Benjamins Translation Library

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Preface

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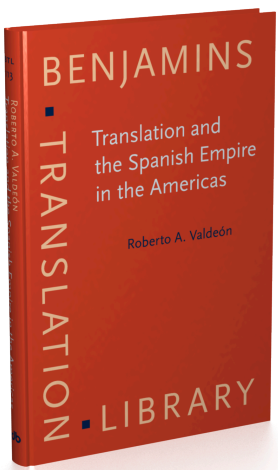

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Translation and the Spanish Empire in the Americas
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Preface

The origins of this book go back to a conference held in Antwerp in 2009. The location may sound well-chosen for a text on translation and the Spanish empire. Antwerp, part of the Spanish empire in the sixteenth century, preserves many reminders that connects it with its Spanish rulers, including the Latin translation of Bartolomé de las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, printed in the city and exhibited at the Plantin-Moretus Museum. In fact, many of the texts of the conquest of the Americas were published in Antwerp. However, the location was very much a coincidence except for the fact that my participation was the result of a kind invitation by the organizers, Luc van Doorslaer and Peter Flynn. It was a small and yet highly international event. Edwin Gentzler, Cecilia Alvstad, and Dirk Delabastita, among others, offered their insights into Eurocentrism and translation studies, and discussed the connections between translation, Europe and the Americas that Edwin Gentzler's own *Translation and Identity in the Americas* debated. In retrospect I am not sure whether my participation met Luc van Doorslaer and Peter Flynn's expectations, although my contribution was later shaped into one of the articles of the special issue of *Translation and Interpreting Studies* devoted to translation and Eurocentrism (2011), later published in book format.

It was also the beginning of an interest in the role played by translation in the conquest of America (as we use the word in Spanish, that is, to refer to the territory comprising North, Central and South America) and in the development of the Spanish colonial rule in the continent. Two of the issues that I discussed in my Antwerp talk became the starting points of this book. On the one hand, the scholarly use of Doña Marina/La Malinche, Hernán Cortés's interpreter, as the perfect example of the violation of the land and its peoples by the conquistadors, as well as a metaphor of the treason to her own people (cf. Valdeón 2011 and 2013a). On the other, the role of the translations of Las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (a small tract in which the Dominican friar combined fact and fiction to encourage the future king, Philip II, to curb European abuse in the Caribbean and elsewhere) in the creation and expansion of the Spanish Black Legend and the promotion of benevolent empires, notably by the English (cf. Valdeón 2012a and 2014). But as I probed into the uses of translation, and the importance of translators and interpreters, I found approaches in other disciplines (but also in translation studies) that could provide us with a more nuanced view of these highly contentious issues.

This book explores the connections between translation and the Spanish empire in the Americas, as well the dissemination of the events of the conquest through translation, following the path and the suggestions of those who have preceded us. Translation studies, like other disciplines within the Humanities and the Social Sciences, has a certain tendency to attempt the conquest of new territories by labelling and relabelling concepts and suggesting new epistemological approaches. However, I have preferred to rely on previous scholarly work, namely Georges L. Bastin's periodization for the study of the history of translation in the Americas (2006, 124). The book aims to examine the role of translation and translators in two periods: the encounter and conquest, and the colonial period. Bastin speaks of three more epochs: from pre-independence to emancipation, the independence period, and from 1920 to the present. Bastin's definition of translation in Latin America as an activity that is "displacing and creative, politically, economically, educationally, and culturally committed – a specific and, above all, appropriate practice and space" (2006, 124) marks the boundaries between the periods covered here, and the other three, the former being an activity more clearly linked to the discourse of empire than the latter.

The first chapter introduces some of the issues that will be discussed in the book, paying particular attention to two axes: the Black Legend versus the benevolent conquest on the one hand, and translation as violation versus translation as (mis)communication on the other. "Conquerors and translators" examines the encounter/clash of civilizations, the difficulties posed by the lack of communication and the gradual use of translation in the expansion of the Spanish in the Americas. "Translation and the administration of the colonies" delves into the role of translation in the establishment of the colonial administration and its role in effacing many and adopting a few of the cultural marks of the so-called New World. "Evangelizing the natives" reflects on the role of translation in the evangelization of the Americas through translation but also on how the relationship between the various religious orders and the indigenous peoples contributed to the expansion of the knowledge of the lands and cultures. These sections are established for practical reasons, but it should be understood that, chronologically, the events were simultaneous. The fifth and sixth chapters partly justify the title of this book, *Translation and the Spanish Empire in the Americas* rather than *Translation in the Spanish American Empire*. "The chroniclers translated" and "Native chroniclers and translation" examine the role of translation in the dissemination of information about the Spanish empire in other European languages, which shaped national identities in other parts of Europe as a result of the emergence of the so-called Spanish "Black Legend", "invented precisely to rule Spain out of imperial contention" (Mignolo 2002, 459). It will consider what was translated and into what

languages, but I will also discuss more recent versions of Spanish texts to evaluate the ideological evolution of these translations, as we move from the early colonial period to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, eventually, to contemporary renderings. It will put to the test the initial assumption that all translations of Spanish documents portrayed the Spanish negatively.

The texts used to obtain information about how translation served colonial purposes on the one hand, and establish communication with the natives on the other are the chronicles of the conquests, the religious texts used by the missionaries and the Church, the legislation produced in Spain and in the colonies themselves, and administrative documents of all sorts (such as those issued by the governing bodies of towns and cities). Translations of the Spanish chroniclers will be considered primary sources in that they will inform us of the dialogues and debates among emerging European powers. Secondary sources, not only by literary and translation scholars, but especially those produced by anthropologists, historians and ethnographers, will also be of paramount importance. Many of these are US-based researchers. They have dealt with translation practices in one way or another, although their work is less known to translation scholars. A few of them have even translated some of the chronicles. All these sources will contribute to establish an uneven triangular base for the book, as we look at legislation and religious texts that originated in Spain and were translated into indigenous languages, Spanish and indigenous visions of the conquest (and their translations into European languages), and contemporary approaches to the use of translation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, notably by US scholars, who, due to their political and geographical position, have become particularly interested in the history, literature and cultures of the whole continent.

To finish this preface, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have read the book, or parts of it, and who have provided valuable suggestions at various times over the past four years. I would like to start by thanking my colleague and friend Luc van Doorslaer, whom I first met in 2008 at a conference I organized in Oviedo. Our mutual interest was, and remains, news translation but Luc inadvertingly sparked my curiosity in the theme of this book. At the Antwerp conference, I first met Edwin Gentzler, with whom I shared many enjoyable breakfasts (and one or two sips of prosecco) in the cold December of 2009. His invitation to join the University of Massachusetts Amherst Translation Center and the generous funding of the Spanish Ministry of Education (Reference: PR2011-511) allowed me to have access to most of the texts I needed to consult, and so many more. Edwin's support and advice have always been an invaluable asset. Other colleagues who have provided their advice include Georges L. Bastin (Montreal), Luise von Flotow (Ottawa), Nigel Griffin (Oxford), An van Ecke and Lieve Behiels (Leuven), Kyle Conway (North

Dakota), Elizabeth Woodward (Coruña), Thomas Scanlan (Ohio). I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their careful reading and insightful comments. My special thanks go to África Vidal (Salamanca), who enthusiastically agreed to read the first two chapters of the book and kept asking for more.

I would like to end by thanking my family, first my parents (my mother, who taught me how to read and write, and my father, who has now forgotten all the lands he once conquered) and my siblings. To Dolores, my wife (who finished her Ph. D. dissertation in Amherst) and to my daughters Sara and Marta, I cannot find the words to express my love and admiration.