

TRANSLATIONS OF HISTORICAL ECONOMIC TEXTS INTO SPANISH: A GENERAL APPRAISAL OF 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at providing a brief summary of the main characteristics of the process of diffusion of foreign economic texts in Spain through translations of these texts into Spanish. The time scope of this paper is limited to the 18th and 19th centuries. During the 18th century foreign economic writings entered Spain without significant delay, fostered by enthusiastic initiatives from intellectuals of the Enlightenment. In the 19th century, the main source for import of economic ideas was France, leaving British works aside. This had an enormous influence in the economic analysis developed in Spain, and probably was one of the main reasons for the absence of marginalist revolution in this country.

The import of economic ideas in Spain during the Enlightenment

According to Ernest Lluch, the history of the Spanish economic thought follows closely the thesis sustained by Hirschman that the economic doctrines that manage to reach a large diffusion and influence usually emerge in countries which are powerful both in terms of politics and economics. It is for this reason that the best reputed periods of the history of the economic thought in Spain are those in which Spain (and before Castile or Al Andalus) was hegemonic¹. On the contrary, from the 18th century to the 20th, Spain can be easily considered within the confines of the concept of intellectual periphery. In this long period, and leaving apart some isolated exceptions, most of the ideas on political economy and public finances, which inspired the design of economic policy, came from abroad. Therefore, Spain was a net importer of economic ideas. In this framework, translations of foreign economic works into Spanish were numerous, and one of the main channels for diffusion of political economy in this country.

During the Enlightenment, translations of economic works into Spanish supplied intellectual elites with the possibility of reading some of the most important foreign economic writings avoiding censorship by eliminating those paragraphs which could be considered dangerous to religion, moral or politics. Original works would not have been admitted in Spain by censors, and therefore spread would have been quite difficult. As a result, writings that were placed in the Inquisition index of forbidden books (as it was the case of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in its French version) were edited in modified versions. Some powerful enlightened individuals were essential in the edition of some translations from original works which might be deemed "dangerous"². Whatever the case might be, in the second half of the 18th century and first decades of the 19th century, the ideas of classical economists arrived in Spain only with a relatively short delay through translations and adaptations. The main exceptions were Ricardo, whose *Principles* (first issued in 1817) were not translated until the 20th century, and Malthus' *Essay* (1798), which was first translated in 1846 from a 1845 French edition, although some pieces had appeared in periodical journals. On the other hand, for instance, Say's *Traité d'économie politique*, first issued in 1803, was already published in Spanish in 1804; and the *Catéchisme d'économie politique*, published in 1815 was also translated the following year. Smith's *Wealth of*

¹ Lluch (1999), 465; Hirschman (1989), 348.

² Reeder (1978), 47-48.

Nations was first translated into Spanish from its English original in 1794 by José Alonso Ortiz, under the patronage of Godoy, with some changes in order to pass censorship. It had a corrected second edition, published in 1805-1806. Previously, there was just Martínez de Irujo's partial translation of Condorcet's summary, issued in 1792. But the first complete translation would not be done until 1956³. The other factor which limited the number of translations of foreign works of economic thought was no doubt indifference and the lack of a public large enough so that the editor decided to launch the translation. The second half of the 18th century is a period of eclecticism in Spain, with a poor performance in general. Spanish economic tradition, with its political orientation (arbitrism), could not incorporate the new Anglo-French conception of political economy, nor supply with the adequate tools to get an acceptable analysis of economic facts. However, in these years, translation continuously increased. Most of them were translations from French (be they French original works, or French versions of books written originally in other languages). In this period the circulation of economic ideas from Italy to Spain and its crystallizing in translations, was important too: In all, seven translations from Italian authors were edited in Spain in this period: Galiani, Filangieri, Genovesi, etc. However, it seems that this number was not larger due to the ability of a well-educated Spaniard, with a good knowledge of Latin, to understand Italian⁴. Robert Sydney Smith wrote a pioneering work on the spread of foreign economic ideas in Spain between 1776 and 1848, dealing mainly with the transmission of English economic thought into Spain. He asserted that this transmission could be examined through some elements, translations of English works being one of the most crucial⁵. Smith believed that English economic thought permeated Spain erratically, not in a continuous flow, due to several causes. First, wars in Europe restricted the migration of ideas, although this flow was never completely blocked. Second, the difficulties of understanding English for the Spanish reader –if compared to Latin languages– explains why a decent proportion of English works were known through French translations (and also Spanish translations of French translations), which were not always perfect substitutes. The most important example is the knowledge of Smith and Malthus through Say's works. Third, chance also played a role. There were some individuals interested in British economic literature who managed to get some original works, as it was the case of Jovellanos, but there was no institution in Spain, public or private, able to provide a sort of regular access to British writings. Smith believes that the role of censorship has been exaggerated. It is true that the likelihood of being censored could be a deterrent fact for translators of foreign works, but the small size of the Spanish market of books was probably more discouraging. Some translations of practical books, particularly those related to agricultural techniques, were subsidized with public funds, but this was not usual. Some Spaniards had a relatively broad range of knowledge of British economic literature for the reason that they had lived in England or had been connected to English economists. The repression of liberals by Fernando VII was decisive in this concern, as London was one of the most common destinations of exile. They also lived the English economic conjuncture, which gave them the opportunity to contrast the consistency of English economic works. On the other side, it seems that British economists had hardly any data on Spain. On many occasions Spanish economists claimed that classical economic principles should be adapted to the current circumstances of a backward country, as they feared that they would favor England⁶.

The French predominance in the 19th century

In the 19th century, leaving apart some original contributions by authors as Flórez Estrada, Spanish economic thought is not but transcriptions of foreign ideas adapted to the nation's economic circumstances. In this context, translations were the main way for the spread of the knowledge of the

³ Cabrillo (1978), 73-77; Perdices (2000), 275.

⁴ Reeder (1978), 60-61.

⁵ Smith (1968), 106-107.

⁶ Smith (1968), 135-137.

advancements of the science political economy in Spain. In this framework, French liberal economic thought penetrated Spain strongly. This will be the main source for influence on Spanish economic authors at that time, replacing British authors. Consequently, translations from French language became even more important in this period, particularly the works of members of the optimistic school, especially J.B. Say and Bastiat. Actually, until the 20th century, translations are mostly from French. It was also quite usual that Spanish versions from economic works originally written in English or German were translated from their French versions.

According to Cabrillo, some criteria guided the selection for translations into Spanish: language (French was preferred to English), the chance of the original writings or the prestige of some authors (Say, Bastiat, etc.) were the motivation of editors and translators. Some circumstances might be shocking, such as the absence of Spanish translations of essential books in the history of economics: Ricardo's *Principles*, or J.S. Mill's *Principles*, whereas works from followers of Ricardo were translated instead: James Mill or McCulloch. Sometimes we find some different translations of a single original in quite a short time. Cabrillo pointed out three periods concerning translations in the 19th century: 1800-1830, in which the dominant character in Spain is J.B. Say; 1830-1860, in which Spain witnessed the penetration of English classical school, some utopian socialists and a bunch of works supporting free trade (Bastiat turned out preeminent); and from 1860 onwards, in which translations are of poorer quality. Cabrillo links this fact to the general opinion that the second half of the 19th century is a period of decadence in Spanish economic thought⁷. It seems that Say became the most read foreign economist in the first half of the 19th century. All Say's translations into Spanish were issued in the first third of the century: The first volume of the Spanish version of the *Traité d'économie politique* (first original issued in 1803), was already published in 1804. By 1838 this work had eight editions and four different translations, becoming the most spread foreign economic book in Spain in the 19th century (the Spanish Government agreed in 1807 to make it the textbook for Political Economy studies at the university). The *Catéchisme d'économie politique* (1815) had six Spanish editions between 1816 y 1833. Cabrillo concludes that, for the first third of the century, the Spanish economists knew well the main economic works published in France, but not the English ones. Lluch and Almenar stated that, directly or indirectly, all Spanish economists of the 19th century owed something to Say⁸.

Bastiat became the most popular author among Spanish liberal economists since the end of the decade of 1840. *Sophismes économiques* (1846) had six Spanish editions between 1846 and 1859, based on three different translations. *Harmonies économiques* (1850) was at least issued five times in Spanish from 1858 to 1880. *Cobden et la ligue* (1845) was published twice, in 1847 and 1865. Other free trade supporters were also widely spread in Spanish: The translation of Garnier's *Eléments de l'économie politique* (1846) was edited five times between 1848 and 1870, and Thiers' work *De la propriété* (1848) reached seven different Spanish editions only in that year. Other liberal economists translated into Spanish in the central decades of the century were Molinari, Blanqui, Droz, Rossi and Walras. The exception was Sismondi. Puynode, another member of the French liberal school, saw his main work, *De la monnaie* (1853) translated into Spanish and published in two volumes in 1856-58. This is essential to understand the monetary and financial thought of this school. Regarding English authors, Cabrillo believes that British classical theory never rooted in Spain. James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* (1821) was published in Spanish as soon as in 1822, but Malthus' *Essay* (1798) was not translated until 1846 from a French edition. McCulloch had two works translated: *Principles of Political Economy* (1825) in 1855, and *A Treatise on the Principles and Practical Influence of Taxation and the Funding System* (1845) in 1857⁹. There are two crucial characteristics of translations of economic works into Spanish at the end of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th. First, the marginalist revolution did not enter Spain. Malo believe that it was the consequence of the lack of attention that French economic periodical publications showed to it. Whatever the case might be, the fact is that marginalist works were not translated into Spanish until much later in the 20th century.

⁷ Cabrillo (1978).

⁸ Cabrillo (1978), 75; Lluch and Almenar (2000), 109-110.

⁹ Cabrillo (1978), 76-78

Second, in the last decades of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th Krausist authors introduced some German influences in Spain, particularly some influences of German historical school. Buylla introduced the historicist methodology in Spain through his translation of Schönberg, but it seems that neither he nor other Krausists developed their knowledge of these schools. In Malo's opinion, some aspects of Krausism could serve as a point of connection with marginalism (as they knew the concepts of utility and marginal productivity and other neoclassical tools), but they were not capable of building a general theory around this concept. On the other hand, due to the Spanish dependency on the import of foreign economic ideas (particularly from Latin language speaking countries), the delay in the spread of Marshall's ideas in France and Italy was ill-fated for Spanish economic thought¹⁰.

His Principles were not translated into Spanish until 1922. Other crucial economic works of the first decades of the 20th century followed this pattern. Keynes' General Theory took a bit less to have a version in Spanish language: it was translated in 1943. Concerning the effective production of translations into Spanish and of translators themselves, in the second half of the 18th century, Enlightened economic societies played a major role in the introduction of new economic ideas in Spain. The period of most success of these societies, 1775-1790, is the period in which more translations into Spanish were done. In these years, out of 20 translations and adaptations of foreign economic writings, 15 were accomplished by members of these societies. Concerning the problem of who were these translators, Reeder believe that they belonged to one of these three groups: The first group was formed by specialists in foreign languages and therefore were professional translators. The second group was formed by economic professors, who adapted some foreign works mostly for their students to use them. In fact, the most important adaptations of major economic works were made by members of this group. The third group was formed by economic writers themselves¹¹.

In the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century this pattern does not seems to change. In spite of the difficulties to sketch some common characteristics of Spanish economic translators at that time, it seems that there were two types of translators: economists who edited Spanish versions of works that were close to his professional interests, and professional translators who just profit from their expertise in foreign languages. Many of these translators are quite anonymous individuals (more than in the previous century), whereas some others are important characters both in contemporary economic chairs or economic literature (Flórez, Colmeiro, Gutiérrez, Azcárate, etc.) Some years ago, Vicent Llombart issued a contribution of a model of transmission, grounded on Stigler's market of ideas¹², attempting to explain the diffusion of Physiocracy in Spain in the 18th century. Llombart's analytical framework takes account of both external influences and internal factors, and introduces three aspects for study: public goods, utility and costs of transaction. Among the factors that conditioned the reception of Physiocracy, Llombart highlighted the conception and institutional organization of economic knowledge, which comprises the characteristics of supply and demand, the presence of other economic ideas competing with Physiocracy, and the action of political and economic institutions. Regarding the elements of the market of ideas, Llombart underlined the large increase in the production and distribution of economic literature that took place in the second half of the 18th century. The supply of ideas grew –quantitatively, but also qualitatively– thanks both to the literature produced in Spain and to the imported, in which translations played an important role. The demand for ideas was formed by economic experts, politicians and public officials, members of economic societies and intellectual members of nobility or commercial bourgeoisie. Demand was in general encouraged by the utility of economic ideas as an engine for economic, political and even moral reform, while major interest in economic theoretical issues hardly existed. Supply adapted to demand, as the majority of the economic literature which was available dealt with applied problems (reception of foreign literature also followed this pattern). Transaction costs were high: The obstacles for the circulation of ideas not only consisted in restrictions to freedom of speech, but also included

¹⁰ Malo (2001), 432.

¹¹ Reeder (1978), 64-66.

¹² Stigler (1983).

factors such as the lack of academic institutions teaching political economy, the scarcity of bibliographical information, the size of the book market, the absence of scientific communication or the difficulties to learn and understand foreign languages. In short, as Llombart puts it, the features of supply, demand and costs of transaction in Spain in the second half of the 18th century determined the behaviour of this market. The reception of Physiocracy was confined within this framework¹³. This analytical framework might be applied to translations: which ideas formed supply and demand, and how costs of transactions linked to them were. It is an interesting direction for research on translations of foreign economic works into Spanish to explore in the future.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, Spain depended to a large degree on translations to diffuse economic ideas since the emergence of political economy as a separated field of knowledge in the last decades of the 18th century. During the Enlightenment Spanish cultured elites did not wait long to have Spanish versions of some of the most important contemporaneous economic writings. As the 19th century went by, translations tended to focus on particular sources, and even if their number increased, many relevant works were not translated. This circumstance only reverted well into the 20th century.

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¹³ Llombart (1995), 32-39.

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