Histoire des sciences au Moyen Âge

**La Topographie de la traduction de la fin du
X^e siècle
au début du XII^e siècle**

Conférences de l'année 2012-2013

*The Topography of Translation, from the end of the tenth century
until the early twelfth century*

Charles Burnett

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ashp/1604>

DOI: 10.4000/ashp.1604

ISSN: 1969-6310

Publisher

Publications de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2014

Number of pages: 189-190

ISSN: 0766-0677

Electronic reference

Charles Burnett, "La Topographie de la traduction de la fin du X^e siècle
au début du XII^e siècle", *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études (EPHE), Section des sciences
historiques et philologiques* [Online], 145 | 2014, Online since 15 December 2014, connection on 06 July
2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ashp/1604> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ashp.1604>

This text was automatically generated on 6 July 2021.

Tous droits réservés : EPHE

Histoire des sciences au Moyen Âge

La Topographie de la traduction de la fin du X^e siècle au début du XII^e siècle

Conférences de l'année 2012-2013

*The Topography of Translation, from the end of the tenth century
until the early twelfth century*

Charles Burnett

- 1 This course of seminars attempted to explore how the cultures of different regions of Europe and the Middle East contributed to the production of Latin translations in science and philosophy, made from Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, before the great campaigns of translation undertaken in Toledo and under the patronage of the Hohenstaufen and of Alfonso X, king of Castille and León. We followed a roughly easterly course, beginning with England, and passing through Catalonia, Tuscany, Sicily and Constantinople, to end in the principality of Antioch. We discovered on our journey the specific characteristics of each region as reflected in their choice of texts to translate, and the language out of which they made these translations.
- 2 In the first seminar we explored the Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Norman-French background of the writings of Adelard of Bath, who left his native land to search for Greek learning in Sicily and Arabic learning in the Principality of Antioch, but returned to Bath where he translated Arabic texts on geometry, astronomy, astrology and magic, and taught these subjects to the sons of the nobility. He belonged to a network of scholars in the West Country of England, who included the Jewish convert, Petrus Alfonsi, and Walcher, the abbot of Great Malvern, followed by Roger of Hereford and Robert Grosseteste later in the century. A strong interest in the mathematical sciences, nourished from Arabic sources, characterised these English scholars.
- 3 In the second seminar we looked at the earliest examples of Latin knowledge of Arabic doctrine, in astrology and the construction and use of the astrolabe, which appear in

Catalonia in the late tenth century. In the same area of Northeast Spain, in the second quarter of the twelfth century, Latin scholars benefitted both from the heritage of the Islamic dynasty of the Banu Hud in Saragossa, among whom mathematics prospered, and from the presence of Jewish intellectuals whose scientific language was Arabic.

- 4 In the third seminar we traced the journey of the Jewish savant, Abraham Ibn Ezra, from the Northeast of Spain to Tuscany in the 1130s and 40s. Here, the trading network of Pisa extended from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, and strong bonds tied the city to Constantinople. Hence it could benefit from the works of both Greek and Arabic scholars. Abraham Ibn Ezra himself wrote a great number of texts in Hebrew and Latin, including translations from Arabic, for the Jewish and Christian communities of Pisa and Lucca. Burgundio of Pisa, in turn, translated Greek texts on medicine, philosophy and Christian theology, from manuscripts originating in Constantinople. Translations made in Sicily also reflect contacts with Constantinople, and here the interest in Greek learning mingled with that in Arabic and Hebrew.
- 5 In the fourth seminar our attention turned to Constantinople itself. Constantinople was the home for a small group of Italian scholars, some of whom were engaged in reconciling the schism between the Eastern and Western church. But while mainly making available to Latin readers theological works and works on the Greek language, they also translated scientific and philosophical works. Antioch greatly benefitted from its proximity to the Byzantine realm, but was also close to Arabic centres of learning. Stephen the philosopher provided a link between Pisa (where he originated) and Antioch, where he translated medical and philosophical works. He compiled a large glossary of pharmaceutical terms in three languages—Arabic, Greek and Latin—while someone in his circle with the name “Abd al-Masih of Winchester” made the earliest translation of Ptolemy’s *Almagest* into Latin.
- 6 The seminars revealed the richness and diversity of the cultures in which translations were made, and brought out the links between the various centres as well as their specific natures.

INDEX

Subjects: Histoire des sciences au Moyen Âge

AUTHOR

CHARLES BURNETT

Directeur d'études invité, École pratique des hautes études – Section des sciences historiques et philologiques
Warburg Institute, University of London