

ANNE LE FÈVRE DACIER: HOMER'S FIRST FEMALE TRANSLATOR

Biography

Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (1647-1720), a distinguished classicist, translator and philologist born in Preuilley-sur-Claise, France, excelled in Latin and Greek under her father's guidance in Saumur. Renowned for her exceptional translations, notably of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, she became a prominent figure in French literary circles. Her defense of classical literature and emphasis on fidelity in translation influenced philosophical and artistic debates of her time.



Fidelity: her own code of ethics

Influence

Dacier significantly impacted French literary circles by translating numerous Greek and Latin texts, making them accessible to a wider audience. The first use of *traductrice*, the feminine form of the French term for translator, was in reference to Madame Dacier. Her staunch defense of classical literature, notably Homer's epics, reignited the debate between "ancients" and "moderns" in France, influencing philosophical and artistic discussions.

Dacier's dedication to conveying the original text's essence marked her "code of ethics" as a translator. She emphasized the importance of cultural relativity, tolerance, and conveying as much of the original text as possible, aiming for fidelity in translation. She is credited with developing a translator's "code of ethics".

Notable Works

Dacier's translations included works by Callimachus (1674), Publius Annii Florus (1674), Sextus Aurelius Victor (1681), Eutropius (1683), and Dictys of Crete (1684). She also translated Anacreon (1681), Sappho (1681), Terence (1683), Plautus (1683), and Aristophanes (1684). Her renowned translations of Homer's Iliad (1699) and Odyssey (1708) were particularly celebrated. Apart from translations, Dacier authored polemical treatises such as "Of the Causes of the Corruption of Taste" (1714) and "Homer Defended against the Apology of Father Hardouin" (1716). These writings expanded her philosophical views on art, language, and education.

The Ancients and the Moderns

In 1699, Madame Dacier published her major work, a French translation of Homer's Iliad. Her version of Homer's Odyssey followed in 1708. Widely acclaimed as both faithful translations and graceful examples of French prose, the books reignited the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns. Dacier's defense of classical literature against modern literature, particularly Antoine Houdar de la Motte's adaptations of Homer, sparked debates on the superiority of ancient versus modern literary styles. Her Neo-Aristotelian philosophy favored classical education for moral development.

For Further Reading



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