

## **Why some Renaissance medical translations into French retained Latin for prescriptions, notes and prefaces**

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**This paper was given at the Maison Française Oxford in April 2014 at ‘Transforming the Early Modern Republic of Letters: literature, learning, logic, books. A Conference in Honour of Ian Maclean.’ It forms part of my larger research project on the textual transmission of medical and surgical works in early modern France.**

One of Ian Maclean’s most significant and enduring contributions to our understanding of the Renaissance has been his scholarship on the learned book, encouraging us to consider the circulation of knowledge within a European rather than national dimension.<sup>1</sup> As a small homage to his work, in this paper I shall look at the extent to which movements between Latin and one of the Romance languages, French, functioned in a specific area which his work has also embraced, medical and surgical treatises. I propose to tackle a particular paradox: how and why translations from Latin into French published c. 1530-1600 - ostensibly monolingual, vernacular printed works - nonetheless continue to reserve space for Latin. I shall argue that we need to nuance an over-rigid binary division that assumes a simple choice between the vernacular or Latin, in order to recognise continuing exchanges between the two languages and reading communities.<sup>2</sup>

Howard Stone’s bibliography of medical and surgical works published in French in the sixteenth century listed some 156 translations and some 164 original works.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Pettegree’s on-line *Universal Short Title Catalogue* provides an updated critical bibliography, taking account especially of re-editions (which are, perhaps controversially, counted as new ‘texts’) and thus indicating the circulation of a given work.<sup>4</sup> The *USTC* captures the growing significance of medical writings in French in a period when Latin remained the international and professional language for learned medicine, as illustrated by the **data and graph in the Appendix at the end of this paper**.<sup>5</sup> The shift from Latin to vernaculars is already apparent by 1600, although over the seventeenth century it accelerates even more sharply.

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<sup>1</sup> See I. Maclean, *Scholarship, Commerce, Religion: The Learned Book in the Age of Confessions, 1560-1630*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hai, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: CUP, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> ‘The French Language in Renaissance Medicine’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 15 (1953), pp. 315-46.

<sup>4</sup> <http://ustc.ac.uk/index.php/>.

<sup>5</sup> Since writers of medical works in French included some who were poets or authors in their own right – e.g. Symphorien Champier, François Rabelais, Jacques Grévin – I would underline the importance of intersections between medical and literary discourses. See (ed) A. Carlino et M. Jeanneret, *Vulgariser la médecine. Du style médical en France et en Italie*. Geneva : Droz, 2009.

Exchanges happened in both directions: not only through translations from Latin (and Greek) into the vernacular, but also through translations from modern languages into neo-Latin. Examining translations into Latin from all vernaculars, Peter Burke has estimated that the period 1550-1650 saw the number peak, with medicine prominent among the texts in question.<sup>6</sup> In translations of medical works from Latin into French between 1530-1600, the evidence from the prefaces suggests that they were intended primarily for surgeons, but also for provincial physicians, apothecaries, sometimes midwives, and – in the later decades of the century – for the educated general reader with an interest in medical curiosities. For example, in 1566 the physician Jacques Dalechamps dedicated to Jacqueline de Montbel, comtesse d'Entremont, his version of Galen's *De l'Usage des parties*. Apparently the noble lady's interest in science had led her to request that Dalechamps dissect a bull's eye for her!<sup>7</sup> Conversely, if a work was successful or aroused interest in the vernacular, it might be translated into Latin for wider, international circulation. This is exemplified by the inclusion of the Latin translation by Bauhin of François Rousset's French treatise on caesareans,<sup>8</sup> in the 1586 edition of the *Gynaeciorum Libri*, a learned compendium on women's health.<sup>9</sup>

Translating medical works into the vernacular for dissemination among lay readers (including women) was regularly considered to require justification or defence. The first wave of defence culminated around 1549 – in many respects anticipating the quarrels underlying the literary use of French in Joachim Du Bellay's *Deffence et Illustration*. The arguments centred initially on two distinct themes: the propriety of using the vernacular for medical matters, and the possibility of achieving adequate synonymy for Latin scientific terminology in French, which was perceived still as an imperfect, developing language. Many of the defences between 1538 and 1549 emanated from Lyons, especially from the physicians Jean Canapé and Pierre Tolet, both of whom were stalwart translators into French of ancient medical texts. Canapé provocatively declared in 1541:

'Voila l'occasion laquelle m'a induict (selon ma promesse) de donner quelque entree et intelligence en l'anatomie à ceulx qui ne sont aucunement institués aux langues, grecque ou latine. Considérant que l'art de medecine et chirurgie ne gist pas du tout aux langues, car c'est tout ung de l'entendre en Grec ou Latin ou Arabic ou françoys, ou (si tu veulx) en Breton Bretonnant, pourveu qu'on l'entende bien.'<sup>10</sup>

While in 1549, in a heated debate over the medical properties of vinegar,<sup>11</sup> Tolet opined:

<sup>6</sup> *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>7</sup> See E. Berriot-Salvadore, 'La femme dans les ouvrages médicaux lyonnais : Questions théoriques et stratégies éditoriales', in (ed) M. Clément et J. Incardona, *Émergence littéraire des femmes à Lyon, 1520-1550*. Saint-Étienne: PSE, 2009, pp. 62-63, 65-67.

<sup>8</sup> *Traitté nouveau de l'Hysterotomotokie, ou enfantement caesarien*. Paris: Denys Duval, 1581. See V. Worth-Stylianou, *Les Traités d'obstétrique en langue française au seuil de la modernité*. Geneva: Droz, 2007, pp. 243-256; and the English translation of Rousset's treatise in my companion volume, *Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern France. Treatises by caring physicians and surgeons (1581-1625)*. Toronto: Iter Press, 2013, pp. 1-62.

<sup>9</sup> I discuss the co-existence of French and Latin versions of works on women's reproductive health in 'Concurrent Publication of Medical Works in Neo-Latin and French in Early Modern France', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* (December 2014). On the publishing history and popularity of the *Gynaeciorum Libri*, see H. King, *Midwifery, Obstetrics and the Rise of Gynaecology. The uses of a sixteenth-century compendium*. Aldershot-Burlington: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 1-8.

<sup>10</sup> Preface to his translation of Galen, *Du Mouvement des muscles*. Lyon: Etienne Dolet, 1541.

<sup>11</sup> See C. Lastraioli, 'Rire du savoir de l'autre: une querelle médicale au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in (ed.) F. La Brasca et A. Perifano, *La Transmission des savoirs du moyen Age à la Renaissance: le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. II. Besançon: Presses

‘Et aucun ne trouvera impertinent, que j’aye respondu en François. Car pour mon devoir, je devois premierement satisfaire à ceux qui sont vulgairement instruits, entre lesquels la question [des qualités du vinaigre] est esmeue: joint que aussi bien l’on peut ratiociner en françois, ou autre langue vulgaire, que en latin.’<sup>12</sup>

Alongside this evidence of humanists embracing vulgarisation, in the second half of the sixteenth century there is increasing evidence that translators of medical works allied themselves with learned humanism, seeing their task as closely related to – sometimes indistinguishable from – that of editing, amending and commenting on the original Latin (or Greek) text.<sup>13</sup> This mindset goes a long way towards explaining the presence of Latin within texts intended as vernacular translations.

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I shall now turn to specific cases of how and why some translations into French continued – paradoxically - to use Latin for certain functions. In reviewing versions of medical works published between 1540 and 1600, I have identified three main types of occurrence; within each of the categories I shall give several examples to illustrate the nature and range of practices.

### 1) Prescriptions

These are frequently given in Latin, even in French translations. First and foremost, there was a practical reason: apothecaries were used to operating from physicians’ scripts in Latin. However, this use of Latin also preserved professional medical secrecy. On the one hand, certain medicines might be dangerous (e.g. abortifacients); on the other hand, as those with Paracelsian sympathies asserted,<sup>14</sup> the practice ensured a lucrative ‘closed market’ of which the medical professionals retained tight control. In 1549, the publisher of an anonymous translation of the *Institutions chirurgiques* by the physician Jean Tagault reports that before his death Tagault encouraged the translation into French, but specifically requested that neither ‘les receptes des medicaments ne les motz principaux de l’art’ should be translated into the vernacular.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Barthelemy Aneau, in his translation in 1555 of Gesner’s *Tresor de Evonime Philiatre des Remedes secrets*, argues that a French translation of this pharmaceutical work is essential precisely to break down secrecy:

‘Or ayant consideré, que un Tresor caché ne sert de rien non plus que s’il n’estoit point en nature. Et que ce Tresor icy enclos en langue latine pour la plus grand part, et couvert de plusieurs mots, Grecz, Arabicz, et Barbares, estoit incogneu aux hommes purement François.

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Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2005, pp. 11-32; C.-A. Meyer, ‘Pierre Tolet and the *Paradoxe de la faculté du vinaigre*’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 13 (1951), pp. 83-88.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Tolet, *Paradoxe de la faculté du vinaigre*. Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1549.

<sup>13</sup> I treat the development of humanist translation in the chapter on ‘Langues Anciennes’ in *L’Histoire des traductions en langue française*, sous la direction d’Yves Chevrel et Jean-Yves Masson: tome I. XV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, sous la direction de Véronique Duché. Paris: Verdier, forthcoming, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> On the repercussions of the Paracelsian quarrels in France, see A.G. Debus, *The French Paracelsians*. Cambridge: CUP, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Tagault, *Institutions chirurgiques*. Lyon: Guillaume Rouillé, 1549. This translation is attributed simply to a ‘medecin sçavant’.

Nous affin de l'ouvrir, et descouvrir à eux, et leur en donner l'usage : L'avons mis en pure langue françoise, pour estre de tous françois entendu et pratiqué.<sup>16</sup>

The battle was to last a long while; almost a century later, in 1644, for instance, when the collected works of the physician Nicolas Abraham de La Framboisière<sup>17</sup> were republished in French, the prescriptions ('Les Ordonnances') were still recorded in Latin.

## 2) Loci and definitions in margin annotations

Loci – reference to classical authors - were frequently included either within the text of the French translation of a medical work, or in margin annotations. Indeed, some Renaissance translators suggest that physicians capable of reading a work in the original could use their translation as a convenient means to identify such references, an assumption providing further evidence that humanist translations shared common ground with critical editions and commentaries. For example, the physician Paul Bienassis, producing a new translation in 1563 of the obstetrical manual by Rosslin (*De partu hominis / Des divers travaux*),<sup>18</sup> wrote in his prefatory letter that he has undertaken the task :

'non pour ceulx qui sont instructz en la langue Latine, lesquels ne pourroient avoir grandement affaire, de ceste traduction (sinon que pour estre relevez de labeur, ilz y trouveront diverses appellations, d'aucunes maladies, extraites des œuvres de Galien) mais pour ceulx, qui n'ont eu l'opportunité, de vacquer en icelle langue.'<sup>19</sup>

His marginal notes include some twenty precise references to classical sources; they are not taken directly from recent Latin editions of Rosslin, being in all probability compiled by Bienassis himself. They provide information of the following kind:

'Arist. 4 li. De histo animal. Cap. Ulti. Les femmes enfantent le plus souvent 40 sep. Apres la conception [ ;] les signes pour connoistre que le temps d'enfanter approche.'<sup>20</sup>

Medical definitions furnished in the margins of translations may also use Latin terms, in part as a tacit recognition that the scientific French was still developing. Again there are a number of examples in Bienassis's translation where the terms are discussed in several languages in the text itself. For example, when the text speaks about the formation of the embryo, the margin note records both learned and everyday appellations:

'La premiere membrane a nom Chorion. Secundae ou Secundina qu'on appelle l'arrierefays, ou la delivrance'.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Conrad Gessner, *Tresor de Evonime Philiatre des remedes secrets*. Lyon: Balthazar Arnoullet, 1555.

<sup>17</sup> The first edition of his complete *Œuvres* had appeared in 1613.

<sup>18</sup> See *Les Traités d'obstétrique en langue française au seuil de la modernité*, pp. 89-117.

<sup>19</sup> Eucharius Rösslin, *Des divers travaux et enfantemens des femmes*. Paris: Jean Foucher, 1563.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, fol. 12<sup>v</sup>.

Carrying the process of bilingual definitions to its logical conclusion, in 1569 Jacques Grévin appended to his translation of Vesalius's anatomical treatise a short glossary or dictionary of medical terms in Latin and French. He explains its purpose as follows:

'Et à celle fin que cecy ne soit du tout estrange, à ceux qui ont acoustumé les vieux mots, j'ay bien voulu proposer ce petit advertisement pour discharger ceux qui liront ce traicté anatomique. Je feray doncques une brefve collation de noz mots François, accommodez, par nous avec les Grecs et latins, lesquels on escorche ordinairement, à celle fin que ceux qui se sont accouostumez aux uns, puissent faire leur profit des autres, et qu'ils voyent quelle raison nous avons eu à ainsi les tourner.'<sup>22</sup>

While Grévin's aim was to provide the French language with its own lexical resources, he felt obliged to include Latin and Greek terms in his definitions – some of which, incidentally, are still used in modern French. For example:

Oz dela fesse.

L'oz de la fesse est ce que l'on appelle *Iscion* ou *coxa*.

Osselet.

L'osselet est un oz du pied, que les grecs nomment *Astragale*.<sup>23</sup>

Because medical translators were concerned with precise synonymy, they thus cited Latin (or Greek) when engaging in scientific discussion of their French versions ; scholarly translations lent themselves to a proliferation of such notes, appendices and glossaries.

### 3) Prefatory materials

Finally, it is not uncommon for some of the prefatory materials of a translation to be in Latin. These may range from short flattering poems (*pièces de circonstance*) to quite lengthy prose epistles. Their presence raises the question of why, in a work ostensibly intended for a non-Latinate readership, the printer or the author should have seen fit to include these 'foreign texts'. We may ask how far they indicate an expectation of two distinct reading communities, one bilingual, the other reading only the vernacular sections of the text. I shall cite three examples of extensive prefatory texts in Latin, which illustrate well the influence of learned humanism on medical translations c. 1550-1600.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, fol 10<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> 'Advertissement au lecteur sur les noms françois imposez à quelques parties du corps humain', in *Les Portraits anatomiques de toutes les parties du corps humain, gravez en taille douce... Ensemble l'Abbrégé d'André Vesal*. Paris: André Wechel, 1569.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. iv<sup>r</sup>.

- Epistle in Latin prose to Antoine des Essarts by Jean Brèche,<sup>24</sup> prefacing his translation of *Les Aphorismes d'Hippocrates* (1st ed. 1550; new extended edition, Paris: Jacques Kerver, 1552).
- Epistle in Latin prose to the local bishop by Jean Massé, prefacing his translation of *L'Œuvre de Claude Galien des choses nutritives* (Paris: Vivant Gaultherot, 1552).
- Epistle in Latin prose to Philibert de Diou by André Malésieu, prefacing his translation of Estienne Gourmelen's *Le Sommaire de toute la chirurgie* (Paris: Nicolas Chesneau, 1571).

The first observation I would make is that the three translators in question belong to different professions: a lawyer (writing to another lawyer), a doctor (addressing a bishop) and a surgeon (addressing a lawyer in the Paris Parlement). In the first two cases, we would expect Latin to be the working language of communication; for surgeons, however, this would be the exception rather than the rule, but learned surgeons – Bienassis is one such example in Poitiers in the 1560s, Malésieu another in Paris in the early 1570s - rarely missed the chance to display their scholarship.

Secondly, in all the works there are prefatory materials in both Latin and French, so *both* reading communities are addressed. In such cases, is Latin used to emphasise the translator's learning, and his membership of a limited group? Or is it a language in which, despite the vulgarising mission of the vernacular translation, some discussions are still restricted to a linguistic elite? From my survey to date, I would suggest that the primary function of a Latin text is to establish beyond all reasonable doubt the translator's scholarly credentials. Thus, Jean de Brèche's nine-page Latin epistle emphasises that he has worked from the Greek text of Hippocrates – as attested by the many Greek quotations in the margins of the translation – and that it took him a full eight months to complete ('octo nihilominus integros menses'). In contrast, the French preface defends the capacity of the French language to express Hippocrates's scientific ideas, and considers various approaches to translation.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the Latin epistle by Jean Massé,<sup>26</sup> also a substantial nine pages in length, discusses the scholarly difficulties posed for a translator by the variants in Greek and Latin manuscripts he had consulted:

'Plurimum auxit difficultatem in his vertendis exemplarionum Graecorum ac Latinorum varietas, quum hoc haberet Latinus codex, quod Graecae minime consonum esset, illud vero Graecus, quo Latinus omnino carebat.'

Massé also raises the issue of translating plants names that require either paraphrases or neologisms in French. This second issue is expounded in more detail in the French preface, but the latter is essentially a practical glossary to enable the reader to understand some of the more technical terms.

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<sup>24</sup> Jean de Brèche was a lawyer of the Présidial de Tours; his correspondent, Antoine des Essarts, was lieutenant civil au Châtelet de Paris.

<sup>25</sup> It offers a defence of paraphrase rather than word-for-word translation, and an acceptance of scientific neologisms.

<sup>26</sup> A physician from St Florentin in Champagne.

The third case is rather different: André Malésieu, a Parisian surgeon, translated a recent neo-Latin manual on surgery, the *Synopseos chirurgiae libri sex*, by Estienne Gormelen, a physician originating from Brittany, but soon to be promoted in 1578 to the Royal Chair in Surgery. Malésieu writes two prefatory letters, one in Latin to Philibert de Diou, the other in French to the student-surgeons for whom he has undertaken the translation. The French preface provides an introduction to Gormelen, whose work will allow the young surgeon to gain essential professional knowledge distilled from the Ancients. While hoping the young surgeon will eventually be able to read the classical texts in their original language, Malésieu limits his margin annotations (translated from Gormelen) to the most accessible works. This French epistle is that of a master addressing his apprentices. The elegant Latin epistle, on the other hand, is an example of correspondence from one intellectual to another.<sup>27</sup> Malésieu expounds to Philibert de Diou, President of the Paris Parlement, the historical institutions of medicine and surgery, underlining the importance of legal frameworks, and including a harsh criticism of the ‘infoelici hoc nostro saeculo Empiric[ii]’.<sup>28</sup> Implicitly, the latter are to be distinguished from the trained surgeons for whom Malésieu is translating. Here, the use of Latin, which is not strictly necessary for scientific purposes, inscribes Malésieu’s perception of his privileged socio-professional status.

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Paradoxically, in prefaces to translations into French, Latin remains the bastion of professional status as well as a badge of learned humanist credentials. While the continued use of Latin could be argued to have been functionally necessary in prescriptions, references to classical authors and definitions of medical terminology, in the prefaces the French language could have served equally well to convey the same ideas. However, the use of Latin creates an impression of complicity between the translator and recipient, defining a privileged community of readers, still defined, in the second half of the sixteenth century, by the ability to appreciate well-turned, humanist Latin, even within a national rather than international context.

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<sup>27</sup> On learned medical correspondence, see N. Siraisi, *Communities of Learned Experience. Epistolary medicine in the Renaissance*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Estienne Gormelen, *Le Sommaire de toute la chirurgie*. Paris: Nicolas Chesneau, 1571, fol. +iiii<sup>f</sup>.

**APPENDIX: THE PRINTED BOOK 1500-1600 - DATA FROM A. PETTEGREE'S *USTC*<sup>29</sup>**

Note: 'text' is used in this *USTC* (<http://ustc.ac.uk/index.php/>) to designate an edition rather than a work; so if a work is printed in 5 editions, it is counted as 5 works.

	<b>All languages</b>	<b>Latin</b>	<b>All vernaculars</b>	<b>French</b>
<b>All texts published 1500-1600 In Europe</b>	331,975	149,693 (45%) <sup>30</sup>	182,282 (55%)	47,914 (14%)

	<b>All languages</b>	<b>Latin</b>	<b>All vernaculars</b>	<b>French</b>
<b>All texts published 1500-1600 In France</b>	75,699	36,102 (48%)	39,597 (52%)	37,461 (49%)

<b>Medical texts in Latin</b>	<b>Across Europe</b>	<b>In France</b>
<b>Total 1500-1600</b>	6,487	1,467 (23%)
<b>1500-1525</b>	731 [Venice 205; Paris 92; Lyon 76]	176 (24%) [Paris 92; Lyon 76; Rouen 4]
<b>1526-1565</b>	2,636 [Lyon 504; Venice 477; Paris 456]	977 (37%) [Lyon 504; Paris 456; Toulouse 5]
<b>1566-1600</b>	3,120 [Basel 565; Venice 266; Frankfurt 197; Lyon 162; Leiden 123; Paris 112]	314 (10%) [Lyon 162; Paris 112; Lyon-Genève 27]

<b>Medical texts in French</b>	<b>Across Europe</b>	<b>In France</b>
<b>Total 1500-1600</b>	1202	1091
<b>1500-1525</b>	103 [Paris 57; Lyon 24; Rouen 8]	97 [Paris 57; Lyon 24; Rouen 8]
<b>1526-1565</b>	572 [Paris 277; Lyon 173; Antwerp 29; Poitiers 24]	522 [Paris 277; Lyon 173; Poitiers 24]
<b>1566-1600</b>	527 [Paris 220; Lyon 155; Rouen 22]	472 [Paris 220; Lyon 155; Rouen 22]

<sup>29</sup> Data was accessed in April 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Individual percentages are rounded to the nearest integer, hence across any row the total may vary between 99-101%.



Number of medical texts (i.e. number of editions) published in France,  
as recorded in A. Pettegree's *USTC* (<http://ustc.ac.uk/index.php/>)

