

The First Modern *Aeneid*: Enrique de Villena's *Eneida* of 1428

The first full translation of the *Aeneid* into a Romance language was done in 1428 by the Aragonese nobleman, Enrique de Aragón, Marqués de Villena (known generally as Enrique de Villena). This Castilian translation was made at the request of Juan II of Navarre, de Villena's nephew, and is a complete prose translation with extensive original commentary on the first three books. He was unable to finish the commentary on the remaining books before his death in 1434, but his translation was completely drafted by November 10, 1428. It was undertaken simultaneously with a translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which is the first translation of that work as well into another vernacular tongue.

This paper analyses this translation of the *Aeneid* in its cultural context as a product of late-medieval / proto-humanistic Spain, and illustrates the following points. A) Spain was a likely place for translations to be made, since the Spanish courts were multilingual and had a long tradition of sponsoring the translation of important texts from numerous languages into Castilian (or another vernacular, depending on the region). B) Spain was undergoing a powerful cultural change at this time, however, which was the result of Spanish involvement in Italian politics. The literature of the *tre corone* (Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch) was making its first impact on the Spanish courts, and this conditioned the reception of Vergil. Juan II of Navarre had come upon the character of Vergil in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and—struck by the extravagance of Dante's praise for the *Aeneid* and its author—commissioned Enrique de Villena to translate it for him. C) Though a powerful political presence in Italy, Spain was much inferior in its Latin literacy, a problem which would remain an embarrassment to Spanish intellectuals and diplomats for many decades to come. Italian humanists like Bruni, Decembrio, Valla, and Filelfo had considerable contact with Spanish rulers, but the Spaniards were unable to keep pace with the Latin-language humanism so powerfully present in Italy during this period. Instead, Spain was undergoing a recrudescence of medieval literary forms.

De Villena's translation, then, comes at an interesting moment when medieval and renaissance cultures (if such a distinction even makes sense here at all) are so thoroughly confused as to defy any simple historical characterization. This translation breaks with the medieval "retellings" of the *Aeneid* precisely in its intense fidelity to the Vergilian original, which it renders line for line without additions or subtractions into a rather pedantic Castilian prose. It does not attempt to assimilate the *Aeneid* into another genre (as did, for example, the author of the Old French *Eneas*); rather, De Villena meant the translation, surrounded by his lengthy commentary, to lay bare the *provechosa doctrina* embodied in the Master's text.