
Abstract (CfP “Translation in Science, Science in Translation”)

Based on my dissertation, the first biography of the materialist scientist Jacob Moleschott, I would like to illustrate processes of translation, negotiation and circulation of knowledge in nineteenth-century science and its popularization. Born in ’s-Hertogenbosch in 1822, Jacob Moleschott studied medicine in Heidelberg and was Privatdozent at the University of Heidelberg; he became an assistant of Johannes Mulder in Utrecht and later taught at the University of Zürich. He was appointed Professor of Physiology at the University of Turin in 1861, became an Italian citizen in 1867, a Senator of the newly established Italian Kingdom in 1876, and Professor at “La Sapienza” in Rome in 1878. He died in Rome in 1893, being celebrated as a national hero in several countries at once. Moleschott played a highly important role as a translator and mediator. He contributed in transferring knowledge (scientific expertise, as well as practical and administrative knowledge) not only between European countries, but also between different disciplinary areas such as the natural and the social sciences.

There are three main fields in Moleschott’s biography that exemplify processes of translation: first, his work as a translator (e.g. of Johannes Mulder’s books on physiology) and the translations of his main publications into other languages; second, his popularizing activity, including the transfer of concepts and knowledge between science and politics (for instance in the debates on physical education and on the abolition of the grist tax in the Italian Senate); third, his engagement in processes of cultural mediation both between nation-states and between scientists and politicians. These will be illustrated through the analysis of his presidential role at the International Sanitary Conference in 1885 and his participation in the five-hundredth anniversary of the University of Heidelberg in 1886. Finally, a “translational” approach allows for the first time to focus on Lombroso’s translation of Moleschott’s Kreislauf des Lebens and to show the highly important role played by translation in the adaptation and transformation of Moleschott’s ideas in Lombroso’s criminal anthropology. Thus, his biography is a concrete example of the key role of translation studies and “travelling concepts” for the history of science.

Bio-bibliographical note

Laura Meneghello studied in Venice, Paris, and Utrecht, specializing in the History of Science. She held a scholarship at the GCSC, where she submitted her PhD-thesis on "Jacob Moleschott: Science, Politics, and Popularization in Nineteenth-Century Europe" (to be published in 2017). She will hold a position at the University of Siegen as of September. Her main research interests are modern European history, history of science, cultural history, translation studies.