From Incan Realm to the Italian Renaissance: Garcilaso el Inca and the Voyage of his Translation of Leone Ebreo’s Dialoghi d’Amore

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The salient moments of Garcilaso el Inca’s life suggest what compelled him to translate Leone Ebreo’s Dialoghi d’Amore. The biographical affinities between these two writers may have been Garcilaso’s greatest motive. Both of them were transplanted from one culture into another, in their case the common culture of the Renaissance, in which they found themselves after having abandoned their respective native lands and original cultures and even their original names. In addition, both were literary translators, expressing themselves in languages that were not their own, or that they had, forcibly, to make their own. Garcilaso’s translation of the Dialoghi d’Amore is thus a rendering into Spanish of a work that Leone Ebreo conceived in a language, Italian, that was not his own. In both cases translation becomes an act of appropriation, of forging the cultural identity of each writer’s choice.

When Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca (1539-1616) left his native Peru in 1560 little did he suspect that he would be leaving his South American homeland for good and that his paternal homeland of Spain would be the stage for his meeting with one of the most ambiguous works of Renaissance thought. His translation of Leone Ebreo’s Dialoghi d’Amore was a unique production of sixteenth-century literature and for two principle reasons: it was the first work published by an American author in the Iberian Peninsula and it was a translation by an author for whom Spanish was not his native tongue.

In several respects both Garcilaso de la Vega and Leone Ebreo led very similar lives: both participated in the culture of the Renaissance, whether consciously or not, despite their origins in at least partly alien cultures, both left their homelands at an early age, and both wrote in languages that were not native but acquired. Literary history has accorded both of them a respectable place in the canon; their books are regarded today as standard Renaissance masterworks. Garcilaso’s work is looked upon as a pivotal point in Classical Golden Age Spanish prose, for, as Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo has said (1974: 490), it was the most correct rendering in that language of a work which, already a popular bestseller at the time, would become a classic representative of Renaissance Neoplatonism.

Garcilaso de la Vega: a Man Between Two Worlds

Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca was born on April 12, 1539 in Cuzco, the capital of the waning Incan empire, eleven years after the Spanish conquerors arrived and forever devastated the ancient realm1. His father was a Spanish captain, Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega, of Castilian aristocratic origins, and his mother was Isabel Chimpu Ocilo, the niece of Huayna Cápac, the last ruler of Peru, whom Garcilaso’s father never married. At birth he was baptized with the name Gómez Suárez de Figueroa after the names of the oldest of his uncles and other relatives who belonged to the noble house of Feria. Though from his father’s side he boasted Castilian credentials, he was brought up in his mother’s household along with the children of the emperor, listening to fables and accounts of his Incan ancestors in his maternal language, Quechwa, accounts which later on would serve him as an inspiration for this composition of the Comentarios Reales. This Incan upbringing was further strengthened when his father left Garcilaso’s mother to marry a Spanish woman, Luisa Marten de los Rios, under pressure of the Imperial crown. Garcilaso was ten years old.

In 1554 his father’s fortunes changed considerably as he was named Governor of Cuzco, a position he held until his death in 1559. He bequeathed to Garcilaso land in the Paucartambo region along with four thousand pesos in gold and silver, which would enable him to pursue studies in Spain. Although officially a bastard because he was the fruit of an unrecognized union, his father evidently always cared for him and there is no reason to believe that he was resentful. On the contrary, Garcilaso always admired his father and went to lengths to defend his good name and reputation. In his youth and throughout his life he lived the contradiction of the mestizo. Spanish and American by birth, he could not feel fully accepted at either hearth, and disparate origins contended for supremacy in his cultural commitments in successive years.

In January 1560, Garcilaso undertook a harrowing voyage which saw him traveling through Lima, then to Ciudad de los Reyes, Cartagena, Havana, the Azores, Lisbon and Extremadura where he had relatives. He finally settled in Montilla, a small Andalucian town where his uncle, Alonso de Vargas, lived. The following year he attempted to receive honors and privileges on his fathers behalf from the Consejo de Indias in Madrid, but this failed as his father was accused of having aided Gonzalo Pizzaro (1506-1548), brother of Francisco Pizarro (1476-
Leon Ebreo’s ambiguous position in the Renaissance

Leon Ebreo is the name by which western literary posterity has come to know Judah Abravanel (1460?-1530), son of the last great Sephardic exegete, Isaac Abravanel (1436-1508), whose views on ritual and legal matters remain authoritative even today in Rabbinical Judaism. Born in Lisbon, he was schooled in medicine and Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophy. The Portuguese capital boasted both an important Jewish community and the Christian court of Alfonso V for whom Leone’s father was the minister of finance. Abravanel was reared in the Iberian Judaic tradition, which, unlike the Central European Ashkenazic one, boasted a longstanding respect for philosophical and classical thought, largely due to its links to Arabic philosophy which had developed side by side with Jewish thought during Sephardia. Hebrew was the language in which he received his education and religious training for it was in Hebrew that the Jewish community of Lisbon conducted its cultural life. His father wrote in no other language, and, as Manuel Augusto Rodrigues has shown (1981: 527-595), Leone Ebreo’s extant Hebrew poems display his command of the tongue.

Following an accusation and a death warrant issued by Alfonso V’s successor, João II, Isaac moved his family to Spain in 1484 and quickly gained favor there as a financial adviser to the Catholic rulers, Ferdinand and Isabella. Even his fathers intercessions, however, could not convince the Spanish monarchs to revoke the order of expulsion imposed upon the Jews of Spain in 1492. Once again the family followed the route of exile, this time to the capital of the Aragonese Kingdom of Naples. It was in Italy that Judah, now in his early thirties, took up the name Leone Ebreo, a name shared by many Jews in Italy during the century. There his father was accepted by the local monarch, Ferrante, permitting Leone to lead a life of relative ease, it seems, until the French invasion of the kingdom in 1494, when he was forced to flee to the relatively safer haven of Genoa. What followed was a life of wandering which took him to places as far afield as Barletta, Naples, Venice, Ferrara, Pesaro and possibly Rome in his later years. Though we do not know for certain when he died, in his dedication of the work to the Sienese noblewoman, Aurelia Petrucci, the editor of the first edition of his Dialoghi d’Amore, Marino Lenzi (Ebreo 1983:2), mentions the fact that Leone was no longer among the living at the time of publication in 1535.

The work itself is like its author: a meeting of apparently disparate traditions, in which age old philosophical controversies which had dogged Jewish, Islamic and Christian thought, such as the eternity of the world and the question of creation, are addressed. The views of Maimonides (il nostro rabi Moisè throughout the text), Avicenna, Averroes, Samuel Ibn Gabirol (Il nostro Albenzubron), Algarzel, Alfarabi, Aristotle and Plato converged with whole portions of Boccaccio’s De Genealogia Deorum. Leone’s two interlocutors, Filone and Sofia, begin with the dichotomy of lover and the beloved, of desire and its satiety, but move on to a multitude of speculative philosophical issues. In many respects the treatise was a first, in that it incorporated elements which were alien to the Sephardic philosophical tradition; it was also a last in that it was the note on which, in many senses, that very tradition ended (Pines 1983: 365-398).

To this day the original language in which the work was composed continues to divide Leone Ebreo scholars. Research in the last fifty years has demonstrated that behind the text of the first edition (1535) there were constant revisions of the work. This points to two possibilities: either the work was composed by Ebreo in the South of Italy and then it was progressively Tuscanized to make it fit for publication or it was written in a language other than Latin. Perhaps Hebrew, Spanish or Latin. In any case, Tuscan Italian was not Ebreo’s native language, but rather a last in that it was the note on which, in many respects, that very tradition ended (Pines 1983: 365-398).

Understandably, the fact of the Dialoghi’s Jewish provenance was all but lost upon its first Italian readers, who saw in the text the elucidation of Renaissance Neoplatonism of the Piccinio variety, and therefore granted to it a privileged place among the trattati d’amore, which included Tullia d’Aragona’s Della infinità di Amore (1547), Baldassare Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano (1528), Mario Eguicola’s De Natura Amore (Latin version 1495 and Italian1525) and Pietro Bembo’s Glì Asolani (1505), works which populated the literary landscape of Italy and Europe in the sixteenth century. More than one critic has pointed out that the strength of the text and what sets it apart from the other trattati is the fact that substance takes precedence over style and is treated in a graver, more original and more rigorous fashion.

These works served to disseminate the Neoplatonic ideals outside of the confines of the university where philosophy was traditionally taught. The trattati in which conversation, its rules and procedures, was so important in the developing Renaissance court culture of Central and Northern Italy, were bestsellers, turning Petrarchism and...
Neoplatonism, dormant for some time, into dominant literary and philosophical currents in Italy towards the beginning of the sixteenth century. Ebreo’s book was classed alongside these love treatises, wrongly so according to Carlo Dionisotti (1959: 420-422), for the Jewish author was far more profound than his Christian literary peers. Although its author’s Judaism might have posed problems, it seems to have been overlooked by Renaissance syncretists who valued the work’s fundamental truths above other considerations. A Christian reading was also made easier by the announcement, in two editions, of Leone’s conversion, together with an almost certainly spurious allusion to Saint John the Evangelist, contained in all Italian editions as well as in published translations.

Spanish Translations of the Work

By the time Garcilaso de la Vega petitioned for permission to print his rendering of the work in 1588, the Italian text had already gone through twelve printings by printers as prestigious as Aldo Manuzio and sons, Domenico Giglio, Giorgio de Cavalli, and Nicolò Bevilacqua. Previous to the publication of Garcilaso’s translation, there had been two Spanish editions. The first of these was published in 1568 (and later in 1598) in Venice and was attributed to a certain Guedeliah Yahia. This would seem to have been a Thesalonikan-based Sephardic Jewish author, a descendent of a prestigious Portuguese family who was also a known translator of works from Latin into Hebrew. The work was dedicated to Philip II and it is curious that it is the only edition to mention Leone Ebreo’s real last name, Abravanel (Abarbanel in the author’s rendering) instead of simply Leone Ebreo. In his dedication, the translator stresses the Catholic nature of the work, the fact that the author was Spanish himself, as well as the work’s benefit to the Spanish nation. He also claims to have translated it in his spare time. Written in a decidedly archaic Spanish for a late sixteenth century work, this translation must have seemed awkward to Peninsular readers at the time. In spite of its dedication, this version did not seem to have fared particularly well in Spain; as Marquez points out (1984: 237), it is only mentioned in a requisition of Italian books by the Inquisition in Murcia in 1604 and in Zapata’s Index of 1634. At the end of the text there is a small treatise on the soul, Opiniones sacadas de los más auténticos y antiguos filósofos que sobre la alma escribieron y sus definiciones, attributed to el pírritissimo doctor Aron Afia, Philosopho y Metafisico excelentissimo who, we know, was an important cultural figure in the Jewish community of Thesalonika, in particular as a translator and friend of Amatus Lusitanus during his stay in the city (1565-1568). This translator’s work corresponds almost perfectly to the text of the manuscript in the British Library (ms. Or. Gaster 10688), which, very likely of Ottoman provenance, is written in Spanish but in Hebrew characters. We can assume fairly safely, then, that the translator was eyeing both a Sephardic Jewish public who maintained the Spanish language even after the expulsion and who would have read the work in Hebrew characters, as well as a Christian readership who naturally would have read it in Latin ones.

The second translation, published for the first time in Zaragoza in 1582, bore the title Philographia universal de todo el mundo. This was the work of Carlos Montesa, the son of Hernando de Montesa, who was part of the staff of the embassy in Rome, Don Diego de Mendoza (1502-1575) at the time of Pope Julius III (1550-1555). Montesa claims to have translated the work from Latin into Spanish, motivated by his desire to share the contents of the book and to continue the work of his father, who had begun the translation before him (1582: 2r-v). In his work, dedicated to the Inquisitor of Aragon, Don Francisco Gasca Salazar, Montesa claims to have safeguarded the sense of the original, hence justifying himself for having taken certain liberties in his translation, avoiding matter that would only have obscured the meaning of the text: “Creo haver guardado la propiedad, que es lo principal que en las traducciones se requiere aunque he añadido y quitando en partes, algunas cosas que escuecian la materia, para facilitarla, la qual en muchas estava escura y dificultosa” (ibid.: 2v). Montesa’s dedication, which also serves as prologue, is long and decidedly pedantic, cluttered with allusions to classical authors and subjects, and thus puts the translator’s learning on display. Indeed, before the translation proper, there is a composition of Montesa’s own, entitled Apologia en alabanza del amor, which, as its name suggests, spells out the author’s defense of love in Neoplatonistic terms. Ficino, Saint Paul, the Gospels, the Psalms, Petronius, Cicero, Catullus, Saint Augustine and Saint Ambrose are all quoted in this rather convoluted if not confused work which provides the doctrinal basis for what is contained in Ebreo’s text.

Garcilaso’s Translation of Leone Ebreo’s Dialoghi d’Amore

Garcilaso’s translation came out in Madrid in 1590. On the title page, he identified himself as both Indian and Inca for the first time, proudly flaunting his origins: La traduzion del Indio de los tres Dialogos de Amor de Leon Hebreo, hecha de Italiano en Español por Garcilaso Inga de la Vega, natural de la gran Ciudad de Cuzco cabeza de los Reynos y Provincias del Piru. The work was dedicated to Philip II of Spain: Dirigidos a la sacra catolica real majestad del Rey don Felipe nuestro Señor. We do not know when exactly Garcilaso began to translate Ebreo’s book or what moved him to do it. That he chose Madrid for putting the treatise through press is not as surprising at it would seem, for even though Andalucia had an active press, it was under the constant surveillance
and censorship of the authorities (García Oro 1995: 88-91). Madrid, moreover, as the new capital (until 1561 the imperial court was in Valladolid), was the center in which decisions on book privileges and *imprimatur* were taken as well as the place where the most interesting commercial prospects for retailing books were to be found (ibid.: 112-113). The importance of Philip II’s construction of the San Lorenzo del Escorial monastery (built between 1563 and 1584) outside of Madrid partly in order to house his personal library should not be underestimated, given that many books were dedicated to monarchs in the hope that they would end up in such libraries (Chartier 1996: 193-211). In actual fact this work did enter the King’s personal library though in the seventeenth century although it is possible that it had been in King Philip II’s possession beforehand 9.

The King’s secretary, Juan Vázquez, granted His Majesty’s official approval on 7 September 1588, recognizing Garcilaso’s desire to serve the Spanish nation and in particular to give an example to the New World, especially Peru, of the kinds of literary activities their people should be engaged in (Ebreo 1949: 2). According to norms of the times, any manuscript was subject to Royal scrutiny through the *Consejo Real* in order to be accorded permission to be printed [CHECK: García Oro 1995: 76-77]. That Garcilaso’s work got through this inspection demonstrates that, for the authorities at least, this time nothing was found in it deemed injurious to Christian values and morals. It was published by Pedro Madrigal, a publisher active in Madrid from 1586 to 1594, who was known for works of historical, literary and philosophical interest and for his commercial attachment to the Jesuits of Alcalá de Henares (Delgado Casado 1996: 410-411).

Garcilaso presented the work for approval to Don Maximiliano de Austria, the King’s representative in his court, on 12 March 1587. In his prefatory letter, dated 18 September 1598, to Maximiliano, Garcilaso claims that he had wanted to present the work to him earlier but that this was his third copy of the work, that there had been no one to help him with his corrections, and that when someone had offered to help the result was so disastrous that he had to intervene personally. In the typically subservient language of the era he excuses himself for any errors and offers himself in service to the sovereign. Garcilaso also claims here that while he was working on this translation he had also been writing *La Florida*, the work in which he deals with the discovery of Florida by Hernando de Soto (1500-1542), of which more than a quarter was already written by that time (Ebreo 1949: 5). Maximiliano did not receive the work until June 18 and told him that he would hold onto it until September. In his warm message of reception, he thanks Garcilaso for his gift, excusing his own lack of culture, stating that Garcilaso could send him any of his works for official approval when he wished (ibid.: 7). It can be safely assumed that Maximiliano’s appraisal was positive.

In his dedication to King Philip II, dated 19 January 1586, Garcilaso claims that he was moved to translate the *Dialoghi* for four reasons: 1) because of the excellence of their author; 2) because such offerings to the monarch—and this would be the first by a subject of the New World—were necessary, for his subjects depended on him; 3) because in his youth Garcilaso had served Don Juan of Austria, Philip II’s brother, as a captain; and 4) because Garcilaso was a descendant of the Incas and related to the last king of Peru (ibid.: 8-9). The king’s acceptance of this offer, says Garcilaso, will show how universal and august love can be, for through such an acceptance the king will imitate God himself. In addition, betraying more than a little nostalgia and admiration for his homeland, Garcilaso expresses the hope that the work will reach Peru and most especially its capital: “Y la merced que vuestra clemencia y piedad se dignare de hazerme en recebirlo con la benignidad y afabilidad que yo espero, es cierto que aquel amplissimo imperio del Pirú, y aquella grande y hermosissima ciudad su cabeza la recibirán y tendrán por summo y universal favor: porque le soy hijo, y de los que ella con más amor crió [...]” (ibid.: 12). Garcilaso concludes his dedication by mentioning *La Florida* which, although now languishing in the shadows, he soon hopes to offer to King Philip II in addition to a work he envisions on the conquest of Peru, a work which became his *Comentarios Reales* (ibid.: 13).

In his letter to Maximiliano, Garcilaso says that he had previously thought that the excuses offered by authors of translations for their works were a means of exonerating their own shortcomings—thus was, he says, until he began to translate the *Dialoghi*, a task he initially undertook for himself, as the life of relative leisure he now led allowed him to do (ibid.: 16-17). Upon showing the work to some of his erudite friends, he says, he was encouraged to persist in his efforts, which he knew to be far from perfect: “Todos ellos me mandaron e impusieron con gran instancia que passasse adelante en esta obra, con atenció y cuydado de poner en ella toda la mejor lima que pudiesse, que ellos me asseguraban que sería agradable y bien recibida. Bien entiendo que lo fuera si mis borrones no la desluzieran tanto, de que a V.S y todos lo que los vieren suplico y pido perdón que en mi caudal no hubo más” (ibid.: 17). The desire to perfect what had begun as a pastime led him, he says, to conceive of his translation as a real occupation and something which might go on to merit a royal dedication. To that end, therefore, he requests Maximiliano’s intercession with the monarch, which he likens to that of the High Priest in the temple in Jerusalem (ibid.: 17-18). Garcilaso offers two warnings to the reader—to read the work carefully and as the author intended it, as an invitation to philosophize; and to be attentive to some difficult passages which he left as they were because they demonstrated that the book was not intended to be read by the masses—and stresses the difficulty he faced in correcting errors and maintaining a fidelity that would not, at the same time, obscure meaning (ibid.: 19-20). In another letter, this one to King Philip II, dated 7 November of the same year, he once again states that in translating
the Dialoghi d’Amore and having it published he wishes to give an example to his people of what kind of cultural endeavors an Incan subject of the Spanish crown should be engaged in: “De mi parte no hay en ella cosa digna de ser recibida en cuenta, si no fuesse el atrevimiento de un indio en tal empresa y el desseo que tuve de dar con ella ejemplo a los del Pirú, donde yo nací” (ibid.: 22-23).

Garcilaso’s translation far eclipsed the other two and went on to become the standard Spanish translation of the Dialoghi d’Amore. In recent times it has been edited even more often than the Italian text, enjoying a reprint as recently as 1996. Such successes, however, did not fall within Garcilaso’s lifetime, during which there were no subsequent reprints. Leone Ebreo’s book had already been censured in 1581 under the Portuguese inquisitors, who ordered it expurgated for containing Jewish or Platonic fables (De Bujanda 1995: 543-544). No single edition was spelled out in this condemnation, so it comprised the Italian editions, Saraceno’s Latin translation, as well as Guedelia Yahia’s Spanish one and the two French translations. Portugal adopted the Tridentine Index in 1564 and had imposed the need for books to be approved by the local bishop and inquisitor. In addition, stringent control of foreign books coming into the country was also imposed (De Bujanda 1996: 153-171). Even though there was pressure to unify the Inquisitions of both Portugal and Spain and hence their indexes, individual titles continued to receive different treatment [CHECK SOURCE: Op cit 112-117]. The book was condemned to be expurgated in the 1590 Roman Index without mentioning a particular edition or translation (De Bujanda 1994: 430). Although this Index was printed, it was never promulgated or distributed in the Catholic world (ibid.: 280). Nonetheless, Spain closely watched Rome and this initial condemnation of the work must have been behind the decision not to allow the work to be reprinted, in spite of the authors wishes, and it was censured by the Inquisition in 1593 (Pupo-Walker 1982: 19).

Garcilaso’s rendition of the work is much superior to the two previous efforts, both in faithfulness to the text and in style. The Golden Age, linguistically, was a period of transition when the norms of what has become known as classical Spanish were being established. Garcilaso’s text, as Alfonso D’Agostino has shown (1992: 77), reflects these norms even using certain words in Spanish for the first time according to the existing historical dictionaries, many of them derived from the specialized lexicon of Philosophy. Certainly the text is imperfect and there are some omissions and departures from the original, but in some respects Garcilaso’s rendering of Ebreo’s work is even more correct; and on the level of syntax, the Inca’s Spanish is, in some cases, even more correct that the Sephardic Jew’s Italian (ibid.: 62-64).

What then, aside from what he mentions in his dedication, could really have moved Garcilaso in his choice to translate Leone Ebreo’s work? The popularity of the Dialoghi in sixteenth-century Europe is attested to by the number of Italian editions and translations of the work. Some of these, certainly the Italian editions, the Latin translation, as well as Montesa’s 1582 translation, must have circulated in Spain. Given the Spanish possessions in Italy, the Kingdom of Naples in the south (incorporated into Spain in 1504) and Milan in the north (a Spanish possession from 1535 to the eighteenth century), contact with the Italian peninsula must have been quite common, and it was not strange that a cultured Spaniard should be able to read works in Italian; Italian, after all, enjoyed cultural preeminence at the time.

The imitation of Italian literary forms and genres, and the adoption of Italian words, was the great fashion of the day in Spain, as it was in France. The Peruvian writer’s namesake had imported Italian poetic styles as well as literary themes into Spain, and the influence of Petrarch was widespread among the literary avant-garde of Spain in the sixteenth century. Also moving in this literary world was Garcilaso’s great friend Juan Boscán (1495-1542) with whom he had his poetry published posthumously in 1543. Together they experimented with using the Italian eleven-syllable meter, instead of the traditional Spanish eight, and the canzone, the terza rima, the ottava rima and blank verse Italianate forms.

In addition Boscán translated Castiglione’s Cortegiano, the first edition coming out in Barcelona in 1534. This translation was vastly popular, going through eight additional editions in the sixteenth century alone10, and testifies to the popularity of the trattati d’amore in Spain as well. It is not known with any certainty whether Boscán ever set foot in Italy, though he may have accompanied King Ferdinand to Naples as a member of his court. He did know Castiglione personally, however, visiting him daily in Granada in 1526 while the author of Il Cortegiano was the Papal envoy in Spain. Unlike Garcilaso, the Catalan author had enjoyed a humanistic formation thanks to his links to the Spanish court at an early age (Darst 1978: 15-17).

At the time, a familiarity with Italian culture and language was a given among cultured Spaniards. Authors of the Spanish Golden Age clearly were able to read Leone Ebreo’s work in the original text. In his prologue to Don Quijote (1605), Miguel de Cervantes claims that anyone with a smattering of Tuscan could read the Dialoghi d’Amore and derive from it all that one needed to know about love: “Si tratares de amores, con dos onzas que sepáis de lengua toscana toparéis con León Hebreo que os hincha las medidas” (1905: cxvii). In fact, as Gabriella Rosucci points out (1995: 211-220), Cervantes’ first published work, La Galatea (1585), a pastoral novel, relied heavily on Leone Ebreo’s book as a foundation for his theory of love. Another writer, the Portugese-born Jorge de Montemayor, also relied heavily on Ebreo’s ideas in his pastoral novel Los siete libros de la Diana (1560) and most certainly would have read the work in Italian, given that the first Spanish translation did not appear until after the
Neoplatonism was both a stylistic recourse and an intellectual element in these works as in others and Leone was always a cited reference. Yet another popular work at the time, Maximiliano Calvi’s Tratado de la hermosura y del amor (Milan), has been called, by Menéndez Pelayo (1974: 532), a “scandalous plagiarism” of Leone’s text. In late sixteenth-century Spain, the impetus to disseminate the contents of the Dialoghi d’amore through translation is clear.

How Garcilaso went about it, what method he used, is unknown. No documented evidence shows that he ever set foot in Italy; he must have learned Italian on his own. The inventory of his library, taken in 1616, shows that he possessed several books in Italian, among them certainly an Italian edition of the Dialoghi, Aldo Manuzio Jr.’s Eleganze della lingua toscana e latina. Leone Battista Alberti’s L’architettura, Ludovico Dolce’s Palmierino d’Oliva, Giovanni Boccaccio’s Filocolo, Alessandro Piccolomini’s Della instituzione morale as well as his plays, Guicciardini’s Storia d’Italia, Nicolò Franco’s Dialoghi piacevoli, Aníbal Caro’s Lettere familiari, Aretino’s Ragionamenti and Torquato Tasso’s letters. In addition there were works which he may have possessed in Spanish translations or in the original Italian (this was not always true in the inventory, in the case of The Tratado de la hermosura y del amor) by Pietro Bembo, Boccaccio, Lodovico Ariosto, Matteo Maria Boiardo, Pandolfo Collenuccio, Piccolomini and Girolamo Muzio. In all of these cases, of course, it is not certain when the books entered Garcilaso’s library. His library also held Cristóbal de las Casas’ Bocabulario de las dos lenguas toscana e castellana, first published in Seville in 1570, although we cannot know for sure if he used them or not. This was not the only Italian-Spanish dictionary available then; he could have consulted several which circulated in the sixteenth century. We know that he possessed four copies of the Dialoghi and a French translation, so he may have compared the Italian original with the Latin or one of the two Spanish translations. His library also held copies of Il Cortegiano: he may very well have studied Boscán’s translation and used it as a model for his own. Such conclusions, however, as they are derived from the holdings in his library, are perforce speculative.

In Montilla and Córdoba, Garcilaso was in contact with a cultured circle of people, some of whom must have possessed a degree of familiarity with the language. He was, however, an essentially self-taught man, never able to dedicate himself to the studies he went to Spain to pursue in the first place. Garcilaso translated the Dialoghi from a language which was foreign to him, and which he probably never got to speak, into another which was also an acquired one for him. His maternal language, we must not forget, was Quechua, although he was certainly also schooled in Castilian. In his dedication to Philip II he claimed that neither was his natural language and that his Spanish was deficient on account of his lack of schooling in Peru and the endless conflicts there, something he remedied by going to Spain: “[... ni la lengua italiana, en que estaba, ni la española en que la he puesto, es la mia natural, ni de escuelas pude en la puericia adquirir más que un indio nacido en medio del fuego y furor de las cruelísimas guerras civiles de su patria entre arma y caballo y criado en el ejercicio de ellos porque en ella no había entonces otra cosa, hasta que pasé del Pirú a España a mejorar [...]” (Ebreo 1949: 11). In a letter of December, 1592, to his friend Juan Fernández Franco, he claims further that in childhood he had learnt grammar poorly, again on account of the wars, and that he had taken up the profession of arms, which he continued in Spain. That way of life ended due to the ingratitude of princes and the little favor of the king which “enclosed him in his corner”, causing him to find solace in translating Leone Ebreo in his spare time:

En mis niñez que oy una poca de gramática, mal enseñada por siete preceptores que a temporadas tuvimos, y peor enseñada por siete preceptores que a temporadas tuvimos, y peor aprendida por pocos más discípulos que éramos, por la revolución de las guerras que en la patria avía, que ayudavan a la inquietud de los maestros. Cuando se cansó el postrero dellos, que seríamos de trece a catorce años, nos pasamos mis condiscípulos y yo al ejercicio de la gineta, de cavallos y armas, hasta que vine a España, donde también ha avido el mismo ejercicio, hasta que la ingratiad de algún príncipe y ninguna gratificación del Rey me encerraron en mi rincón. Y por la ociosidad que en él tenía, di en traduzir al León Hebreo, cevido de la dulçura y suavidad de su Philosophia. La qual obra, aunque yo no puse nada en ella sino muchas imperfecciones, ha causado que V.m y otros señores míos me favorescen, sin que en mí aya de escuelas más que el perpetuo desseo dellas. Por tanto suplico a V.m me trate como un soldado que, perdido por mala paga y tarde, se ha hecho estudiante. [CHECK: GET PARTICULAR PAGE: in Aseñecio: 1949: 583-593]

In his own view, then, Garcilaso was a soldier who only late in life became a student.

Conclusion

The place of this translation in Garcilaso’s oeuvre has much divided critics who have seen it as a philological exercise, a kind of training in his vocation as a writer which would pave the way to his future literary endeavors, or an indication that the Incan author identified himself squarely with the Neoplatonic and Renaissance conception of the world. At least one critic, Susana Jákfalvi-Leiva (1984: 14-15), has seen the work as a means of permeating Spanish and European culture in general with South American indigenous culture, an intent that is borne out, she says, by the dedications that Garcilaso appended to his work.

The parallels that can be drawn between Ebreo’s and Garcilaso’s lives invite speculation. Although officially excluded from what was considered Hispanic culture, Sephardic Judaism was a fundamental component
of Iberian history and identity. Perhaps Garcilaso’s translation of Ebreo’s work was a means of reclaiming the Sephardic writer and including him in the Spanish fold, of extending the narrow confines of what Hispanic culture was considered to be in the emerging Golden Age, of rendering what was considered foreign and alien, and hence suspect, part of the accepted national literary tradition. Doris Sommer (has suggested that Garcilaso may have seen himself in Ebreo and thus attempted to redeem him by showing that Ebreo, the exiled Spanish Jew, also had a “cultural claim on Spain”:

El Inca Garcilaso, of the ethnically mixed name and culturally conflicted heritage, may very well have recognized the self-exiled Sephardi as a figure for himself. Abravanel had been an intimate of the Iberian kings, their compatriot of countless generations. Hebreo was a homeboy, even if he was hounded by fanatics as a foreigner. He had a cultural claim on Spain, the kind of claim that Garcilaso was making when he assigned himself the paternal name.

The overlapping circumstances make for an almost uncanny echo system between the “Italian” writer and his “Castilian” interpreter, as if one life simply evoked a surprising intimacy with the other. The intimacy seems metaphorical, a result of fortuitous similarities between terms that belong to different and unconnected discourses, Incan and Jewish. (1998: 116)

Both authors, Leone Ebreo and Garcilaso de la Vega, imply a first time: the first time a Jewish author became standard reading by Renaissance audiences and an Incan became a standard name and a recognized master of Castilian prose. In both cases, they also imply a last time, and the waning of their respective civilizations: Leone Hebreo belonged to the last generation of Sephardic Jews to live on Iberian soil; he was the last to be privy to a national life which, though at times difficult, had for centuries been characterized by the living side-by-side of Muslims and Christians. Similarly, Garcilaso was the last of his nationals to be reared in the lore of the Incan empire. In both cases their respective works were the result of travel and translation: Leone Ebreo through his Italian exile and his adoption of a language and a means of expression which were not his own; Garcilaso de la Vega, the Inca, through his move to Spain and his translation of Ebreo’s work, which initiated his literary career in a language that, to a certain point, was foreign to him as well.

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