

Mary Roper Clarke Bassett and Meredith Hanmer's *Honorable Ladie of the Lande*

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ABSTRACT

In his 1577 English translation of Eusebius' *History of the Church*, Meredith Hanmer makes reference to "an honorable Ladie of the lande," whose identity still remains unknown. My design here is to gather the scarce and scattered available evidence, so as to propose a name that is rather reasonable. In order to contextualize the conclusions, reference will also be made to such issues as women's literacy and religious controversies in Elizabethan England.

KEYWORDS: Mary Roper Clarke Bassett, Meredith Hanmer, translation, Greek, Eusebius

Mary Roper,¹ Sir Thomas More's granddaughter by his beloved Margaret, is especially known for an English translation of her grandfather's Latin book about Christ's Passion, written while prisoner in the Tower of London.² This work was included in William Rastell's edition of More's *English Works* (1557), pp. 1350-1404, and it was the only text by a woman to appear in print during the reign of Mary Tudor (Demers 2001: 5). The editor was enthusiastic about the chance he had to include Mary's translation, for it seemed to be no translation at all: "so that it myghte seme to have been by hys [Thomas More's] own pen indyted first, and not at all translated: suche a gyft hath she to followe her grandfathers vayne in writing" (Rastell 1557: 1350). But it is Mary's partial translation of Eusebius' *History of the Church* that I will bring forth into the readers' consideration, both for it and for the light it might

¹ The date of Mary's birth is not known. She was the daughter of Margaret More Roper and William Roper. She first married Stephen Clarke and then James Bassett. Mary died on March 20, 1572.

² *An Exposition of a Part of the Passion of ... Iesus Christe, Made in Latine by Syr Thomas More ... in the Tower ... and Translated into Englyshe by Maystress Mary Basset*. Edited by Philip E. Hallet.

cast on the identity of an anonymous lady mentioned by Meredith Hanmer in the first complete English rendering of such text.

1. Mary Roper Clark Bassett, Meredith Hanmer and their translations of Eusebius

Ro. Ba., author of *The Lyfe of Syr Thomas More*, completed in 1599, mentions Mary Roper. Before referring to her English translation of Sir Thomas' book about the Lord's Passion, the anonymous biographer writes:

This gentlewoman verie handsomelie translated the Ecclesiasticall historie of Eusebius out of Greeke into Latyn, and after into English yet extant, to the shame of the hereticall [translation] of Meridith Hanmer – which, for that Christophersons, Byschopp of Lincolne, his translation was then famous and extant, hers came not to print. The English may here after. She translated the Historie of Socrates, Theodoretus, Sozomenus and Euagrius. Theis of her modestie [she] caused to be suppressed. (Ro. Ba. 1950: 149/8-18)³

This translation was never published. What remains of it – or, most probably, all that Mary Roper translated – is preserved in the Harleian MS. 1860, kept in the British Museum. This MS contains a translation of the first book of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* from Greek to Latin, and the first five books into English; both works were attributed to *Maria Clarcke*, as explicitly stated in the MS.⁴ A hint that Mary's translation was known among English Catholics after her death in 1572 is given in the above quoted words by the anonymous author of *The Lyfe of Syr Thomas More*: he writes that Mary's work was "yet extant, to the shame of the hereticall [translation] of Meridith Hanmer" (Ro. Ba. 1950: 149/11-12). Hanmer (1543-1604) was the author of the first complete English translation of Eusebius, Socrates and Euagrius: *The Auncient Ecclesiasticall Histories of the First*

³ John Christopherson (d. 1558) was not Bishop of Lincoln, but of Chichester.

⁴ Url: <http://www.adam-matthew-publications.co.uk/digital_guides/medieval-and-early-modern-women-part-1/Detailed-Listing.aspx>, accessed 10 February 2006. The MS is available in silver halide positive microfilm: *Medieval and Early Modern Women. Part 1: Manuscripts from the British Library*. London: Adam Matthew Publications. Reel 12. No edition of the translation has been published to date.

Six Hundred Yeares after Christ... (London, 1577).⁵ In 1563, just five years after Elizabeth ascended to the throne, John Foxe had published the first edition of his *Acts and Monuments* (*The Book of Martyrs*). To some extent, Hanmer's book was an interesting offshoot of Foxe's project.⁶ Because Protestants of the sixteenth century were quite interested in patristic sources, there began to be a market for English translations of the Fathers. Foxe's famous book was based, at least in part, on Eusebius, and so it is no surprise that an English translation of his Church history was not long in coming. However, the possibility exists that Hanmer also knew about Mary Clarke's partial rendering of this text.

In the prologue to his translation, "The Translator unto the Christian reader," Hanmer mentions a curious detail:

The occasion that moued me to take so great as enterprise in hand was, that I read them in Greeke vnto an honorable Ladie of the lande, and hauing some leasure besides the lecture and other exercises agreeable unto my calling, I thought good to turne the private commoditie unto publique profite (Hanmer 1577: iiiii v)

The identity of this honourable *Ladie of the Land* has not been clarified to my knowledge. At first glance, readers could infer that she was no other than Elizabeth, Countess of Lincoln (1528-1589),⁷ the wife of Edward, 1st Earl of Lincoln (1512-1585).⁸ Hanmer dedicated his translation to her (September 1, 1576).⁹ And yet, in the *dedicatorie*, as flattering as it was supposed to be, it is nowhere stated that she knew any Greek at all to have been able to enjoy not only Hanmer's reading, but also *the other exercises agreeable* that followed. Elizabeth

⁵ The dedicatory epistle was finished on September 1, 1576. The book was printed at London: "By Thomas Vautroullier dwelling in the Blackefriers by Ludgate." This work also contains Dorotheus' *Lives of the Prophets, Apostles, and Seventy Disciples*. The attribution of the biographies to Dorotheus is traditional but unsubstantiated.

⁶ In an unpublished lecture given at the Woodrow Wilson International Center (1993), Patrick Collinson speculated that Foxe himself probably inspired and encouraged Meredith Hanmer's translation of Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*.

⁷ Elizabeth Fitzgerald – the "Fair Geraldine" of Henry, Earl of Surrey – had been Anthony Browne's wife. Her marriage with the Earl of Lincoln took place on October 1, 1552.

⁸ Edward Clinton Fiennes.

⁹ "To the right honorable, the godly wise and virtuous Ladie Elizabeth, Covntesse of Lyncolne, wife to the right and noble Edward Earle of Lincoln, Lorde highe Admirall of England one of the Queenes Maiesties priuie counsaill and Knight of the most honourable order of the Garter" (Hanmer 1577: ii v).

is praised for her virtues and true zeal, and she is also said to enjoy “no vayne bookes” (Hanmer 1577: ii r & iiiv). Had she known Greek, it would surely have been emphasised.

Taking these issues as a starting point, I would like to present the main argument of this paper. I consider that it is by no means a remote possibility that the *Ladie* Hanmer mentioned at the beginning of his address to readers was no other than Mary Roper Clarke Bassett. This I will try to demonstrate, first, by providing the names of several ladies which might also be taken into consideration.

2. Greek and the ladies

Women’s learning during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is an issue still open to debate nowadays. Betty Travitsky claims that “from approximately 1500 to 1640, English women composed or translated over one hundred works” (Travitsky 1981: 5),¹⁰ and yet it has not been until quite recently that scholars have paid attention to these texts.¹¹ Even when they have, some critics argue, the conclusions have been far fetched and, in a way, a veil to cover women scholars real position during the Early Modern period. As M.P. Hannay concludes, as learned as they were, “Tudor women rarely violated the boundaries set for them [...] patronage, translation, dedications of translations, epitaphs, letters, and private devotional meditations” (Hannay 1985: 14).

¹⁰ There is a vast bibliography about this topic. See Warnicke (1983), Hannay (1985), Krontiris (1992) [*Oppositional Voices. Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance*. Routledge: London], Kate Aughterson (1995) [*Renaissance Woman. Constructions of Femininity in England*. London: Routledge], Kate Aughterson (1998) [*The English Renaissance. An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. London: Routledge, esp. Chapter 4 “Education”], Virginia W. Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman and Margaret. Mikesell eds. (2002) [*Juan Luis Vives. The Instruction of a Christian Woman*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, “Introduction”]. For less Feminist approaches, see Hogrefe (1975), Elaine V. Beilin (1987) [*Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*. Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press] or Katharina M. Wilson (1987).

¹¹ Travitsky mentions two early critical works, both unpublished: Rugh W. Hughey (1932) “Cultural Interests of Women in England, from 1524-1640, Indicated in the Writings of the Women,” PhD, Cornell University; and Charlotte Kohler (1936) “Elizabethan Woman of Letters, The Extent of Her Literary Activity,” PhD, University of Virginia (1981: 239, nn. 1 & 2 to “Introduction”). Although Travitsky elsewhere in her work makes reference to Foster Watson’s (1912) *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co.), she does not include Watson as a pioneer text on this field, probably because her disagreement with this author’s non-feminist stances.

Thomas More's role in the promotion of women's education remains unchallenged. According to P.S. Hogrefe it was "the theory and practice of Sir Thomas in educating his daughters" that especially contributed to the increase in the number of women who participated in the educational and literary life of the sixteenth century (Hogrefe 1975: 98). More critical voices have come to the same conclusion, though emphasizing how "More's approach was essentially a utilitarian one in which the educational goals were the preparing of [...] women for maternal and wifely service" (Warnicke 1983: 23). Despite ideological differences with More, his alleged antifeminism or his supposed inner contradictions, these voices conclude that he promoted women's education: "[More] argued that while they [women] were inferior beings, women could excel in scholarship, thereby achieving intellectual equality or near equality with men" (Warnicke 1983: 91-113).

Therefore, it would seem reasonable to argue that, despite the practical consequences that learning might have for Tudor women's real position in life and the limits imposed on their education, a good number of them received a solid education. Some of these women were members of the aristocracy, but there were also a few from the upper middle-class (Warnicke 1983: 91-113). As Elaine Beilin has pointed out, "these women were not so much wonders as signs" (Beilin 1987: xvi). According to a sixteenth century English source,¹² those ladies who were in the court spent their time

in continuall reading either of the holie Scriptures, or histories of our owne or forren nations about us [...] And to saie how many gentlewomen and ladies there are, that beside sound knowledge of the Greke and Latine tongs, are thereto no lesse skilfull in the Spanish, Italian, and French, or in som one of them, it resteth not in me.

According to Warnicke (1983: 132), Harrison was overstating the skills of these ladies, a view that is consistent with the denunciation of the so-called Myth of Tudor Woman, a dominant trend in Feminist criticism especially after the publication of Joan

¹² *Description of England* by William Harrison (1534-1593), first published in 1577 as part of Holinshed's *Chronicle*. This work enumerated England's geographic, economic, social, religious and political features and represents an important source for historians interested in life in Elizabethan England. The quoted excerpt is taken from Hannay (1985: 8).

Kelly-Gadol's revisionist paper "Did Women have a Renaissance?"¹³ This forces us to adopt a certain scepticism when considering the real number of women with an intellectual formation, especially if we talk about their knowledge of the Classical languages and, more specifically, Greek.¹⁴ Obviously I do not mean that Mary Bassett was the only lady in London who knew this language. Even among the upper class, however, such a skill was pretty uncommon. It is interesting to notice that in his *dedicatorie*, Hanmer praises the glory of Elizabeth's court – as opposed to the ruin of her antecessor's – stressing there were "so many learned Clerkes, so many Godly persons, so many graue Matrons, so many vertuous Ladies, so many honorable personages" (Hanmer 1577: ii r). But no learned ladies? Queen Elizabeth's name immediately comes to mind for she was well acquainted with Greek.¹⁵ Roger Ascham tutored her and was direct witness of her improvements. In his *The Scholemaster*, this educationist gives abundant details about her methods and diligence in learning.¹⁶ Queen Katherine Parr (1512-1548), Henry VIII's last wife, was involved in Elizabeth's tuition as a young girl. The former had retired from court upon Edward VI's accession, though she remained close to London. Her dower manor, Chelsea, was in the suburbs and there she took with her the 13 year old Princess Elizabeth. Katharine Parr was justly celebrated for her warm and open nature. Apart from this, she was herself a rather literate woman: she published or edited several religious works in English and she could "read Latin easily and had some knowledge of Greek".¹⁷ Later studies have nonetheless denied her proficiency in

¹³ In *Becoming Visible*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (1977). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 139-164.

¹⁴ For a general description of the introduction of Greek in the English Academic curriculum, see Arthur Tilley (1938) "Greek Studies in England in the Early Sixteenth Century (I)." *The English Historical Review* 53: 221-239; and (1938) "Greek Studies in England in the Early Sixteenth Century (II)." *The English Historical Review* 53: 438-456.

¹⁵ For Elizabeth I's learning, see Hogrefe (1977: 209-233), Warnicke (1983: 96-97) or Teague (1987: 522-547).

¹⁶ In his "Preface to the Reader," for example, Ascham narrates how one night, after dinner, he went up to the Queen's private chamber to read with her in Greek a "noble Oration by Demosthenes" (1571: ii v).

¹⁷ William P. Haugaard quoted in Hogrefe (1977: 194). For a detailed analysis of Katherine as a woman of letters, see Hoffman (1959-1960). An interesting study of Katherine's works is Janel Mueller (1545). "Devotion as Difference: Intertextuality in Queen Katherine's Parr's 'Prayer or Meditations.'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 53.3: 171-197.

Greek, if only because her religious zeal made her reject pagan authors who wrote in this language. According to Warnicke, Katherine's involvement in the selection of tutors for Elizabeth Tudor was rather a hindrance:

In 1548 with the death of William Grindal, Elizabeth asked Katherine, who was then Queen Dowager, to replace her deceased tutor with Ascham who was, himself, a former pupil of Checke. Perhaps because he usually assigned pagan authors to his students, Katherine only reluctantly agreed to Elizabeth's request for his appointment [...] (Warnicke 1983: 94-95)¹⁸

A few weeks after Katharine and Elizabeth settled at Chelsea, another girl entered the household. Lady Jane Gray (1537-1554)¹⁹ was just 9 years old when she was sent to live as the ward of the Queen Dowager. She would remain with her until 1550, when Katherine died shortly after the birth of her only child. It was only because Lady Jane had a real opportunity to become Queen (both by succession and by marriage to Edward VI), that Jane's parents propitiated her solid instruction in Greek, among other languages. And Queen she was, though just for nine days in July 1553; right after she was imprisoned and executed by Mary Tudor at the age of 17 (Warnicke 1983: 98-99). Three years before, Roger Ascham had visited Lady Jane at her parents' home in Bradgate Hall (Leicester). While the whole family was away hunting, as Ascham reported, 14 year old Jane was reading Plato's *Phaedon* in Greek, "and that with as much delite, as some gentleman would read a mery tale in Bocace." John Elmer, the future Bishop of London, was her kind and gentle tutor (Ascham 1571: 11r - 12 v).

None of the three names of learned women that I have proposed in this section seem to me a fitting candidate for the unknown lady mentioned by Hanmer, and this for the following reasons:

1. Katherine Parr's knowledge of Greek, despite what early enthusiasts might claim, is not to be taken for granted. Hoffman has stated that she "knew little latin and no greek" (Hoffman 1959-60:

¹⁸ Katherine's role in the education of Edward VI was essential (Weinstein 1976: 791-792).

¹⁹ Great-granddaughter of Henry VII of England, reigned as uncrowned queen regnant of the Kingdom of England for nine days in July 1553.

349),²⁰ whereas Weinstein assumes that she “knew Greek a little” (Weinstein 1976: 789). In any case, she might not be able to enjoy the lecture of Hanmer’s manuscripts and even less the other exercises that he proposed. But above all, what is most conclusive to discard her as the woman behind Hanmer’s words is the fact that had she been the lady he was thinking of, there is no reason to explain why Hanmer would have refrained from calling her by name or as the very Queen of England. This would, no doubt, present his book under the most favourable auspices.

2. Very much the same could be said about Elizabeth I, Queen of England at the time Hanmer published her translation and a woman endowed with a solid, albeit rare, knowledge of Greek. Her name does appear elsewhere in the “Dedicatorie” of the translation.

3. Lady Jane Gray also presents a similar case. Her knowledge of Greek is undisputed and she was also (though briefly) Queen of England; Meredith Hanmer might very well have mentioned her name as such. Besides, had she been the lady Hanmer had met, her presence in his translation would have served another purpose: that of favourably contrasting Elizabeth I’s reign against that of her predecessor, Mary Tudor, under which Lady Jane Gray had been executed. In any case, the dates of both Hanmer’s translation (1577) and her death (1554) render the possibility of a “scholarly” interview between the two almost impossible: Hanmer was 11 years old when Lady Jane was executed.

3. Was Mary Basset the *Honorable Ladie of the Lande*?

In this final section I will develop three main lines of argumentation in order to support my claim: Mary Bassett’s knowledge of Greek; the date of Hanmer’s text; his reasons to hide the lady’s identity; and some other considerations.

3.1. Mary Bassett’s training in Greek

Mary Roper received all her instruction at home, since her mother tried to educate all her children with the same care and devotion Sir Thomas had shown to his family. Just as Margaret had been the most gifted student in More’s domestic academy, Mary was the best pupil in her mother’s school (Olivares 2007: 67-71). A passage from

²⁰ Hoffman (1959-60: 350-351) adds: “The education that Catherine received as a child quite evidently fell far short of humanist ideals. It included little, if any, Latin and no Greek.”

Nicholas S. Harpsfield's *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More* (1557) well illustrates the importance that the education of her family had for Margaret, even in difficult situations:

To her children she [Margaret] was a double mother, [as] one not content to bring them forth onely into the world, but instructing them also her selfe in vertue and learning. At what time her husbande was vpon a certaine displeasure taken against him in king Henries dayes sent to the towre, certaine sent from the king to searche her house, vpon a sodaine running vpon her, founde her, not puling and lamenting, but full busily teaching her children: whom they, finding nothing astonied with their message, and finding also, beside this her constancie, such grauitie and wisdom in her talke as they little looked for, were themselues much astonied, and were in great admiration, neyther could afterward speake [too] muche good of her, as partly my selfe haue heard at the mouth of one of them. (Harpsfield 1935: 78/25-79/12)

For the task of educating her children, Margaret also relied on the help of tutors, exactly as her father had done in the happy days of his *schola*. A letter addressed to Mary Roper Clarke by Roger Ascham (15 January 1554), the famous education theorist, shows how Margaret did her best to persuade him to become her children's tutor; she did not succeed, however (Grant 1576: 134v-134r).²¹ The purpose of Ascham's letter was to offer his services to Mary. Free from his obligations to the University, Ascham was at Mary Tudor's²² court and seemed willing to help Mrs Clarke, if only in the absence of the tutors who were already frequenting her house and whose names he gives:

²¹ "It was I who was invited some years ago from the University of Cambridge by your mother, Margaret Roper – a lady worthy of her great father, and of you her daughter – to the house of your kinsman, Lord Giles Alington, to teach you and her other children the Greek and Latin tongues; but at that time no offers could induce me to leave the University. It is sweet to me to bear in mind this request of your mother's," (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12515/12515.txt>). Ascham's Latin letters were collected and published by his friend, Edward Grant, master of Westminster School.

²² Ascham was Latin Secretary to Queen Mary in 1553, a position he was permitted to retain in his profession of Protestantism. It is somewhat extraordinary that though Queen Mary and her ministers were Catholics, Ascham remained in his office and his pension was increased to £20.

Libe[n]ter nu[n]c apud te reuoco, & eiusdem si non perfectione[m], conatum meum tamen aliquem iam in Aula tibi offerrem, nisi ipsam sic & praestares per te doctrina, et abundares etiam opera, cum opus est, duorum doctissimorum virorum, Coli, et Christoforsoni, ut mea opera non indigeas. Sin his perpetuo praesentibus vti non poteris, me aliquando voles, & quoties voles abuteris. (Grant 1576: 134r)²³

In his *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1772), George Ballard (1706-1755)²⁴ claims that, after Ascham's refusal, Margaret managed to find other tutors for her children: a certain Doctor Cole – maybe Henry Cole (ca. 1500-1580), who became Dean of St. Paul's (1556)–;²⁵ John Christopherson (d. 1558), later Master of Trinity College, Cambridge (1553-1558) and Bishop of Chichester (1557-1558), to whom we will shortly return;²⁶ and finally, Mr. John

²³ “and I now not only remind you thereof, but would offer you, now that I am at court, if not to fulfil her wishes, yet to do my best to fulfil them, were it not that you have so much learning in yourself, and also the aid of those two learned men, Cole and Christopherson, so that you need no help from me, unless in their absence you make use of my assistance, and if you like, abuse it” (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12515/12515.txt>). Ascham's mention of the possible absence of the tutors might be a reference to Christopherson's stay in Louvain in the year before; as Hermans reports: “When, writing from Louvain in 1553, Christopherson dedicates his Latin translation of four short works by Philo Judaeus to Trinity College, Cambridge.”

²⁴ George Ballard was a writer, antiquarian, and historian. Early in life he developed a reputation for learning. He had a sister with literary interests, and this may have influenced the composition of his best-known work, the *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), which contains biographies of 64 learned and literary women from the Middle Ages to his own day. His work is considered a major source of information about educated women of the past, and has been extensively used by biographers and anthropologists since the 18th century. For a modern edition of this text, see Ruth Perry ed. (1985) *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

²⁵ Henry Cole was educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford. At first he conformed to the Protestant religion but afterwards returned to the Catholic Faith about 1547, and eventually resigned all his preferments. In Mary's reign he became Archdeacon of Ely, a canon of Westminster (1554), vicar-general of Cardinal Pole (1557), and a judge of the archiepiscopal Court of Audience. During Elizabeth's reign he remained true to the Catholic Faith and took part in the discussions begun at Westminster in 1559. He was committed to the Tower (20 May, 1560), and finally removed to the Fleet (10 June), where he remained for nearly twenty years, until his death.

²⁶ John Christopherson (d. 1558), later Master of Trinity College, Cambridge (1553-1558) and Bishop of Chichester (1557-1558), was also Mary's chaplain and confessor. Christopherson died less than a month after Elizabeth I's coronation in 1558, and spent his last days under house-arrest for his outspoken Catholicism. His reputation both as a scholar and a staunch Catholic in the days of Mary Tudor outlived him.

Morwen (fl. 1533 - 1560).²⁷ Since she had no children from her first marriage, the reputed English educationist was therefore offering himself as tutor for Mary, a way to fulfil in a certain way Margaret Roper's invitation: "Libe[n]ter nu[n]c apud te reuoco, & eiusdem si non perfectione[m], conatum meum tamen aliquem iam in Aula tibi offerrem."²⁸ Contrasting Ascham's letter with Ballard's testimony we have to assume also that Christopherson and Cole had been Mary's childhood tutors and still were so in 1554. John Morwen (or Morren),²⁹ the third name in Ballard's account, was also Mary's tutor as a child, but Ascham does not mention him, probably because he was not with her any more. A prominent Oxford scholar, of Corpus Christi College, Morwen was Reader in Greek. According to James K. McConica (1963: 49), he taught John Jewel, the eminent Elizabethan divine, and Mary, daughter of the Ropers. Ballard adds a relevant detail: so pleased was Morwen with Mary's Greek and Latin compositions, that he translated some of them into English (Hogrefe 1959: 207).

To some extent, it is possible to figure out the main lines along which Mary was taught the art of translation, especially from Greek. Among the three names mentioned in the previous paragraph, John Christopherson stands out as one of the most prominent Greek scholars at the time.³⁰ Therefore it does not take a great stretch of the imagination to assume that Mary Bassett received a good and solid training in Greek and, therefore, would be more than able to enjoy Hanmer's "lecture and other exercises agreeable" (Hanmer 1577: iii v).

²⁷ Quoted from Hogrefe (1959: 207). Though Hogrefe follows Ballard in stating that Cole and Christopherson were Mary's childhood tutors, she adds that it "seems impossible, within the limits of this [Ballard's] work, to vouch for all his details" (1959: 207, n. 7).

²⁸ "and I now not only remind you thereof, but would offer you, now that I am at court, if not to fulfil her wishes, yet to do my best to fulfil them" (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12515/12515.txt>).

²⁹ John Morwen was Prebend of Weldland (St Paul's) (1558-1560). He held a number of livings in the diocese of London. He was deprived of them in 1560 and ended his career imprisoned by Elizabeth for preaching in favour of the Mass.

³⁰ The number of pages he wrote is enormous. Leaving aside the only original Greek academic play written in the Early Modern period, *Jephthah*, Christopherson translated into Latin Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *De vita Constantini*, as well as other Church histories also written in Greek. He had also translated four books by the Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus (15-10 b.C. - 45-50 A.D.).

3.2. *The genesis and time setting of Hanmer's translation*

At this point, I would like to make one brief initial consideration about the time setting of Hanmer's translation. On the one hand, I would tentatively take the date of Mary's death (March 20, 1572) and, therefore her last years, as the *terminus ab quo* in the gestation of the translation; on the other, the date when Hanmer signed his *dedicatorie* (September 1, 1576) as its *terminus ad quem*. We do not know when he began his translation, but certainly it would take him a few years to complete "so great as enterprise in hand" (Hanmer 1577: iii v), one to be achieved only with "tedious study and infinite toyle and labour" (Hanmer 1577: iii v). Thus, if the occasion for his decision to set upon such a time-absorbing task was Hanmer's interviews with a certain lady, these meetings (one has to assume) would not have taken place in the recent past. This supposition is further confirmed by the use of the verbs in the simple past tense (*moued, read, thought*), and not in the present perfect tense, which he consistently uses at the end of his *dedicatorie* to Elizabeth, Countess of Lincoln. In light of all this, the date of Mary Bassett's death seems to fit with the early genesis of Hanmer's translation.

Another detail leads us to assume a many-year-long process before the completion of the work. Though printed in one single volume, Hanmer's massive translation contained: 10 books by Eusebius; 7 by Socrates Scholasticus; 6 by Euagrius Scholasticus; Dorotheus Bishop of Tyrus' account of the lives of the prophets, the apostles and 70 disciples; a chronology by Hanmer; and, finally, "a copious index of the principall matters" (1577: i v).

3.3. *The reasons for a veiled identity*

Another argument that supports my claim is, precisely, that the name of the lady is nowhere revealed. Hanmer considered that to disclose her identity would place him in an embarrassing situation, especially if the referred woman was not viewed under a favourable light in the new court, neither by Queen Elizabeth nor by the addressee of his *dedicatorie*. Retha M. Warnicke provides relevant information about the censorship that Elizabeth and her court imposed on the first (or Pre-Reformation) generation (Warnicke 1983: 31-46) of women humanists:

The divorce of Catherine of Aragon, which was soon followed by the execution of Sir Thomas More and the persecution of his family, brought public disrepute to the women humanists of the first

generation. It became unfashionable at court, or indeed elsewhere, to praise the accomplishments of Margaret Roper and her sisters, of Margaret Clement, or even of the Princess [sic] Mary, whose royal title was transferred to her half-sister, Elizabeth. (Warnicke 1983: 91)

What I am suggesting is that Hanmer did not give Mary's name for she was known to be not only a Catholic, but also the granddaughter of Thomas More, executed for treason by Queen Elizabeth I's father. After the death of Mary I, the tide was again low for the Mores and, certainly, it might not be appropriate to mention her name in a *dedicatorie* addressed to a woman so well connected to the Royal court: Elizabeth, Countess of Lincoln, was intimate friend of Queen Elizabeth, as well as the wife of a member of the Queen's Privy Council. Besides, it is startling to check how both Mary Bassett and Elizabeth, Countess of Lincoln, held to some extent similar positions within their royal courts. In 1599 Ro. Ba. stated that "shee [Mary Bassett] her selfe was one of the maides of honour" (Ro. Ba. 1950: 149/8-9). Even more, in 1557 (still during Mary Basset's life time) Nicholas S. Harpsfield's *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More* (1557) referred that James Bassett was at the service of the Queen, as one of the "Soueraines Queene Maries priuie chamber" (Harpsfield 1935: 83/8-9). In a sense, to put it in an odd way, Mary might be said to be Elizabeth's *alter ego* in Mary I's court.

Still another detail might support my claim. In "The Translator unto the Christian reader" that follows the dedicatory, Hanmer shows that he was well aware of all the translations of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* prior to his, for he mentions all of them but Mary Clarke's.³¹ This omission is quite meaningful, for I think that Hanmer surely knew (of) this work. Mary's translation, although never published, was not a private or domestic document. It is preserved nowadays since, as stated in the first section of MS. Harleian 1860, it was addressed to *the Lady Maryes Grace*, that is, the Princess Mary Tudor, who was crowned in 1553. Accordingly, in the "Historical Notes" to Harpsfield's text, R.W. Chambers writes that the translation was finished under Edward VI (1537-1553) and dedicated to "the Lady Mary"; he further argues that it was "apparently the presentation copy actually given to the Princess

³¹ Hanmer was very well informed. Reference is made to Rufinus, including Beatus Rhenanus' opinion; Epiphanius Scholasticus and Joachimus Camerarius' judgement; Wolfgang Musculus, followed by Edward Godsalfus' censure and Iacobus Grynaeus' corrections; finally, reference is made to John Christopherson's (1577: iiiir).

Mary."³² Hallett also states that the translation was presented to the future Queen (1941: xii-xiii). It must be inferred from this that the work was finished before 1553, the year of Edward's death, while Mary Tudor was not yet Queen of England. However, Reed writes that the MS preserved in the British Library is the presentation copy given to Queen Mary (in Ro. Ba. 1950: 327-328, 149/9-10). This might be a slight confusion,³³ but not necessarily. In fact, both views might not be contradictory: Mary Clarke probably finished her dedicated translation before 1553 and presented it to Mary, only when she was Queen of England. Be that as it may, are we to believe that this document passed unnoticed to Hanmer?

3.4. Other considerations

At this point, readers might wonder why Hanmer, a supporter of the new Anglican Church might make reference to the granddaughter of a well known *papist*, and a *papist* herself. E.E. Reynolds, the Morean scholar, conveniently warned us against "too great a simplification of the problems people had to face at that time. We tend to see a straightforward conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. Those who lived through the religious turmoil of that period must have been often more bewildered than enlightened" (Reynolds 1960: 117). This he writes when reporting that, some time after Thomas More's death, her daughter Margaret – Mary's mother – tried to persuade Roger Ascham to tutor her children. He was a supporter of reformers and never concealed his sympathies (Reynolds 1960: 116-117), and yet, Margaret thought of him as the best teacher for her children.

It is nonetheless true that things had gone worse between Catholics and Protestants after Edward's and *Bloody Mary's* reigns, but some details do confirm that religious differences, as long as they were not tainted by political interests, personal vengeances or treason plots, were not in themselves motifs of hatred. Ascham himself was Latin Secretary to Queen Mary in 1553, a position he was permitted to retain in his profession of Protestantism. Hanmer's words about John Christopherson also illustrate my point. The latter's reputation as staunch Catholic and learned scholar is behind Hanmer dispassionate and balanced comment on the worth of his

³² Chambers in Harpsfield (1935: 332, 83/12-17). See also McCutcheon (1987: 451).

³³ This seems to be the case for he refers to Harpsfield and Hallett as his sources (Reed in Ro. Ba. 1950: 327-328, 149/9-10).

work, without entering into any value judgement or criticism either on Christopherson or his beliefs: "(as for his religion I referre it to God and to himselfe, who by this time knoweth vwhether he did well or no) a great Clarke, also a learned interpretour, he hathe translated passing well" (Hanmer 1577: iiiii r).

Mary Bassett, it seems, could not finish her translation of Eusebius and the other Greek Church historians. I do think Meredith Hanmer, once more, was thinking of her when he wrote:

As I am given to translate (good Christian reader) there have bene divers which attempted to translate these auncient Ecclesiasticall histories, yet have geven over their purpose, partly being discouraged with the diversitie and corruption of Greeke copies, and partly being dismayed with the crookedness of Eusebius stile, which is by reason of his unperfect allegations, and last of all, beinge whollie overcome with the tedious study and infinite toyle and labour. (Hanmer 1577: iiiii v)

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- Bishop of Caesarea in Palaestina VVrote 10 Bookes. Socrates Scholasticus of Constantinople VVrote 7 Bookes. Euagrius Scholasticus of Antioch VVrote 6 Bookes. VVhereunto is Annexed Dorotheus Bishop of Tyrus, of the Liues of the Prophetes, Apostles and 70 Disciples. All Which Authors are Faithfully Translated out of the Greeke Tongue by Meredith Hanmer, Maister of Arte and Student in Diuinitie. Last of All Herein is Contayned a Profitable Chronographie Collected by the Sayd Translator, the Title Whereof is to Be Seene in the Ende of this Volume, with a Copious Index of the Principall Matters throughout all the Histories. By Thomas Vautroullier dwelling in the Blackefriers by Ludgate. London.*
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