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ISSUES IN TRANSLATION  
THEN AND NOW:  
Renaissance theories and  
translation studies today

eds. Annet den Haan, Brenda Hosington,  
Marianne Pade and Anna Wegener

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## Introduction

The present volume brings together several contributions to the question of establishing a dialogue between scholars of premodern translation and some current proponents of translation theory. It is hoped that this will mark an important step in what we believe is a badly needed yet mutually beneficial and enriching exchange between these two groups of specialists.

In January 2017, the Danish Academy in Rome hosted a two-day international colloquium entitled “Issues in Translation Then and Now: Renaissance theories and translation studies today”. Its aim was to contribute to a dialogue between the various theories of translation expressed in Renaissance (and to some degree medieval) treatises, commentary, and paratexts and those that are being discussed by scholars engaged in modern translation studies. Though both Renaissance and modern translation studies are rapidly expanding fields within the humanities, there seems to have been little contact between the two groups. Works on the history of translation often tend to ignore the complexity and diversity of Renaissance translation theory and practice – to the point that they often deny the existence of anything approaching a coherent or scientific translation theory prior to the nineteenth century. At the same time, current commentators on Renaissance translation theory and practice are not always completely conversant with modern theories of translation, which can often provide a different perspective by which to make judgements.

The reason for this may partly be the paradigm change in translation studies that has taken place over the last thirty years, from a *prescriptive* to a *descriptive* view. Since Renaissance theoreticians and practitioners almost exclusively discussed translations in normative terms, this shift may have resulted in widening the gap between their views and those of today’s translation specialists. In spite of this, the organisers of the colloquium believed that it was possible to bring them together by addressing certain issues of interest and concern to them both, and by maintaining that Renaissance theoreticians posed many of the same questions as those that occur in contemporary translation studies.

The participants in the colloquium were asked to focus primarily on some frequently recurring key issues in translation theory today, such as foreignization/domestication and notions of cultural translation, intertextuality, materiality, untranslatability, notions of authorial and textual hierarchy, and the status and ‘habitus’ of the translator. The essays in this volume reflect some of these topics, as well as the many lively discussions that took place during the colloquium.

Marianne PADE argues that from the beginning of the fifteenth century there was among Italian humanists a discussion of what we today would call *domesticating* vs. *foreignizing* translation. Using Lawrence Venuti's notions of fluency and transparency, she shows how leading humanists advocated and practised radically domesticating translation strategies during the first 50-60 years of the century – though there were always dissenting voices.

Réka FORRAI focuses on translation as *rewriting*. In her contribution, she argues that the concept of rewriting as discussed by Gérard Genette and the cultural translation theorist, André Lefevere, is also appropriate and useful for understanding the work of some medieval translators, as seen in her corpus of historiographical and hagiographical writers. Furthermore, it is also applicable for a Renaissance translator such as Bruni, as witnessed in his *Italian War against the Goths*.

Anna WEGENER's essay focuses on *intertextuality*. Employing a framework proposed by Lawrence Venuti, Wegener juxtaposes Leonardo Bruni's *On the Correct Way to Translate* with other modern translation theories. She analyses Bruni's treatise as a theory of intertextuality in translation. She also demonstrates that *On the Correct Way to Translate* is a seminal text, not only about translation, but also about retranslation.

Massimiliano MORINI's essay is also concerned with *intertextuality*. He addresses the question of why modern translation scholars have not, up until now, acknowledged the existence of early English translation theory and suggests that this has to do with its intertextual nature. Using twentieth-century notions of intertextuality and a corpus of paratexts accompanying various English translations, Morini is able to trace a web of theory that unites early modern England with the rest of Europe.

Annet DEN HAAN investigates how *translatability* was seen with regard to biblical translation during the Renaissance and in the twentieth century. She argues that the assumptions presented in Eugene Nida's influential 1964 *Toward a Science of Translating* about theology and translatability, although grounded in the linguistic and communication theories of his time and hailed by him as a new direction in biblical translation, are actually similar to those of Renaissance authors like Lorenzo Valla.

Andrea RIZZI investigates the strategies adopted by editors, translators and printers to make themselves visible to readers in early printed books. He applies approaches to the concepts of *visibility* and *agency* recently articulated by Mairi McLaughlin, Theo Hermans and Sharon Deane-Cox to analyse paratextual features of successive Italian editions and translations of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. He is also concerned with the *materiality* of these editions, *authorial hierarchy*, and the *status* of the translator.

The conference was organized by Brenda Hosington, Marianne Pade and Anna Wegener as part of the collaborative research project *Cultural Encounter as a Precondition of European Identity* ([www.acdan.it/projekter/ce/](http://www.acdan.it/projekter/ce/)), funded by the Carlsberg Foundation.

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Annet den Haan, Brenda Hosington, Marianne Pade and Anna Wegener,  
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