
Adrian Izquierdo
CUNY Hunter College

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Reviewed by: Adrian Izquierdo
Hunter College, The City University of New York

Even Dame Folly would have to admit the worth of the industrious endeavors of Jorge Ledo and Harm den Boer, who breathe new to life into the newly found early modern Spanish translation of Erasmus’s famous satirical encomium, reviving the old debates on the controversial issue of Spanish Erasmism and its significance in sixteenth-century Europe. Before Ledo and den Boer’s finding, no other Spanish translation of Erasmus’s influential opus had seen the light until the 1842 edition printed in Barcelona, almost three hundred years after the Dutch humanist’s works had been placed on the Spanish Inquisition’s index of banned books in 1559. Moria de Erasmo Roterodamo opens Brill Publishers’ new series
of Heterodoxia Iberica aimed at the publication of philological editions of significant works that challenged official religious, political, or literary discourses. This critical edition of the only early modern Spanish translation of the Moria manuscript is a significant complement to the study of the spiritually heterodox movement that spread among Erasmus’s followers in Spain, spearheaded some decades ago by Marcel Bataillon and Eugenio Asensio, the dedicatees of Ledo and den Boer’s edition.

Erasmus began his Encomium Moriae, as is well known, on a long journey from Rome to England in 1509 and completed it while staying in the home of his friend Sir Thomas More, the dedicatee of the encomium. A thorough introduction of almost fifty pages precedes this copiously annotated edition in which Ledo and den Boer locate the anonymous translation within the constellation of the sixteenth-century vernacular translations of the Moria, including the Czech translation of 1512, the French versions of 1517 and 1520, the German translation of 1534, the Italian and the English translations of 1539 and 1549, the Dutch translation of 1560, and a Portuguese adaptation dating to the end of the sixteenth century. Despite any hard evidence of early Spanish translations until their discovery, the Moria was certainly read and imitated in Spain, and its elusive imprint has been traced to paramount literary pieces such as Lazarillo de Tormes (1554) and Cervantes’s Don Quijote (1605/1615).

Ledo and den Boer’s attempts to elucidate author, circumstances, and dates, both of the translation and of the extant copy containing the Moria de Erasmo Roteradamo found in the Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos at the Amsterdam Portuguese Synagogue, are some of the most enlightening pages in the introduction. The Spanish Moria discovered in MS. 48 E 33 is, as they argue, “an imperfect copy of a previous sixteenth-century translation, a task which was apparently executed by a Portuguese scribe at some point during the mid-seventeenth century” (6–7). A 1538 ordinance banning a Spanish Moria, the 1541 reference to a “Moria de Erasmo” in an inventory of a notary from Barcelona, and some data gathered from the 1559 Index all seem to point to the existence of early modern vernacular translations that could have circulated in manuscripts in Spain (12–13). Other changes garnered by the editors—an indication of the order of the Colletan friars, only founded in Spain in 1580; the reference to Erasmus as “del Conseio de su Magestad” in the first page of the manuscript, and textual correspondences with particular editions of the Moria—allow them tentatively to place the translation “in the second third of sixteenth-century Castile” (30–31), providing 1532 and 1580 as terminus dates for the translation. This fact is not to be underestimated, for even if Erasmus’s reputation declined after his death in 1536 and to cite his books, especially the satirical Moria, became dangerous, he had a great appeal among some well-known Spanish intellectuals, making the terminus dates of the translation significant to the surreptitious spread of ideas in that environment.

Although most details about translator and scribe are presently unknown, Ledo and den Boer glean clues from the text by deploying a philological approach that combines etymology, paleography, historical phonology, and linguistics with issues pertaining to the historical, literary, and cultural fields in which both the translation and the manuscript were produced. The labor of assembling materials and collating texts, establishing relationships among classical, patristic, and contemporary sources, tracking variant readings, and clarifying the historical meaning in the copious annotations is thorough and erudite. Accordingly, they argue that the sixteenth-century translator was knowledgeable in Latin and Greek, was versed in dialectics, and was fully acquainted not only with the Moria but with Erasmus’s other works. They do not believe that the translation was made through an intermediary.
language such as Italian, Dutch, or French, as was often the case in the period. By contrast, the seventeenth-century scribe who produced the extant copy was not a professional amanuensis, knew more Portuguese than Spanish, knew little if any Latin, and probably did not live in the Iberian Peninsula.

Having collated with the Erasmian original, Ledo and den Boer account for over a hundred changes in the translation, oddly referred to as “lacunae” (23). Most of these changes, however, are related to matters of style: eliminations, modifications, modulation of erudite references. Under this blanket term, however, they also include misreadings, omissions, and unintended modifications made by the scribe. Although this computation points to their thoroughness in the description of the manuscript, what is really remarkable in the text are the changes pertaining to the translator’s praxis. Most of the early modern European translations of the Moria, as they explain, aim at adapting Erasmus’s encomium to the particular cultural environments of their readership. While the French, German, Dutch, and Portuguese versions modified the original introducing explanatory comments, circumlocutions, and expansions, other early translations such as the Italian and the English maintained the original dispositio and attempted to convey the complex web of loci and irony of the original. Erasmus’s Moria was translated to be read by an audience not necessarily erudite, as can be inferred from the major changes carried within the text that the editors divide into four somewhat overlapping categories: “Removal of Exotic Material,” “Simplification of the Original,” “Significant Lacunae,” and “Additions and Modifications” (23).

The consistent removal of what they call “exotic material,” a common practice in Renaissance translations, is a most prevalent feature of a translation that aims at bringing the Moria to a less erudite Spanish-speaking audience. Drawing extensively on the works of Erasmus’s Renaissance commentator Gerardus Listrius as well as on the modern scholarly Clarence Miller Latin edition and English translation, Ledo engages a remarkable cross-referential comparison with other works by Erasmus, particularly the Enchiridion and the Adagia. Interestingly enough, cases of eliminations and toning down of meaning regarding general critique against the aristocracy or complex doctrinal matters are minimal and of scarce relevance in the translation (27). One can then conclude that domestication, as was generally the case with early modern translation efforts, is what moved our anonymous translator.

Even if we cannot know at present when and how the manuscript arrived at the Ets Haim / Livraria Montezinos, Ledo and den Boer do convincingly place it in the center of an exiled community of Spanish and Portuguese Jews prone to examine critically Christian and Catholic beliefs, and known for their thriving book publishing business all over Europe and beyond. This context helps shed light on why the Moria might have been copied out there from the unaccounted-for original translation and how Folly’s biting wit could have been read by a community of undogmatic dissenters with strong ties to the Spanish culture. The value both of the translation and the extant manuscript is undeniable vis-à-vis the flux of Erasmian ideas and their circulation in early modern Europe at a moment when Erasmus’s unorthodox Christianity served the needs of a restless continent torn apart by wars of religion and political conflicts. Ledo and den Boer, combining forces and expertise, approach the manuscript as a material object, and their contention of placing it at the heart of the Jewish community of Amsterdam is as important as the translation itself, making a case for the ideological transmission of the literary texts.

The editors end their book with an abundant bibliography, a useful “Index of the Words and Translations by Erasmus Cited” as well as an “Index of Primary Sources, Printers, and
Historical and Literary Characters” and an “Index of Scholars Cited.” English is nowadays a leading language of international scholarly research and publication. Despite a certain difficulty in wording their ideas in the “Introduction” and notes, Ledo and den Boer’s publication is a significant contribution to scholarship on Erasmus that will certainly open up new lines of investigation and enhance our understanding of the circulation of Erasmus’s work. The *Encomium Moriae*, originally wrapped in Latin garb and dressed in Spanish by an anonymous translator is today given an afterlife by the knowledgeable care of Ledo and den Boer in an annotated English edition that brings to a wider academic audience versed both in Spanish and the *lingua franca* of the twenty-first century the trials and tribulations of a remarkable translation and a forgotten manuscript.