

Roberto A. Valdeón. 2014. *Translation and the Spanish Empire in the Americas*. Benjamins Translation Library 113. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. xii + 272 pp. ISBN: 978-90-272-5853-3.

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Translation and the Spanish Empire in the Americas is an impressive volume whose author, Roberto Valdeón, is a well-established scholar at the crossroads of translation and cultural studies. He is particularly interested in analysing the multiple facets of ideology in both fields, and the volume presented here is another contribution in this line of research. In this case, the focus has been placed on the role that translation had in the expansion of the Spanish Empire in the Americas, with special attention to its conceptual and ideological construction and dissemination. For this purpose, the study delves into two periods of evolution in Mesoamerica and in the Andean region, firstly revolving around the conquest itself with the encounter between conquerors and conquered peoples, and secondly around colonists and colonial subjects during the colonial period.

As a contribution to cultural, historical and postcolonial studies, the volume can be considered another twist in the road to what Gentzler (2008, 1) has described as moving translation into centre stage in cultural studies, the so-called “translation turn,” in the words of Bassnett (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 128). In this particular case, this turn constitutes a contribution to the rewriting of American history from the perspective of the translator. It is also an up-to-date response to an increasingly heard demand to value the participating roles of translators and translations in social and historical processes. On the one hand, it is undeniable that translation participates in “shaping the way in which conflict unfolds in a number of ways” (Baker 2006, 2), whereas on the other, as Bastin (2010, 17) rightly remarks, it is surprising to see how, even though translation is omnipresent in their work, historians have failed so far to recognize the value of translation as a crucial supporting discipline for historical studies. In the case of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, ignoring the value of translation has often resulted in a reductionist view of the conquest as well as of its chronicling, failing to present a comprehensive view of all the interacting forces and, therefore, of the participation of translators, together with other witnesses, such as Spaniards who emigrated to look for opportunities that could not be found in Europe, who can provide complementary information.

There are a number of reasons why prospective readers will find this volume of great value and interest. As previously suggested, from a broad perspective the volume is linked to contributions on translation from a cultural or a historical approach published in recent years, such as Bastin and Bandia (2006), Delisle and Woodsworth (2012), Calzada Pérez (2003), Sturge (2007), Tymoczko (2000, 2010), and Vidal Claramonte (2010). At a narrower level, it also relates to the increasingly frequent publications on the role of translation in historical processes within American history in particular. Within these, we can distinguish between studies which focus on a very specific topic and those dealing with the role of translation on a larger scale. One example of the former is Vega Cernuda's (2012) collection of studies dealing with the specific role of translation and other problems encountered by the Franciscan friars in the evangelization of American natives, whereas other studies revolve around the specific role of a translator or an interpreter, such as Fossa's (2008) work on Juan de Betanzos Filho and Milton's (2008) study on Jose de Anchieta, to name but a few. At the larger scale this includes works dealing with translation in the shaping of American history from different perspectives, such as those by Alonso Araguás and Baigorri Jalón (2004), Bastin (2003, 2010), Bleichmar and Mancall (2011), Burke and Po-chia Hsia (2007), Lafarga and Pegenaute (2013), Gentzler (2008), Goldfajn, Preuss and Sitman (2010), Ortega (2003), Simon and St Pierre (2000), to give some examples. It is in this second group that Valdeón belongs.

The great profusion of studies on the role of translation in historical processes shows not only the complexity of the task but also the difficulties in setting a common perspective which allows researchers to benefit from previous work and shed more light on the topic, which means that what we often find is a fragmented view rather than a coherent one. For example, Gentzler (2008) describes the cultural and historical role of translation in America by looking at different hyphenated identities (Cajun American, African American, etc.) and hybrid cultures, such as those found along the US-Mexican border, thus the features of specific manifestations of hybridity are set along a given territorial area. This approach of using a geographical area to analyze the development and evolution of a certain phenomenon is common to historical and anthropological research, such as the work by Salomon (1986) on the politics of the Inka frontier. However, and even though we might say that the borders of a territory are the natural habitat of translation, and hence the ideal area to observe this phenomenon, as Pym (2000) posits, the frontier can also be envisaged as a negotiating area in which the translator has the power to set borders as to how one culture will be constructed and represented in the other, and vice versa, no matter if the particular position of the translator in the process is called "intercultural space" or rather "hybridization," depending on the approach followed. Valdeón explicitly avoids falling into a reductionist view of the conquest and the chronicles of both the conquistadors and the natives by presenting them as binary opposites—the account of the atrocities inflicted on the natives by the conquerors versus the amiable view of the conquerors as saviors of the natives. Instead he chooses

to approach a more ambitious territory, that of the Mesoamerican and Andean areas and their evolution across five centuries in order to disentangle the roles of translation as a tool of conquest, as a means to evaluate the Other, as a means of conversion, as well as an example of colonial rivalries (233).

In order to do so, the book is structured in six thematic chapters and a final part with the conclusions of the study. Chapter one (“Language, translation and empire”) revolves around two axes which will structure the discussion throughout the volume, namely the two opposing images constructed of the conquest—the so-called Black Legend or the benevolent conquest—and the role of translation either as violation or as (mis)communication. Chapters two, three and four consider historical study from three chronologically simultaneous perspectives. In chapter two (“Conquerors and translators”) the question of communication between conquerors and conquered is discussed in relation to the teaching of Castilian and the decisive role of the knowledge and use of the main native languages, which became “a cornerstone of the colonial enterprise” (73), as well as the birth of the first universities in 1551 and the status of translation and translators in the early colonial period, whereas chapter three (“Translation and the administration of the colonies”) deals with the role of translation from economic and political angles. Then, chapter four (“Evangelizing the natives”) explains the decisive role of the methods adopted for introducing the Catholic religion in the conquest. It also deals with the problems and challenges brought about by those methods in Mesoamerica (the teaching of Spanish, the learning of local languages, the impact of the regional councils upon language and translation policies, the impact of translation upon the normalization of Nahuatl), and in the Andean region (the Lima councils; standardization of native languages, printing). The Marian cult as an example of hybridism is also taken into account in this fourth chapter.

The volume turns at this point to look at chroniclers and translators. Thus, chapter five (“The chroniclers and the interpreters translated”) revolves around the chroniclers of Mesoamerica and the Caribbean (e.g., Christopher Columbus, Bartolomé de las Casas, Hernán Cortés, Cabeza de Vaca), together with those of the Andean region (Pedro Pizarro, Pedro Cieza de León, Juan de Betanzos and José de Acosta), as well as other texts (e.g., by Peter Martyr, Agustín de Zárate and Diego Durán), and finishes its consideration of European expansion by discussing the translation of science. Chapter six (“Native chroniclers and translation”) deals with native chroniclers such as Domingo Chimalpáhin in Mesoamerica and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega in the Andean region, as well as with native translations of Spanish literature.

In the final section, “Conclusions,” the author discusses the key points of the study from a modern critical perspective. He starts by emphasizing the perils of approaching the subject with a binary (reductionist) view of the participants in the conquest and how this approach tends to persist even today, and by highlighting the (almost invisible) role of women in the conquest and colonization, the role of the dominant elites and of the Amerindians involved and how the identities of the latter changed, and evolved

into hybridity. The author's final remarks point to translation and the purposes it served: the trope of colonialism, the trope of the colonial discourse of other European emerging powers, the trope of (mis)communication, the trope of the contradictions of the period, and also the trope of resistance.

A clear asset of the book is the wealth of information resources from and about the Spanish conquest analyzed by Valdeón. It will be extremely valuable to the reader with an interest in the history of translation in the construction of Spain and the Americas, and their identities—for a deeper insight see Lafarga and Pegenaut (2013). This interest will also be shared by historians specializing in the periods covered, as the texts considered for the study 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)” (ix). Translations of the Spanish chroniclers serve as primary sources, whereas texts produced by literary and translation scholars, anthropologists, historians and ethnographers serve as secondary sources, and include 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.

To sum up, simply saying that *Translation and the Spanish Empire in the Americas* deals with the role of translation and translators in the history of the Spanish colonization of the Americas would constitute a misleading oversimplification of what readers will find in these pages. Not only the quantity and rigor of the data, but also the comprehensive perspective adopted to study the complex role of translators and translations in the process of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, will provide scholars, graduate students and lay readers with hours of both entertainment and illumination. In a nutshell, the book is an ambitious (and successful) attempt to account for the multifaceted complexities of the Spanish conquest from a fresh perspective, that of the translators and interpreters who were active participants in the process, on the side of both the conquerors and the conquered, who with their work helped shape the images and representations of the conquest in different ways.

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