

Pero López de Ayala: Protohumanist?

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What unites us in these essays is an interest in the linguistic and cultural aspects of works which are considered unimportant in the traditional scheme of nationalistic literary history but which were on the cutting edge of any national cultural scene in their own times. Translations shaped the intellectual present and future and without them many local literary trends or genres would not have developed. They were the books that were known and often read more assiduously than works written originally in Castilian, and they probably had a more pervasive influence than many creations which today we consider to be primary. I hate to admit that Ayala's translation of the *De casibus* had a larger reading public over a longer period of time and probably exerted more general influence than *El libro de buen amor* or the *Siervo libre de amor*. This is clearly demonstrated by the large number of medieval manuscripts (8) and early printed editions (3) of the *De casibus* which were produced in the period between 1400 and 1552 (Naylor, "Pero López" 205-15).

Translations also exercised other influences, such as making vernacular authors much more aware of style, as Luis Pérez Botero (153-63) has shown in his study of Pero Lopez's style in the *Tito Livio*. They also contributed to the growth of vernacular vocabulary to the vernacular, a process which started in Castilian since at least as early as the court of Alfonso el Sabio.

In any consideration of translations in general, we must first ask ourselves why the work was chosen to be translated. In this there seems to be a good bit of chance, since it depended both on which works were popular internationally and on the particular intellectual interests of the person doing or sponsoring the translation. Also, in order to be well known and make an impact on the contemporary literary or intellectual world, the medieval translation had to have a way of being diffused. That is to say, it had to interest someone or some institution able to pay for the copying of the manuscripts by professional scribes -the bored monk who would do it for no more than *un vaso de buen vino* or the favors of a friendly *puella* was passed. For this reason many of the preserved late medieval manuscript translations reflect the tastes of the monied classes.

Another consideration in the selection of what works might be translated was the availability of manuscripts of the original. Even if someone had seen a work or had precise notice of it, lacking some sort of original there could be no translation. Difficulty in locating manuscripts was clearly not rare, especially in the Crown of Castile, as is evidenced by the fact that the Secretario Real Juan Alonso de Zamora, around 1420, had trouble locating a copy of Boccaccio's *De casibus* (Naylor, "Pero López" 205) when he proposed to continue the fragmentary Castilian manuscript translation which he had found.

Frequently works were not translated from the original language but rather from another translation. Such is the case of Pero López's version of the *Tito Livio*, which came not directly from the *Ad urbe condita* itself but rather from a French translation of Pierre Bersuire. Pero López probably used the French manuscript not because of the unavailability of the original text but because the Latin was too difficult, which was another major problem, for it is evident that for many "Latinists" the vocabulary and syntax often were too intricate for them to unravel (López de Ayala, *Décadas* 216, 222). This is clearly the case in Premierfait's Middle French translation of the *De casibus* which had to be redone because his first attempt was, let us say, inadequate. The low quality of understanding of the Latin is evidently similar in Castile, since Alonso de Zamora, after finally locating the Latin text of the *De Casibus* in Barcelona had difficulty finding anyone who could read it:

Ovelo en Barcelona, el qual hallé en latín. Por quien me lo tornase en nuestra lengua allí hallar no pude, e después acá en Castilla, assaz de letrados dello

requiriendo, no me davan a ello remedio, diciendo que la rhetórica dél era muy escura para romançar.

Finally, during a diplomatic mission to Portugal, Zamora fell in with Alfonso García de Santa María [de Cartagena] who, as the premier Latinist, could interpret and translate the difficult text.

Pero López de Ayala was a leading intellectual aristocrat and one of the major translators since he is reputed to have done six works, if we are to trust Fernán Pérez de Guzmán in his *Generaciones y Semblanzas*:

- 1) *Decades* one and two of Tito Livio,
- 2) *Moralia* of Gregory the Great,
- 3) *De casibus virorum illustrium* of Boccaccio,
- 4) *De summo bono* of Saint Isidore,
- 5) *De consolatione philosophiae* of Boethius,
- 6) *Historia Troyana* of Guido delle Colonna.

Of these six translations, only the first three are clearly conserved today. The works in the *Moralia/Job* tradition have been studied often and clearly reflect Ayala's interest in explaining God's ways to Man. It is a source for part of the *Rimado* as well. The moralistic translations are very important, but since they are so studied and well known, I shall make few direct references to them, but they will dutifully be referred to in the concluding statements of this essay.

The translation of the first two *Decades* of the Titus Livius have been extensively studied by Curt Wittlin (808-10) and his remarks are very germane to any discussion of Ayala as a translator or as a "proto-humanist."

According to Wittlin the text of the Titus Livius must have been a great discovery for Ayala, but not as classical literature or a guide to Roman culture, but as a manual of the military arts. As is stated in the prologue directed to Enrique II, the *Tito Livio* should be admired because:

se ponen e cuentan las ordenanças que los príncipes e cavalleros guardaron en sus batallas ... que sea traydo agora en público porque los príncipes e caballeros que lo oyeren tomen buen exemplo e buena esperiencia e esfuerço e sy,

catando quanto provecho e quanta onrra nace de la buena ordenança e de la buena disciplina de la cavallería e de la buena obediencia en las batallas, e quanto estorvo e daño e peligro viene al contrario (217) ... E plégavos, muy excelente príncipe, que este libro sea leydo delante la vuestra real majestad, porque lo oyan los vuestros cavalleros e ayan traslado d'él. (220)

Obviously Ayala thought that the best use of the *Decades* of Titus Livius would be to help reinvigorate and educate the Castilian army furnishing models for revamping military organization and strategy. For Ayala, still conscious of the humiliating defeat at Aljubarrota, which he blamed on bad military practice, the classical text was interesting not because it would contribute to literary sophistication or to civic life but because it would teach Castilian chivalry to be a more effective fighting force. Ayala clearly considers that the main value of the *Tito Livio* is to improve the efficiency of the medieval army -*caballería*, as they chose to call it..

Ayala's other surviving translation of a humanistic nature is the *De casibus*. This Latin work was on the cutting edge of Italian literature of the Trecento. Boccaccio finished the first version somewhere between 1355 and 1360 but immediately began revising it, "issuing" a second version in 1373. This treatise was immediately popular, and remained so for several centuries, as the large number of manuscripts, editions and translations attest. It was translated into Spanish by Pero López, around the turn of the fifteenth century and into French by Premierfait in a first version in 1400 and in an expanded -glossed- version in 1409. A rhymed paraphrase, based on Premierfait (1409), was done into English by Lydgate in around 1435. It was much later rendered into German and Italian.

It is interesting to note that the first translation was quite likely the one into Spanish by Pero López, attesting his international contacts and knowledge of what works were stylish.

Before commenting more on the *De casibus*, and after saying that Pero López clearly had a good idea of what was going on internationally, I would like to make some introductory observations. One is that the translator of this *De casibus* often could not figure out Boccaccio's Latin very well. This could be in part because of the difficulty in the reading of

the manuscript, but it is clear at times that he either did not master the syntax (Naylor, "Sobre la traducción" 141-46) or did not know the humanistic vocabulary. My second observation is that this translation is only ascribed -although on very good authority- to Pero López. None of the medieval manuscripts list him as translator. My third point is that it is very possible that Pero López commissioned the translation and did not do it himself. All the claims that Pero López knew Latin well eventually have to be reduced to just that -claims-, and it is not a foregone conclusion that his famous uncle, Cardinal Gómez Barroso contributed to his having a high mastery of Latin. Given the length and the difficulty of the text and the fact that Pero López had many other duties which gave him access to huge amounts of money -as well as secretarial help-, I think it very likely that he arranged for someone else to do most of the work. Supporting this view is the fact that the other non-ecclesiastical Latin work he clearly translated, the Titius Livius, was done not from the original but from a French translation, which probably indicates a less than perfect dotation of Latin by Ayala.

To return to my major point, I would suggest that the *De casibus* came to the attention of the Chancellor of Castile -who was also a pensioner of the French crown- during one of his visits to the court of France, where Boccaccio's work was admired, and where he could have obtained the Latin original. The text of the manuscript used for the translation is that of the revised version, although there are some indications that it has at times holdovers from the first version -or, perhaps, Ayala had two copies and at times translated from one text and at times from the other. I have assembled [and will publish later] the documentation necessary to demonstrate that although the 1373 text is the most often followed there are places in which the *cerca* 1360 was used.

It is clear that Pero López was aware of the latest vogue in continental literature and was at least indirectly in touch with the major contemporary writers in Italy -with the Humanists, if you will. The question that then immediately comes to mind is: what interested him about this exotic and innovative literature?

In order to answer this, let me remind you what the *De casibus* is really about. Divided into nine books and organized chronologically, it begins with Adam and Eve and ends with the mention of various contemporaries of Boccaccio. It employs the vision motif in which many great figures from the past appear to the author and clamor to have their sad and disastrous

cases heard. He admits some and rejects others, so there are long lists of unfortunates whom Boccaccio refuses to hear. In this aspect the *De casibus* is a name list. The work also contains many essays of moral reflections.

The purpose of the book was to show the vicissitudes of Fortune as they effect Princes and monarches and to depict the havoc she wreaks on all leaders but especially on those who are controlled by *superbia* and blind ambition. The *De casibus* traces and justifies the fate of many monarches who governed cruelly, clearly demonstrating that an egotistical ruler tempts fate and Fortune and that the reward for improper behavior in monarches is the justifiable loss of their kingdoms, their legitimacy as rulers, and their lives.

The main thrust of Boccaccio's work is to be a caution to rulers, to "teach them the virtues of wisdom and moderation" (Gathercole 12) and to think of life after death. He shows that to a degree man is powerless, but it principally demonstrates that immoderate monarches will become victims of their own behavior and if they run amuck they will deservedly destroy themselves.

I believe that what attracted Pero López to the *De casibus* is that it was intended to serve as a caution to the monarch, to whose education, as a holder of high office in the realm, Ayala had a duty to supervise. But the work would also serve as an apology for his and his family's behavior toward King Peter of Castile. As we all know, in the civil war between Don Pedro and Don Enrique the Ayala family long remained loyal to Don Pedro, but for reasons which are very cloudy, they transferred their allegiance to Enrique during Pedro's flight from Burgos to Seville, via Toledo in 1366 (López de Ayala, *Crónica* 149).¹ The event is mentioned only briefly in the *Crónica del rey don Pedro*. It is commonly said that one of the reasons that Ayala depicted the king as so cruel is that the chronicle is in reality an apology for the behavior of the Ayala family during Don Pedro's reign and the change of loyalties of the Ayala family, which clearly approaches treason, was a point of embarrassment for Don Pero López.

1 Year 1366, Chapter 4. "...E de tal manera yuan los negoçios e los fechos, que todos los mas que del se partian auian su acuerdo de no bolver mas a el." Pero López is not seen again until 1367, chapter 4 [p. 160]: "...e Pero Lopez de Ayala, que leuaba el pendon de la vanda."

The king Don Pedro of the Ayala chronicle is as insensitive and murdering as any of the worst potentates depicted by Boccaccio. Most of these wicked rulers were rightfully and justifiably deposed, since they had, because of their criminal deportment, lost the moral and divine right to rule. I, therefore, see good reason to believe that the *De casibus* caught Pero López' attention because it largely deals with one of his great moral problems: how to apologize for his family's abandonment of a legitimate ruler in favor of a usurper and regicide. By translating the *De casibus*, which emphasizes how rulers who are greedy, self-willed, and crafty expose themselves to the vicissitudes of Fortune and destroy their legitimacy as rulers, Pero López is apologizing for his family's comportment toward el Rey Don Pedro. This apologetic message is what Ayala sought to propagate using Boccaccio's "humanism".

In summary and in conclusion, the answer to the question *Was Ayala a proto-humanist?* is fairly clear, if we assume that a humanist was a person interested in transmitting classical lore and learning to mold contemporary society into a more logical and 'civilized' form. Ayala's interest in translation and classical civilization, as has often been said, and I must confirm, were really 'medieval.' He was interested in Graeco/Roman and Hebraic literature either to explain God's ways to man or, in face of the disaster at Aljubarrota, to improve military effectiveness ('*caballería*') or to apologize for the wishy-washy behavior of his family in the reign of King Peter, sometime called the Cruel.

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