From translation to appropriation: foreign works in Portuguese periodical press in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

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Résumé

La circulation d’idées et d’imprimés de différentes cultures et langues à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe au Portugal fut, en grande mesure, l’œuvre de la presse. Les périodiques traduisaient des livres aussi bien qu’ils les adaptaient, fréquemment sans mentionner l’original.

En outre, l’omniprésente appropriation d’idées et d’histoires venues d’ailleurs poussait auteurs et éditeurs à faire des déclarations indignées de leur originalité, en face des fréquentes accusations selon lesquelles leurs périodiques contenaient de simples traductions. Ce fut le cas de l’humoristique O Piolho Viajante (Le Puce Voyageur), réclamant qu’il était «né et élevé au Portugal, un enfant de Lisbonne», en réponse à son concurrent Hospital do Mundo (Hôpital du Monde), en 1805.

«Traduction» était le mot-clef parmi les communautés de lecture et de l’imprimé au tournant du siècle. Almocreve de Petas (Colporteur de Bourdes), un autre périodique humoristique, a même publié un choix d’entrées d’un simulacre parodique de dictionnaire.

Tandis qu’un journal politique tel que Correio Braziliense (Courier Brésilien), publié à Londres, contribua à la réception d’idées sociales, politiques et économiques parmi les lecteurs lusophones grâce à la traduction d’A New View of Society, de Robert Owen, ou des Principes d’Économie Politique, de Sismondi, Almocreve de Petas leur
offrit les *Aventures du Baron de Münchhausen* et le « Conte du vendeur d’indulgences » des *Contes de Canterbury* de Chaucer. Même si l’éditeur du périodique humoristique n’a pas pris la peine de prévenir ses lecteurs qu’il s’agissait de traductions.

Cette communication cherche à discuter le rôle de la presse portugaise dans la circulation, réception et appropriation de la culture de l’imprimé à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe, une Babel de livres qui a traversé les frontières et a même permis au périodiques locaux de faire des blagues à propos des mœurs et coutumes étrangers.

Abstract:

The circulation of ideas and the printed word from different cultures and languages in Portugal during the late 18th and early 19th centuries was largely relayed by the periodical press. Newspapers not only translated full books in weekly or monthly installments duly acknowledging their authors, but also published foreign works in various degrees of adaptation, often without any reference to the original, sometimes on the brink of plagiarism.

Moreover, the ubiquitous appropriation of ideas and stories from abroad prompted editors and writers to make dramatic statements of originality, thus answering the frequent accusation that their periodicals were mere translations. This was the case of the humoristic *O Piolho Viajante* (*The Travelling Louse*), claiming it was “Portuguese born and raised, a Lisbon’s child”, in response to its competitor *Hospital do Mundo* (*World’s Hospital*), in 1805. “Translation” was a keyword in the turn-of-the-century printing and reading communities: the also humoristic *Almocreve de Petas* (*Fibs Peddler*) even published a choice of entries to an English-Portuguese, Dutch-Portuguese, Italian-Portuguese and Turkish-Portuguese mock-dictionary.

Whereas a political periodical such as the London-based *Correio Braziliense* contributed to the reception of social, political and economic ideas by Portuguese-speaking readers through the translation of Owen’s *A New View of Society* or Sismondi’s *Principes d’Économie Politique* (from the Geneva edition in French), *Almocreve de Petas* introduced its readers to *The Adventures of the Baron of Münchhausen* and to Chaucer’s *The Pardoner’s Tale*, from *The Canterbury Tales*. Even
though, in the latter, the editor did not bother to mention the fact that they were reading translations.

This paper discusses the role of Portuguese press in the circulation, reception and appropriation of print culture in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a Babel of books that crossed borders and even enabled local newspapers to make jokes about foreign cultural uses and fashions.

1 Introduction

The circulation of ideas and the printed word from different European cultures and languages in Portugal during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was largely relayed by translations\(^1\) in the periodical press.

In a country where a translated and adapted version of the Matter of France, *História do Imperador Carlos Magno*, continued to be one of the top ranking best-sellers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries\(^2\), periodicals not only translated full books in weekly or monthly installments duly acknowledging their authors, but also published foreign works in various degrees of adaptation, often without any reference to the original.

The cultural environment reflected the slow, painstaking change in the overall society, where centuries-old identities were beginning to be challenged by new tastes from abroad. A new climate reluctantly recognized by the humoristic periodical *Almocreve de Petas*\(^3\) in an allegory of mixed gastronomic and fashion stereotypes.

Letter from Pernambuco (…) Don’t you know that all Foreign Nations differ in taste and fashion; Spain’s best delicacy is the red bell pepper; Naples, anchovy; Genoa, chopped mushrooms; Venice, pluck with eggs; Germany, sausage; Italy, macaroni; Hungary, her spirited aqua vitae; Prussia, pudding; the Netherlands, kidney fricassee; England, roastbeef; Denmark, oysters; Sweden, herring in sauce; Poland, stewed aubergine; Russia, *malasada* [fried dough]; America, manioc flour; Asia, tea; and Africa couscous? Don’t you

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\(^1\) On the concept and problems of translation see BRANCO (2008); RICOEUR (2003); STEINER (1975).

\(^2\) “…. My tailor, my shoemaker, my barber, even the galucho [Galician] who waits on my home…. they all confessed to me they were sick of reading Charlemagne” (*Almocreve de Petas*, CXL, p.2). “In the afternoon, when had nothing better to do, he used to read Charlemagne…. ” (*Piolho Viajante*, IV, p. 38). Cf. ABREU (2008), p. 84 and ABREU (2014), p. 96.

\(^3\) *Almocreve de Petas* (*Fibs Peddler*) was the first Portuguese printed periodical where humor was consistently and systematically used. It was edited by José Daniel Rodrigues dos Santos – author, editor, playwright, poet, as well as civil servant and military officer –, one the most prolific writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in Portugal.