression. Accordingly, metadiscourse on translation discussed translation into the vernaculars, not into Latin, although it continued to deal with the themes the Italians had taken up in the preceding century.

⁴⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 17211–12, f.1r. On Seyssel's endeavours to promote French literature through translation, see Norton 1974, 1.

⁴⁷ See Thucydides 1564, sig. *iir and Pade 2007, Ch. I.7. For the distinction between the various functions of a translation, see Botley 2004, 164ff, the chapter "Renaissance Translations: Some Categories."

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