

LLUÍS CABRÉ - ALEJANDRO COROLEU

*A survey of translations of Cicero  
in Italy, France and the Iberian Peninsula  
(ca. 1330-ca. 1500)*

*Abstract: This article examines vernacular renderings of Cicero's shorter moral works between ca. 1330 and ca. 1500 from the vantage point of manuscript production and circulation. Excluding the Somnium Scipionis, no fewer than twenty-one translations of the De amicitia, the De senectute, the De officiis and the Paradoxa stoicorum were produced in Italy, France and the Iberian Peninsula, of which eleven are of the De officiis and the Paradoxa stoicorum. This survey of Cicero's moral treatises and dialogues available in translation confirms the central position occupied by these texts in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe.*

**Keywords:** *Cicero, Humanistic translations, Manuscript circulation*

*Received: 15/03/2024. Accepted after internal and blind peer review: 27/06/2024*

*lluís.cabré@uab.cat  
alejandro.coroleu@icrea.cat*

*Introduction*

Here we present a survey of Cicero's *De amicitia*, *De senectute*, *De officiis* and *Paradoxa stoicorum* available in translation in Italy, France and the Iberian Peninsula in the years between ca. 1330 and ca. 1500<sup>1</sup>. This article is intended as preparatory to an attempt to account for the popularity of Cicero's moral works in

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of project PID2019-103874GB-I00 (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación). List of abbreviations: BC [Biblioteca de Catalunya], BL [British Library], BNE [Biblioteca Nacional de España], BnF [Bibliothèque nationale de France], OFM [Franciscans (Ordo Fratrum Minorum)], OP [Dominicans (Ordo Fratrum Praedicatorum)].

the Crown of Aragon in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Translations are arranged by language, according to a chronological sequence: the earliest versions, in Italian, come first, followed by French, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese and Aragonese renderings. Within each language a chronological order has also been adopted, even if at times it is difficult to provide the exact date for a particular text. At the end of the survey we offer a brief discussion of the available data.

Cicero's shorter moral treatises (including his *Somnium Scipionis*) had a significant place in the twelfth-century Italian curriculum but slipped out of the school syllabus in the following century. The texts began to be copied again in Italy during the Trecento, but they seem not yet to have re-entered the classroom. Rather, their chief academic use at the time appears to have been restricted to the university teaching level, most likely as part of the notarial or legal syllabus<sup>2</sup>. In this context, Cicero's rhetorical and moral values were emphasized, especially through the reading and glossing of the *De officiis* and the *Paradoxa stoicorum*. These two treatises as well as the dialogues *De amicitia* and *De senectute* assumed primacy in the Italian fifteenth-century grammar courses to the point that the Ciceronian manuscripts intended for this use went from zero, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, to thirty-four in the fifteenth century<sup>3</sup>. It should be noted that the centrality of Cicero's shorter moral works during the fifteenth century is also obvious from their frequent occurrence in the inventories of private libraries, both in Latin and in the vernacular, and from their translation into several European languages, as shown by the following catalogue.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 211-212.

<sup>3</sup> See Black, *Humanism and Education* cit., pp. 238 and 262.

## 2. Translations

### 2.1. Italian (Tuscan linguistic varieties)<sup>4</sup>

#### I1 *De amicitia*

Translator: Unknown.

Date: before 1330.

Modern edition: F. Zambrini, F. Lanzani, *Opuscoli di Cicerone volgarizzati nel buon secolo della lingua toscana*, Imola 1850, pp. 109-177.

#### I2 *De amicitia*

Translator: Unknown.

Date: Produced before 1330, this translation was copied in an autograph manuscript belonging to the Florentine notary Filippo Ceffi (fl. late thirteenth century-early fourteenth century), who may also be the translator.

Modern edition: S. Bertelli, *Il volgarizzamento del «De amicitia» in un nuovo autografo di Filippo Ceffi (Laurenziano Ashburnham 1084)*, «Studi di filologia italiana», 67 (2010), pp. 33-90.

#### I3 *Paradoxa stoicorum*

Translator: Unknown.

Date: 14th century.

Modern edition: G. Spezi, *Le Paradosse di Marco Tullio Cicerone volgarizzate nel buon secolo di nostra lingua*, Roma 1867.

#### I4 *De senectute*

Translator: Unknown.

Date: 14th century.

<sup>4</sup> We are very grateful to Elisa Guadagnini, co-curator of the corpus DiVo, for the information provided on all these translations.

Modern edition: Zambrini & Lanzani, *Opuscoli di Cicerone* cit., pp. 31-96.

### I5 *De officiis*

Translator: Unknown.

Date: 14th-15th century.

Modern edition: F. Palermo, *Volgarizzamento degli Uffici di Cicerone, testo inedito del buon secolo della favella toscana*, Napoli 1840.

## 2.2. French

### F1 *De senectute*

Translator: Laurent de Premierfait (1360/70-1418).

Date: 1405.

Preserved in BnF, MS lat. 7789, this translation was dedicated to Louis of Borbon (d. 1410).

Modern edition: L. Premierfait, *Livre de vieillesse*, cur. S. Marzano, Turnhout 2009.

### F2 *De amicitia*

Translator: Laurent de Premierfait.

Date: Initiated in 1404-1405, this translation was completed in July 1416 and was dedicated to Jean, Duke of Berry. It is preserved in BnF, MS lat. 7789.

Modern edition: L. Premierfait, *Le livre de la vraye amistié, traduction du «De amicitia» de Cicéron*, ed. O. Delsaux, Paris 2016.

### F3 *De officiis*

Translator: Anjourant Bourré (fl. 1440-1474).

Date: Between 1461 and 1468.

The full text is preserved in three manuscripts (Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, M 15.7; BnF, MS nafr. 10868; and

Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 930 (O.28)) and was also printed in Lyon in 1493 and 1496. The translation was dedicated to the nobleman Tanguy du Chastel, a member of the court of Charles VI of France.

Modern edition: O. Delsaux, *Traduire Cicéron au XVe siècle, Le «Livre des offices» d'Anjourrant Bourré*, Berlin - Boston 2019.

### *2.3. Spanish*

#### *S1 De senectute*

Translator: Alfonso de Cartagena, bishop of Burgos (1384-1456).

Date: Dedicated to Juan Alfonso de Zamora, secretary to John II of Castille, this translation was completed before January 1422, whilst Cartagena was on a diplomatic mission in Portugal.

Modern edition: A. Cartagena, *Libros de Tulio: De Senectute, De los ofiçios*, ed. M. Morrás, Alcalá de Henares 1996, pp. 152-249.

#### *S2 De officiis*

Translator: Alfonso de Cartagena.

Date: completed before the summer of 1422. The version is also dedicated to Juan Alfonso de Zamora.

Modern edition: Cartagena *Libros de Tulio* cit., pp. 250-616.

#### *S3 Paradoxa stoicorum*

Translator: Unknown.

Date: second half of the 15th century.

This translation is preserved in BL, Egerton MS 1868 and BNE, MS 1221, and stems from the Catalan translation (see C5 below); the BL manuscript has better readings than those

in the Catalan text preserved in Barcelona, BC, MS 296, indicating that it was translated from an earlier and less corrupt source. In BL, Egerton MS 1868 the text precedes several treatises by Lope de Barrientos, who was close to John II of Castile; in BNE, MS 1221 the translation is copied together with the *Suma de la política* by Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo, bishop of Zamora and Palencia (1404-1470).

Modern edition: Ø

Bibliography: G. Grespi, *Traducciones castellanas de obras latinas e italianas contenidas en manuscritos del siglo XV en las bibliotecas de Madrid y El Escorial*, Madrid 2004, pp. 95-96.

## 2.4. Catalan

### C1 *De officiis*

Translator: Nicolau Quilis OFM (ca. 1370-1424).

Date: ca. 1425.

Nicolau Quilis's heavily glossed version is preserved in BC, MS 285, ff. 1-181v. This is a translation sponsored by the «most honourable citizen, Francesch de Colomines», who held different government positions in Barcelona between 1392 and 1428.

Modern edition: Ø.

Bibliography: L. Nicolau d'Olwer, *Fra Nicolau Quiris i la seva traducció dels llibres De officiis*, in *Franciscalia*, Barcelona 1928, pp. 288-296, and C. Wittlin, “*Sens lima e correcció de pus dols estil*”: fra Nicolau Quilis traduint el llibre *De officiis* de Ciceró, «Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona», 35 (1973-1974), pp. 125-156.

### C2 *Paradoxa stoicorum*

Translator: Ferran Valentí (1415/20-1476)

Date: mid-15th century

Ferran Valentí's translation can be read in BC, MS 1029, ff. 1-24v. After settling in Majorca around 1446, Valentí undertook his version, which is addressed to a certain Ramon Gual and other Majorcans in his circle.

Modern edition: F. Valentí, *Traducció de les Paradoxa de Ciceró. Parlament al Gran e General Consell*, cur. J.M. Morató, Barcelona 1959.

Bibliography: L. Badia, *La legitimació del discurs literari en vulgar segons Ferran Valentí*, in *Intel·lectuals i escriptors a la baixa Edat Mitjana*, cur. L. Badia, A. Soler, Barcelona 1994, pp. 161-184.

### C3 *De officiis* (fragment)

Translator: Unknown.

Date (of the extant copy): second third of the 15th century.

This is an entirely unglossed translation of *De officiis*, book 3.81-121, the only extant fragment from a complete translation. The manuscript (Sabadell, Renom-Llonch private collection, MS. s. n.) contains the original Latin with the corresponding Catalan translation in the margins, thus allowing comparison between the texts. The translation was probably intended for teaching and must have assisted the reader with understanding the original Latin. However, the quality of the manuscript does not correspond to that of a grammar school, but rather to a text intended for the private education of a high-ranked individual.

Modern edition: Ø.

Bibliography: L. Cabré, J. Torró, *Una nueva traducción catalana del De officiis de Cicerón (con noticia de su versión aragonesa y de otra del De amicitia)*, «Boletín de la Real Academia Española», 87 (2007), pp. 201-213.

### C4 *De amicitia* (lost)

Translator: Unknown.

Date: probably the same as C3.

An Aragonese translation of the *De amicitia* (see A1 below) follows a translation of the *De officiis* in BNE, MS 10246, which is based in turn on a Catalan translation (see C3 above). The existence of the *De officiis* translation, together with the evidence of Catalan linguistic influence throughout the Aragonese version of the *De amicitia*, are indications that there was also a Catalan version of the text, which is recorded as lost. Judging from the Aragonese version, this Catalan translation of *De amicitia* must have been prepared in the same unglossed form as C3 above.

Bibliography: Cabré, Torró, *Una nueva traducción catalana* cit., pp. 208-209.

#### C5 *Paradoxa stoicorum*

Translator: Unknown.

Date: the manuscript dates from the last third of the 15th century; the date of the translation is uncertain.

Preserved in BC, MS 296, ff. 137-53v, this translation may have been dedicated to a nobleman. In the preface the translator refers to his dedicatee as ‘senyor’ and addresses him with great respect. The translator’s preface is presented as an *accessus*.

Modern edition: Ø.

Bibliography: Badia, *La legitimació del discurs literari* cit., pp. 178-182.

### 2.5. Portuguese

#### P1 *De officiis*

Translator: Pedro Infante de Portugal (1392-1449).

Date: Between 1433 and 1435.



In the preface to his version the translator hopes that his enterprise will «aproveitar aos portugueses amadores de virtude que nom som ou ao adiante nom forem Latinados»<sup>5</sup>.

Modern edition: J.M. Piel, *Livro dos Officios de Marco Tullio Ciceram, o qual tornou em Linguagem o Ifante D. Pedro*, Coimbra 1948.

## P2 De senectute

Translator: Vasco Fernandes de Lucena (d. 1500).

Date: Between 1433 and 1435.

The translation was commissioned by Pedro, *Infante* of Portugal, for Prince Alphonse, the future Alphonse V (r. 1438-1481).

Modern edition: Ø.

Bibliography: Nascimento, *Cícero em Portugal* cit., p. 108.

## P3 De amicitia

Translator: Frei João Verba OP (fl. 1430s)

Date: 1434

The translation was commissioned by Pedro, *Infante* of Portugal, for his brother King Edward (r. 1433-1438).

Modern edition: Ø

Bibliography: Nascimento, *Cícero em Portugal* cit., p. 107.

## 2.6. Aragonese

### A1 De amicitia

Translator: Unknown

Date (of the extant copy): late 15th century-early 16th century

<sup>5</sup> See A. A. Nascimento, *Cícero em Portugal: momentos de humanismo cívico, «Ciceroniana»*, 12 (2006), pp. 99-128: p. 101.

This translation is preserved in Madrid, BNE, MS 10246, a manuscript which was part of the collection belonging to the son of Íñigo López de Mendoza, marquis of Santillana. It is believed to be based on a Catalan translation of the text, now lost (see C4 above).

Modern edition: Ø

Bibliography: J. Riera i Sans, *Catàleg d'obres en català traduïdes en castellà durant els segles XIV i XV*, in *Segon Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalana. VIII, Àrea 7, Història de la llengua*, cur. A. Ferrando, Barcelona - València 1989, pp. 699-709; pp. 702-703, G. Grespi, *Traducciones castellanas* cit., p. 96, and Cabré, Torró, *Una nueva traducción catalana* cit., pp. 208-209.

## A2 *De officiis*

Translator: Unknown.

Date (of the extant copy): late 15th century-early 16th century.

This Aragonese translation of the *De officiis* (also extant in BNE, MS 10246, a manuscript which was part of the collection belonging to the son of Íñigo López de Mendoza, marquis of Santillana) is doubtless based on a Catalan translation of the text (see C3 above).

Modern edition: Ø.

Bibliography: Grespi, *Traducciones castellanas* cit., p. 96; Cabré, Torró, *Una nueva traducción catalana* cit., pp. 208-209.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the following lines is to examine vernacular renderings of Cicero's shorter moral works between ca. 1330 and ca. 1500 from the vantage point of manuscript production and circulation. Our survey of Cicero's moral treatises and dialogues available in translation confirms the central position occupied by these texts in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe. Leaving aside the *Somnium Scipionis* because of its particular transmission,

between ca. 1330 and ca. 1500 no fewer than twenty-one translations of the *De amicitia*, the *De senectute*, the *De officiis* and the *Paradoxa stoicorum* were produced in Italy, France and the Iberian Peninsula, of which eleven are of the *De officiis* and the *Paradoxa stoicorum*.

As mentioned in the preliminary remarks, the earliest translations of the corpus under review – dating to the fourteenth- and early fifteenth century – were produced in Italy, specifically in Tuscany. Indeed the five versions listed above (I1-5) are all in the Tuscan or Florentine variants. Giuliano Tanturli has shown how the considerable exposure enjoyed by Cicero's philosophical treatises and dialogues in Florence at the time was politically driven as the Roman writer was praised as a defender of the republican regime against Caesar's tyranny, and historical parallels were drawn between ancient Rome and contemporary Florence<sup>6</sup>. Unlike the Italian versions, which were aimed at private citizens and had a pedagogical intent, the French and Spanish translations from the early decades of the fifteenth century (F1-2 and S1-2) were dedicated to noblemen. In Castile and France later translations were also produced, but then solely of works previously unavailable in Spanish (S3) or French (F3, the only rendering of the twenty-one examined here which reached the incunabular press). In Portugal (P1-3) and in the Crown of Aragon Cicero was also disseminated through vernacular translations but the phenomenon in both territories began later than elsewhere in Europe, and in the Crown of Aragon the pace rapidly increases around 1450, with two translations of the same works. The existence of two double translations in Catalan (C1 and C3, and C2 and C5) can be put down to a wish to supersede previous work, to unawareness of an earlier version on the part of the translator or the need to put his translation to a different use (as with C3). In addition, some Catalan renderings (C3, C4 and C5) are the source for three further translations into other languages (A2, A1

<sup>6</sup> See G. Tanturli, *Continuità dell'Umanesimo civile da Brunetto Latini a Leonardo Bruni*, in *Gli umaneshimi medievali. Atti del II Congresso dell'Internationales Mittellateinerkomitee* (Firenze, Certosa del Galluzzo, 11-15 settembre 1993), cur. C. Leonardi, Firenze 1998, pp. 735-780.

and S3 respectively). As with Italy and contrary to what happens in France, Castile or Portugal, in the Crown of Aragon the didactic context is certainly present in some of the versions examined (C2, C3 and C5) and does not appear extraneous in the other two (C1 and C4). Like the versions produced in Italy, most Catalan translations are addressed to private citizens, and only C5 could have been dedicated to a nobleman. By and large, across Europe the choice of translated texts favours moral education with the intention of acting as a guide for government.