

# The Translator as a Reader and Commentator of Aristotle The Testimony of Evrart De Conty and His Autograph Manuscript (ca. 1380)

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**Abstract** This article wants to discuss how an autograph manuscript can be a source of knowledge regarding medieval translation methodology, showing the efforts the translator makes, having read his source text, to ponder the words to use in order to express the ideas displayed in it as adequately as possible. The text at stake is Evrart de Conty's Middle French translation of the pseudo-aristotelian *Problemata*, made on the basis of the Latin translation by Bartholomew of Messina and its commentary by Pietro de Abano. The numerous corrections in the manuscript reveal a continuous re-reading of the translation and display the translator's struggle to render the content of the source texts as accurately as possible, but also his concern to make his translation easy to understand for his audience.

**Keywords** Medieval translation. Autograph manuscripts. Autograph. Bilingualism. Medieval commentary.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The *Problemata physica* and their Translations. – 3 The Medieval Translator and the Question of Bilingualism. – 4 An Autograph Manuscript: The Author/Translator at Work. – 5 Translating Aristotle: Some Case Studies of Evrart's Attempts. – 6 Some Conclusions.



## 1 Introduction

When Evrart de Conty, the physician of King Charles V of France, translated the (pseudo-)aristotelian *Problemata* into French at the end of the fourteenth century, he used Bartholomew of Messina's Latin translation (1260) of the Greek source text, as well as Pietro de Abano's *Expositio* (1310), a commentary on Bartholomew's translation that Pietro composed because of the obscurity of that text, a word for word translation from Greek to Latin. Every act of translation implies an act of reading in order to interpret the source text adequately, and usually also an act of re-reading, where the translator verifies if the translated version matches the original appropriately.

Evrart's Middle French translation is preserved in a manuscript that has been acknowledged as an autograph, showing quite some passages where the translator hesitates, correcting words, sentences or passages, adding new ones. Those hesitations not only display the translator's difficulties with respect to the French language, but also show his struggle to render the content of the source texts as accurately as possible, and also easy to understand for his audience, all testimonies of a thorough reading not only of his source texts, but also of his translation.

This article wants to show how the autograph manuscript is a source of knowledge regarding Evrart's translation methodology, and the efforts the translator makes to ponder the words to use in order to express the ideas displayed in the source texts as adequately as possible. The analysis of corrections and additions will also allow to observe how this translator manages to interpret the medical knowledge of the source texts that form the basis of the translation.

In the following, I will briefly present the texts at stake (§ 2), before evoking the question of bilingualism in the Middle Ages (§ 3). A third section is dedicated to the autograph manuscript, which shows the author at work, his reading and re-reading of the source texts and of his translation (§ 4) and which allows us to look into some case studies of Evrart's hesitations and struggle while translating Aristotle (§ 5), before drawing some conclusions.

## 2 The *Problemata physica* and their Translations<sup>1</sup>

The pseudo-aristotelian *Problemata physica* is a Greek treatise composed partly by Aristotle himself, and partly by his students and suc-

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<sup>1</sup> We have already presented those texts extensively in previous publications. For more details, see e.g. Goyens, De Leemans 2004; De Leemans, Goyens 2005; Guichard-Tesson, Goyens 2009.

cessors. It is a colourful collection of ‘problems’ on diverse themes, such as medicine, music, meteorology, gardening etc., all themes that interested the medieval scholar, yet at least one third of the treatise is dedicated to medical problems.<sup>2</sup>

The treatise is divided into 38 sections, and each problem has systematically the following structure: first the author asks a question “Why is it that...?”, which is followed by an answer “It is because...”.

During the Middle Ages, the Greek text has been translated a first time into Latin by Bartholomew of Messina, ca. 1260.<sup>3</sup> Half a century later (1310), Pietro de Abano added a commentary to that translation.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the fourteenth century, ca. 1380, the French king’s physician Evrart de Conty translated both Bartholomew’s translation and Pietro’s commentary into Middle French. It is this translation that will be at the centre of this contribution, and that my colleague Françoise Guichard-Tesson and I are editing.<sup>5</sup>

It might be important to stress that in Evrart’s translation, each problem is divided into two parts, a *Texte* and a *Glose*. Roughly speaking, the *Texte* translates Bartholomew’s translation, and the *Glose* Pietro’s commentary, but it is somewhat less simple than that: the *Texte* already includes wordings of Pietro’s comments, and the *Glose* translates Pietro’s commentary in a freer way, since Evrart often does not respect the structure of his source and adds his own reflections to the text.<sup>6</sup>

In order to understand what happens when we see Evrart’s hesitations in his autograph manuscript, let us first look into the situation of bilingualism in the medieval translation context.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek text has been edited among others by Louis 1991-94.

<sup>3</sup> The translation by Bartholomew of Messina has not yet been the object of a critical edition as a whole; only specific fragments have been edited: the first section is edited in the *Aristoteles Latinus Database* (ALD) in a semi-critical way by Dévière (see also Dévière 2009), as well as by Seligsohn 1934 and Marengi 1966; Gijs Coucke’s edition of section IV is included in his doctoral dissertation (Coucke 2008, vol. 1). Bartholomew’s translation is transmitted in more than 50 manuscripts, of which one of the most important seems to be MS PATAVINUS, Bibl. Antoniana, Scaff. XVII, 370 (fourteenth century).

<sup>4</sup> The commentary has not been edited in its entirety either, apart from certain fragments. The prologue was edited by Pieter De Leemans (De Leemans 2016); section IV by Coucke (2008, vol. 2), section VII by Delaurenti (unpublished transcription); section XXXII in the unpublished master thesis by Devriese 2013, 76-101. The manuscript tradition of Pietro’s commentary is complex; see Coucke 2008, 2: xxii-xlvi. However, there are four manuscripts containing Bartholomew’s translation as well as Pietro’s commentary.

<sup>5</sup> The edition of the whole of the text is the project of a team of researchers, under our supervision. Françoise Guichard-Tesson and I are completing the edition of the first section, which will also present an extensive introduction on the author, the manuscripts, the text genre, the methodology of editing an autograph, etc.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed study of this matter, see De Leemans, Goyens 2007.

### 3 The Medieval Translator and the Question of Bilingualism

In her PhD dissertation, Van Tricht discusses the issue of bilingualism in a medieval translation context.<sup>7</sup> When we want to understand how translators work, it is important to comprehend the linguistic situation in the medieval period. In France, there was not yet a standardised language, and different dialects were at stake, among others the king's dialect, *françois*, which became later on the standard language. But for religious, legal or scientific matters, Latin, the learned language, was used. Medieval translators were in a plurilingual situation, a dialect being their mother tongue, and Latin being their second language, acquired during their studies, since they learned to read and write in Latin and later on studied at the university in Latin. Their second language is thus rather predominant in a specific domain.<sup>8</sup>

In modern times, the situation of plurilingualism, and more specifically of bilingualism, can be summarised in the following diagram:

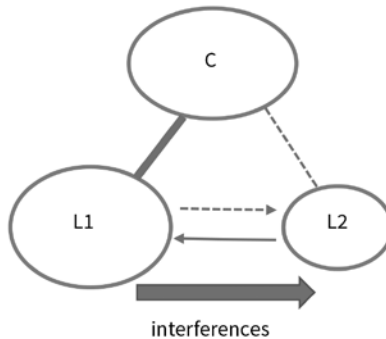


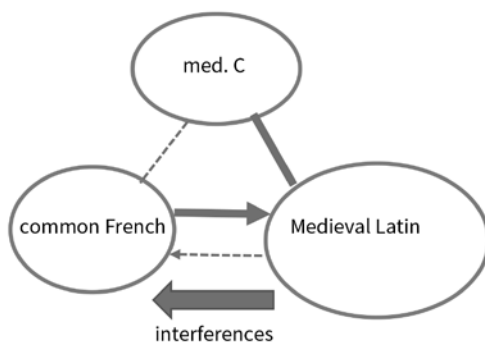
Figure 1 Revised Hierarchical Model. Van Tricht 2015a, 163; 2015b, 56 and Kroll, Stewart 1994

<sup>7</sup> What follows is drawn from Van Tricht 2015a and 2015b.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Ouy 1986.

As the model shows, in a translator, who usually translates from a foreign language towards his/her mother tongue, the lexicon is more developed in his/her first language (L1, represented by the larger circle), and there is a stronger association between the conceptual level and his/her first language (represented by the thick line between L1 and C), more so than is the case for his/her second language. If there are interferences between those languages, they will go from L1 towards L2, and not the other way around, as has been shown in research on that matter.<sup>9</sup>

But what happens during the Middle Ages? One has to take into account the sociolinguistic reality of the time. In the case of Evrart de Conty, we see a cleric who learned to read and write in Latin, and who studied medicine at the university in Latin. So his first language in the medical domain is Latin, and not his mother tongue. When he translates a Latin text such as the *Problemata*, and more specifically medical issues, the situation becomes quite complex: while translating towards his mother tongue, specific medical terminology for instance will be more elaborated for him in his second language, Latin; we could summarise this by adapting figure 1 in the following way:



**Figure 2** Adaptation of Kroll, Stewart's (1994) *Revised Hierarchical Model* to the domain of medieval medicine, cf. Van Tricht 2015a, 183; Van Tricht 2015b, 56

So what happens here is that, for a specific domain, the lexicon of the second language is more developed, and the relation with C stronger with L2, than is the case for the mother tongue, and that L2 influences L1 now, and not the other way around.

<sup>9</sup> Among others, Costa, Santesteban 2004; Van Tricht 2015b, 54.

We can see this happening while Evrart is translating. In a study I made with Elisabeth Dévière, where the medical terminology of Bartholomew of Messina, for the first section of the *Problemata*, was screened for borrowings from Greek, the language used in Bartholomew's source text, we found 28 borrowings from Greek in the Latin translation. Those borrowings were already in use in contemporary medical texts. These words were, in their turn, translated by Evrart into French by borrowings from Latin in 25 cases, 5 of them being neologisms attested for the first time in Evrart's text. Let me give just two examples. The Greek term ἀποπληξία (*apoplexy*) was translated by Bartholomew with the Latin *apoplexia*, a borrowing from Greek; Evrart used the French borrowing *apoplexie* in his text, already attested in French medical texts before his translation. Another example is the Greek κάσους, referring to a burning fever, translated in Bartholomew's text with *causon* and the derivative *causonides*, and in the French translation by *causon* and the neologism (*fièvres*) *causonides*. In other words, borrowings from Greek into Latin can lead to borrowings of the borrowings in the French medical terminology.

We observed that both translators tried to develop translation strategies that allowed them to stay close to the contemporary terminology, trying to avoid neologisms as much as possible, but when they had to coin new words, they integrated them in the best way they could into the phonological and morphological systems of their respective goal language.

In order to see how the translator works, the autograph manuscript can play an important role, revealing quite some interesting hesitations and corrections during the translation process.

#### 4 An Autograph Manuscript: The Author/Translator at Work

Evrart's text is transmitted in about 8 complete manuscripts, one of which is nowadays considered to be an autograph. Ms Paris BnF fr. 24281-24282 counts about 500 folios, distributed over 2 volumes. There are also 7 complete and 2 incomplete copies that are still preserved up until today.<sup>10</sup>

Gilbert Ouy<sup>11</sup> characterised this manuscript as a “brouillon du second jet”, a ‘second draft’ of the text, implying a re-reading by the translator of a first version of his text. Figure 3 shows clearly why: the text is already quite definitive, but there are still some corrections and additions made to the text, as can be seen in the right and left margins where text is added, and corrections are made even in

<sup>10</sup> For their description and their filiation, see Guichard-Tesson, Goyens 2009, 182-6.

<sup>11</sup> Ouy 1979, 368.

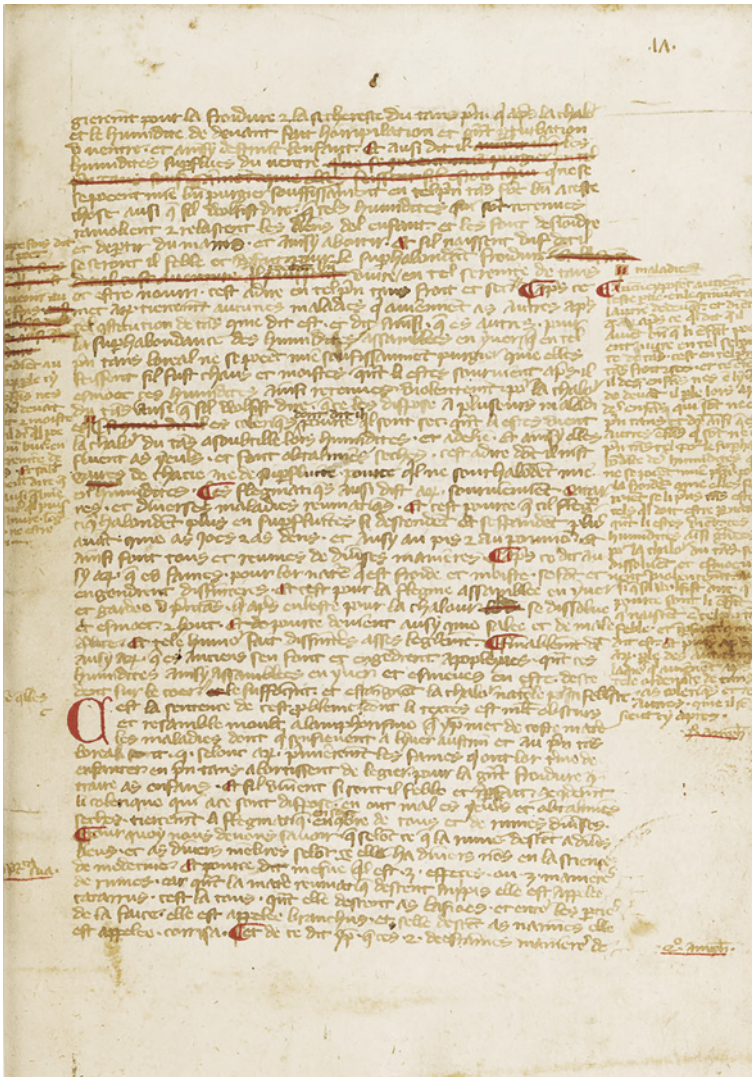


Figure 3 Pseudo-Aristotle. *Problemata*. Evrart de Conty's Middle-French translation. MS Paris BnF fr. 24281, f. 17a



the added passages. In the entire manuscript, there is hardly a page that does not contain erasures, corrections or additions, going from a single erased letter, correcting a careless mistake, to a cut folio, or a replaced one. It shows the author at work: adding, cutting out, correcting letters, words, phrases or sentences.

Medieval autograph manuscripts are rather rarely preserved. Some examples are those by Jean Miélot, Christine de Pizan, and of course Evrart de Conty. Delsaux shows that there are different types of autograph manuscripts to be discerned in that period, and the one made by Evrart de Conty is a “manuscrit de composition”, where the author composes and writes his own text.<sup>12</sup> In the catalogue established by Delsaux and Van Hemelryck, this manuscript is classified as entirely transcribed by the author.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, an autograph manuscript is interesting from several points of view. It allows to study certain characteristics of the author’s language with respect to spelling, morphology or syntax, and to detect the stages in a translator’s work. Without going into details,<sup>14</sup> we can observe the high quality of grammatical spelling on behalf of the author, who pays much attention to noun declension in a period where it was already largely abandoned, agreement of verbs and adjectives etc., of which erased or added letters are testimonies.

We could mention here the interesting case of the nasal consonant *n* or *m* before the bilabials *m*, *b* or *p*. When Evrart does not shorten the word, thus when he does not use the tilde to abbreviate the nasal consonant, he usually writes *n*, as in the following cases: *corrumpent* (A1 f. 246b9),<sup>15</sup> *empaindre* (A2 f. 19a10, 19a55),<sup>16</sup> *enpeesche* (A1 f. 30b25),<sup>17</sup> *impossible* (A1 f. 148a27), *inpression* (A2 f. 13b8). In the same way, we find *n* before *m* in most of the cases:<sup>18</sup> *poissanment* (A1 f. 34b47), *evidanment* (A1 f. 247b39, A2 f. 5a31), *souffissanment* (A1 f. 17b16, 149b55, A2 f. 15b42, 19b6, 183a20, 186b51), *granment* (A2 f. 194a31). In the examined sections, we found only one occurrence of *mm* in *enflammee* (A1 f. 16a41).

An autograph manuscript also allows interesting insights in the chronology of the corrections. We can discern three layers of correc-

<sup>12</sup> Delsaux 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Delsaux, Van Hemelryck 2014, 77, 148.

<sup>14</sup> See the study made on these aspects by Guichard-Tesson 1993.

<sup>15</sup> We refer to the autograph manuscript in the following way: A1 and A2 refer to the first (ms 24281) and the second volume (ms 24282) respectively, followed by the folio number, recto (a) or verso (b), and the line number on the page.

<sup>16</sup> But we also find *empaindre* (A2 f. 15b49, 16a25, 19a27, 19b21).

<sup>17</sup> We also found once *mp* in *empeeschie* (A1 f. 30b26).

<sup>18</sup> This usage was verified systematically on the following sections: I, VIII, IX (probl. 1-5), XV (probl. 1-5), XVI, XX (probl. 1-6), XXX (1-12), which is almost 20% of the text.



tions in Evrart's work: a first layer is the immediate correction of the text, while the author is copying or composing it; an example of this is found in A1, ff. 112b-113a, where we see that, while he was already writing the text of a new problem, he realised that he forgot a part of the *Glose* at the end of a former problem, which he adds at the bottom of the page and the beginning of the following page; he uses different symbols, like a clover or a square, to indicate where to put the addition. Other corrections reveal an immediate proofreading, when words are erased and replaced by another on the same line, in the margins or between the lines. A third layer of corrections are written with ink of a different colour, and are thus made during a subsequent revision.<sup>19</sup>

We find different types of corrections in the manuscript. First of all, some manifest errors, like words repeated by accident, or confusions, or typical mis-reading and copying errors, but also corrections made for stylistic reasons, or allowing the text to be more comprehensible for his audience.

Yet some other interventions are highly interesting from a linguistic and a translational point of view. In what follows, corrections that reveal hesitations with respect to the choice of certain words or the translation of specific concepts will be examined more closely.

## 5 Translating Aristotle: Some Case Studies of Evrart's Attempts

The study of the autograph manuscript gives us indeed the possibility to see the author at work, reading and interpreting a source text. His erasures, additions and corrections sometimes disclose interesting hesitations with respect to the choice of certain connectives or determiners, or the translation of specific scientific concepts, showing an author and translator that weighs his words while rendering the ideas of Aristotle, the *grant philosophe*.

Let us first examine a case where the semantics of connectives are at stake, such as the hesitation between *car* and *pource que*. The following passage is situated at the beginning of the text, the prologue, and is thus not a translated sentence. It shows the hesitation between *pource que* (because), and *car* (because, for):

La seconde cause poet estre pour ce que les choses medicinauls nous sont plus evidentes et mieus congneües quant on y entent, ~~pource que~~ *car* nous nous congnissons mieus que les autres choses. (I, prologue; A1, f. 1a)

<sup>19</sup> For illustrations of these types of correction, see Guichard-Tesson, Goyens 2009, 178-82, ill. 5-7.

The second cause might be because the medical things are more obvious and better known to us, if one tries to understand, *because* for we know ourselves better than any other thing.<sup>20</sup>

The semantic difference between the two connectives is subtle: they are both used to express a causative relation, but *car*, originating from Latin *quare* (that is why), usually justifies a preceding assertion; the sentence introduced by *car* in the preceding example seems indeed to justify what the translator just declared. On the other hand, in the first part of the sentence, the author already used the connective *pource que*, so it is possible that he wanted to avoid a repetition. A second example is found in a translated part, at the end of the *Texte*, a passage that translates Bartholomew's text; this time, the connective *car* is replaced by *pource que* written between the lines:

Pource conclut Aristotes après que li vomites waulroit mieus en cest cas que la sueur, *car*<sup>V</sup> *pource que* li vomites purge mieus les grosses humidités visqueuses que la sueur ne fait. (II, 22, *Texte*; A1, f. 69b)

This is why Aristotle concludes afterwards that vomiting is more profiting in this case than sweat, *for because* vomiting purges the thick viscous humidities better than sweat would do.

In Bartholomew's translation, the connective corresponding to *pource que* is *propter quod* (because of):

[Amplius viscosum glutissimum cum humido quidem expellitur; propter commixtionem, cum spiritu autem non potest, maxime autem hoc est quod ledit] *propter quod* et vomitus sudoribus alleviatur magis. (*Problemata Physica*, incunabulum Mantua, 1475, f. 41a)

We know that Pietro's comment is often a source of inspiration also for the part *Texte*, and there, we find, interestingly, *quare*. Yet, in this example, the sentence introduced by the connective *pource que* in Evrart's text is a real explanation, and not a justification of a preceding assertion; in Pietro's comment however, this explanation precedes the assertion that vomiting is more profiting than sweat, so *quare* is perfectly suitable for that context:

sicut etenim vomitus fortior est purgatio quam sudor, ita purgat humores grossiores, *quare* merito magis iuvant[ur] vomitibus quam sudoribus (Pietro de Abano, *Expositio Problematum*, incunabulum Mantua, 1475)

<sup>20</sup> If not otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

In the following example, the translator's intervention in an added comment reveals a more accurate vocabulary:

Et devons savoir que par l'air, en ceste partie, ne doit pas tant seulement estre entendus li airs qui ~~est entour nous~~ nous avironne sans moyen, mais ausy toutes les aultres choses qui sont entour nous. (I, 1, *Glose*; A1, f. 6a)

And we have to know that by air, in this section, we should not only understand the air ~~that is around us~~ surrounds us without immediate, but also all the other things that are around us.

The wording *est entour nous* is erased and followed, on the same line, by the more compact verb phrase *nous avironne*; it is thus an immediate correction, and probably not influenced by the phrase *qui sont entour nous* at the end of the sentence. A more accurate phrasing is also at stake in the following translated passage; it concerns a problem dealing with the question why a dry and cold summer and autumn is profitable to women and phlegmatic persons:

et c'est voir, ce dit Aristotes, s'il n'y ha erreui en lor gouvernement par ~~lor erreui et defaute~~ me euls meismes et par lor coupe. (I, 11, *Texte*, A1 f. 18b)

And it is true, Aristotle says, if there is no mistake in their regime, due to themselves or *their fault*.

Bartholomew's text reads:

nisi per se peccaverint. (*Problemata Physica*, incunabulum Mantua 1475)

The erased part, *lor erreui et defaute*, repeats *erreui* (error) found earlier in the sentence and adds *defaute*, which means 'fault', but also 'privation, shortage'. In the Latin translation by Bartholomew, we find the verb *peccare* (to make a fault, to sin). In Pietro's comment, we find the substantive *peccatum*. The French word *coupe*, which obviously replaces the erased nouns, implies the responsibility that comes with a fault that is made, and carries also the connotation of sin.<sup>21</sup> The correction made by Evrart leads him to a translation that is semantically more accurate, and closer to the source text.

<sup>21</sup> *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (DMF) 2020. Nancy: ATILF-CNRS, Université de Lorraine. <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf>.

A fourth example regards the translation of a nominal phrase. In the following passage, Evrart first translates the Latin phrase *ex vapore viscoso fumoso* in Pietro's commentary quite literally with *de une vapeur fumeuse et visqueuse*; however, he erases it and replaces it by *de matere moiste et vaporeuse*:

Et pource veons nous, en ciaux qui sont de seche complexion et froide et en l'aage qui a ce se acorde, que nul cevel ne vienent ne ne s'engendrent se trop poy non, qui est significacions que li cevel sont engendré de ~~une vapeur fumeuse et visqueuse~~ *matere moiste et vaporeuse*. Et de ce dit Avicennes que li cevel sont engendré de *une vapeur fumeuse et visqueuse* quant elle se coagule et endurest es pores de la teste. (I, 16, *Glose*; A1, f. 25a-b)

And that is why we see, in those who are of dry and cold complexion and of an age that is in accordance with it, that no hair is generated, or just a small amount, which means that hair is generated by ~~a smoky and viscous vapor~~ *moist and vaporous matter*. And of this, Avicenna says that hair is generated by a *smoky and viscous vapor* when it coagulates and hardens in the head's pores.

The corresponding passage of Pietro's commentary reads as follows:

quoniam in siccis complexionibus et etatibus et frigidis vehementer aut minime aut pauci nascuntur. Unde Avicenna [...] capillus nascitur *ex vapore viscoso fumoso* quando congelatur in poris. (Pietro de Abano, *Expositio Problematum*, incunabulum Mantua, 1475)

So the first time Evrart uses the expression, which he replaces immediately by another wording, is in a sentence that he manifestly adds: "qui est significacions que li cevel sont engendré de matere moiste et vaporeuse", a sentence that actually already encroaches upon the following one, translated from the source text where Pietro uses the expression *vapore viscoso fumoso*. In the added sentence, while first literally translating Pietro's expression, Evrart realises that he would have to use the same expression in the next phrase, so he chooses another wording, viz. the generic term *matere* (matter, substance), accompanied by the adjectives *moiste* (humid) and *vapereuse* (vaporous), which could be considered as (almost) synonymous with respect to *vapeur fumeuse et visqueuse* in the following sentence, but this rephrasing is lacking the feature of viscosity. The adjective *visqueux* refers to the liquidity of a substance, a feature also present in the adjective *moiste* used the first time, but adds the feature of viscosity.

A rather complex yet intriguing case is one of the corrections found in problem 9 of the first section, in the part *Glose*. Figure 4 is an en-

largement of f. A1, 17a given in figure 3, and shows the passage that will be analysed.

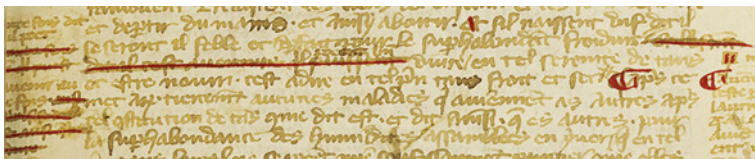


Figure 4 Pseudo-Aristotle. *Problemata*. Evrart de Conty's Middle-French translation. MS Paris BnF fr. 24281, f. 17a (detail)

It regards the multiple corrections marked in red on the folio. This text section concerns the influence of the weather on health, and specifically on what happens to unborn children, or newborns. If springtime is cold and dry, it has a bad influence on the foetus, and there is a risk of a miscarriage. If the child is born alive, he will be weak and imperfect because of the cold. But it might happen that he survives, during this cold and dry springtime.

The final version of Evrart's text reads as follows:<sup>22</sup>

ausi que s'il wolsist dire que tels humidités qui sont retenues ramolient et relascent les liens de l'enfant et les font desjoindre et departir du marris et ainsy abortir. Et s'il naissent vif, dit il, se seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. *Toutefois, dit il, il poet bien avenir aucune fois qu'il poent bien vivre en tel serenité de tans et estre nourri, c'est a dire en tel prin tans froit et sec.*

as if he wanted to say that this contained dampness softens and loosens the cords of the child and separates them from the womb, thus leading to a miscarriage. And if they are born alive, he says, they will be weak and imperfect because of the overabundant cold. *However, he says, it can happen sometimes that they may survive in this calm weather and be fed, this is to say in this cold and dry spring time.*

This passage contains five stages of correction. First, Evrart writes a sentence which he does not seem to like: *Et briefment dit il c'est aventure qu'il puissent* (and briefly, he says, it may be that they may); he erases it and replaces it in the left margin by another wording *Toutefois combien qu'il puist* (However, although he may), which he still does not like, so he erases also the addition:

<sup>22</sup> The sentence that has been subject to multiple corrections is in italics.

~~Toutefois combien qu'il~~ ... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant  
~~puist~~ froidure. Et briefment dit il c'est aventure qu'il puissent

He replaces the erased addition by the phrase *Toutefois dit il il poet bien avenir aucune fois ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est ausi que une aventure* (However he says it may happen sometimes as if he wanted to say that it is by chance), partly above the erasure, partly below:

Toutefois dit il il poet ... seront il feble et imparfait pour le  
~~Toutefois combien qu'il~~ superhabondant froidure. Et briefment dit il c'est  
~~puist~~ aventure qu'il puissent  
 bien avenir aucune fois,  
 ausi que s'il volsist dire que  
 c'est ausi que une aventure

However, he does not like this hesitation (*ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est une aventure*) either, so he erases it and replaces it by writing *poeent bien* (may well) between the lines of the text, in the centre of the line, and then continues his sentence:

Toutefois dit il il poet ... seront il feble et imparfait pour le  
~~Toutefois combien qu'il~~ superhabondant froidure. *poeent bien*  
~~puist~~ Et briefment dit il c'est aventure qu'il puissent vivre  
 bien avenir aucune fois, en tel serenité de tans et estre nourri, c'est a dire en  
~~ausi que s'il volsist dire que~~ tel prin tans froit et sec.  
~~c'est ausi que une aventure~~

While making all these corrections, he forgets the conjunction and pronoun *qu'il* that is necessary to link the subordinate clause to the main clause, which has been added by the copyists in the copies that were made of the autograph.

So we see that the translator-commentator really struggles with the part where he has inserted lots of modalities: "it may happen that, sometimes, by chance, they could...". It is clearly a difficult part of the text, since he writes a line further that "some say that Aristotle talks about children here" (*dient aucun que Aristotes parle cy des enfans...*) and also "and it seems that he wants to say..." (*et samble qu'il woeille dire*). This hesitation does not appear in Pietro's comment, at least not in the versions I looked at; this is the corresponding passage in Pietro's text:

Unde facta quadem humidi relaxatione separantur ab eis, propter quod embriones nutrimento privati moriuntur; si debiles extiterint aut semivivi egrediuntur in aborsum. Si autem fetus non fuerit adeo imbecilis quod predicto egrediatur modo, remanent in vita

cum multa tamen imbecillitate ratione virtutis et imperfecte quantitatis, si accidat ipsos nasci in huiusmodi vere quia cum forent prius in loco humido et calido venientes ad frigidum et siccum mutatione maxima mutantur. (Pietro de Abano, *Expositio Problematum*, incunabulum Mantua 1475)

Therefore, because of a certain fact, contained dampness, by softening [the embryos], loosens the cords [of the embryos], that is why embryos, deprived from nutrition, die; if they are weak, they will be expelled, or come out half-alive, by way of a miscarriage. If however the fetus is not weak to the point that he would be expelled in the declared way, he stays alive with yet a great frailty because of a defective strength and quantity, when it happens that they are born in such a springtime so that they would have come first into a moist and warm place, and are then moved towards a cold and dry one, by way of the largest mutation.

So it seems that Evrart is the one who has doubts about the content of what he reads in Aristotle's text, and the fact that this autograph manuscript is available allows us to see the author struggling with his interpretation and translation of his source. Of course, there is no certainty regarding the model Evrart had before him, so we cannot rule out a different version of Pietro's commentary. Anyway, more research is necessary to point to the exact reasons of these hesitations, in the light of the medical context of the time.

## 6 Some Conclusions

In this article, I wanted to show the opportunities offered by an autograph manuscript with respect to the study of the transmission of ideas, and the translation of classical authorities into a medieval context. While editing Evrart's *Livre des problemes*, there are quite some challenges, especially for the cases where we see the author struggling with his translation. These are interesting passages, that need to be offered to the scientific community in order to be researched more thoroughly, also in the light of the specific situation of bilingualism in the medieval context, and that reveal how an author, as a reader, struggles with the precise interpretation and translation of a source text.

In the edition Françoise Guichard-Tesson and I are preparing and that will be published in a printed version, these stages of the work appear via a thorough description of the process. Gilbert Ouy and Ezio Ornato<sup>23</sup> developed a model, in the late 1980s, that allowed them

<sup>23</sup> Ornato, Ouy 1988.



to visualise different subsequent autograph manuscripts of a Latin treatise by Jean de Montreuil, making use of different fonts, font sizes and symbols that indicate the stage of the alteration of the text, each stage corresponding to a different autograph manuscript. Unfortunately, this model was too complex for Evrart de Conty's manuscript, since it is not always possible to indicate the exact stage of a correction, all the alterations appearing within the same manuscript.

In our printed edition, the corrections will be described in the critical apparatus. The last case analysed earlier will thus be presented in the following way: the edited text itself presents the final version, while in the critical apparatus the interventions of the author are explained; this is shown in the next extract:

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. Toutefois, dit il, il poet bien avenir aucune fois qu'il poeent bien<sup>1</sup> vivre en tel serenité de tans et estre nourri, c'est a dire en tel prin tans froit et sec.

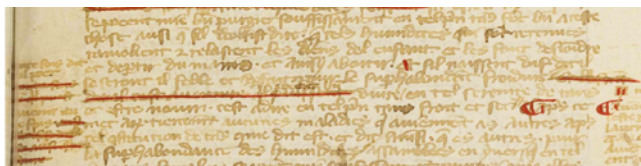
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[1] *Passage avec couches de corrections successives.* Et briefment dit il c'est aventure qu'il puissent raturé après froidure et remplacé en m.g. avec indication de position, par toutefois combien qu'il puist, raturé à son tour et remplacé au-dessus par toutefois dit il il poet. *Suite de la phrase* (toutefois dit il il poet) bien avenir aucune fois ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est ausi que une aventure, en m.g. *Ensuite*, ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est ausi que une aventure raturé après fois, toujours en m.g. *Dans le texte même*, poeent bien suscrit au-dessus de qu'il puissent raturé; qu'il raturé, mais nécessaire au sens.

*Text passage with several layers of corrections.* Et briefment dit il c'est aventure qu'il puissent erased after froidure and replaced in the left margin with indication of position, by toutefois combien qu'il puist, that is also erased and replaced above by toutefois dit il il poet. *Continuation of the sentence* (toutefois dit il il poet) bien avenir aucune fois ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est ausi que une aventure, in the left margin. *Then*, ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est ausi que une aventure erased after fois, still in the left margin. *In the text itself* poeent bien written above qu'il puissent that is erased; qu'il erased, although necessary for the meaning

When we want to show the different stages of Evrart's work, the printed version of the edition does not leave much room for visualisation; we did our best to capture the evolution of his work within the context of the printed edition. So next to the printed edition, a

web-version offering more possibilities that may lead to a better understanding of what is going on in the mind of our author-translator, would be interesting. Let us look into one possible web-based presentation, on the basis of the same passage, making the subsequent stages of the corrections visible:<sup>24</sup>



[1]

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. Et briefment dit il c'est aventure qu'il puissent

[2]

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. **Et briefment dit il c'est aventure qu'il puissent**

[3]

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. **Toutefois, combien qu'il puist**

[4]

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. **Toutefois, combien qu'il puist**

[5]

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. **Toutefois, dit il, il poet bien avenir aucune fois, ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est ausi que une aventure**

[6]

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. Toutefois, dit il, il poet bien avenir aucune fois, **ausi que s'il volsist dire que c'est ausi que une aventure**

[7]

... seront il feble et imparfait pour le superhabondant froidure. Toutefois, dit il, il poet bien avenir aucune fois, **[qu'il] poent bien vivre en tel serenité de tans et estre nourri, c'est a dire en tel prins tans froit et sec.**

Figure 5 An example of presentation of a corrected passage in the autograph

This type of visualisation may lead to a better understanding of what is going on in the mind of our author-translator: the physician Evrart de Conty, reading, translating and commenting a scientific treatise of the 'great philosopher' Aristotle, whom he admires and wants to respect in the best possible way. But sometimes, he is confronted with difficulties, because of a Latin source text that might have been al-

<sup>24</sup> I was inspired, amongst others, by *The Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project*, developed at the Centre for Manuscript Genetics of the University of Antwerp, directed by Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon; see <https://www.beckettarchive.org/>.

tered by succeeding copies, as he states more than once, and because of his aim to render a text that is comprehensible for his audience. The edition of his commented translation should do justice to an author that is scrupulous and eager to instruct his audience.

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