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Research article

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WHO'S AFRAID OF GENDERFLUID TURTLES?

Gender Trouble with Translating Medieval Animal Stories

In the Old Indian fable collection *Panchatantra* (Eng. *The Five Treaties*), composed by an unknown person at least 2000 years ago, a philosopher promises to answer a series of questions on ethics and governance that were besetting the mind of a king. His answers took the shape of entertaining stories whose main protagonists were animals, although humans appeared occasionally as well. Since those answers were of interest not only to kings and people understanding Sanskrit, the *Panchatantra* soon spread across the globe. As a text, it has been developing, adjusting, and expanding on its journey through different cultures and languages.

The process of translation literally led to a multiplication of the text of *Panchatantra*, thus exemplifying what Matthew Reynolds designates as prismatic translation. For Reynolds, accepting the fact that "translation breeds translation" would mean changing the field's dominant metaphor:

> [Translation] would no longer be a 'channel' between one language and another, but rather a 'prism.' It would be seen as opening up the plural signifying potential of the source text and spreading it into multiple versions, each continuous with the source though different from it, and related to other versions though different from them too.[1]

Tracing back the *Panchatantra's* circulation in an ever-expanding web of translations has already been attempted by Franklin Edgerton, showing that the reconstruction of an 'Ur-Text' is entirely impossible.[2] From the perspective of translation studies, a more insightful approach than an 'Ur-Text' reconstruction could be an observation of how a single aspect is translated in a single branch of the text. Our aim in this article, therefore, is to look at the various strategies used to tackle the challenge of translating gender as a grammatical and social phenomenon in translations of the still actively translated Byzantine Greek *Panchatantra* branch, spanning the eleventh to the twenty-first century.

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The westward journey of the *Panchatantra* has been a long one (fig.1).[3] Originally, it consisted of five animal stories that were trying to answer questions about true friendship (lion and bull, the ringdove), vanquishing a superior foe (the war of owls and crows), collaborating with an enemy (mouse and cat), and the price of hastiness (the ascetic and his weasel). Translated around the year 570 CE into Middle Persian by Burzoe, who also added further stories from different Indian sources like the Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata*, it gained popularity. It was rendered into Arabic before 756/759 CE by the Persian Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ who named it *Kalila and Dimna* (*KwD*), after the main characters.[4] In the eleventh century, Symeon Seth from Antioch translated it into Greek, translating the protagonists' names and the title as *Stephanites and Ichnelates* (*SkI*). Symeon Seth, however, translated only a part: 8 out of 15 books.[5] On Mount Athos, *SkI* was translated, with minor additions, into Old Slavonic as *Stefanid and Ihnilat* in the 13th century. Tomislav Jovanović translated that version in 1999 into Serbian as *Stefanit and Ihnilat*. Around the time of the Old Slavonic translation, a Sicilian scholar, Eugenius of Palermo, decided to add the missing seven books to Symeon Seth's text from the Arabic sources.[6] This extended Greek version was then translated into English by Alison Noble in 2022 as *Animal Fables of the Courtly Mediterranean*. We chose to examine this branch because it demonstrates well the complexity of the text's translation history, and showcases different strategies of translating gender in a time span of 900 years within the 'same' material.

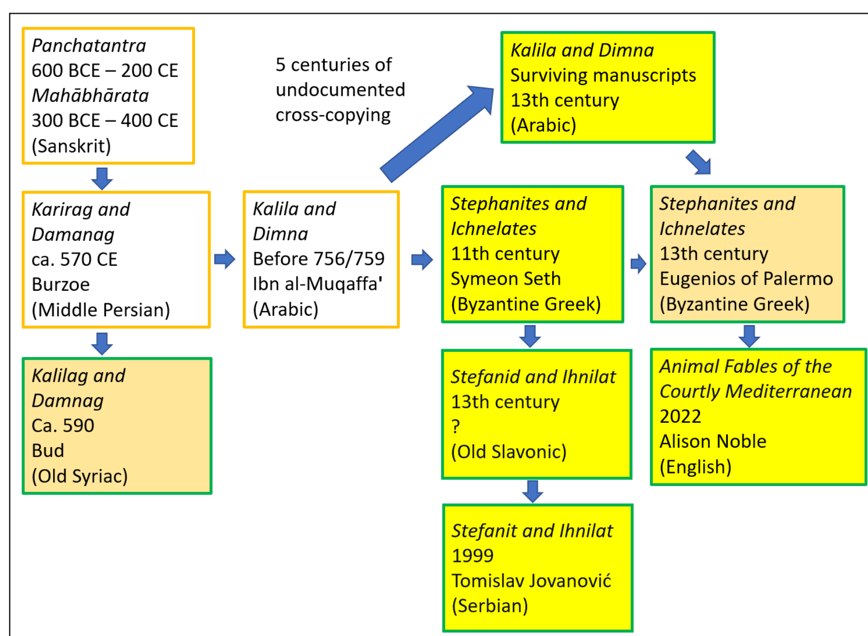

Figure 1. The Westward Journey of Panchatantra, 600 BCE – 2022 CE

As medieval texts vary from one manuscript to another even inside a single linguistic community, it is impossible to know if the exact manuscript that the first Greek translator had an insight into survives. The closest we can get is conjecturing the proximity of the Greek text with the surviving Arabic manuscripts. Similarly, there is not one 'Greek' version of the text, but at least two recensions, made centuries apart. And we have no way of knowing how close the Slavonic version available to us is to the first Slavonic translation from the Greek. Despite having more information on some translators or manuscripts, any analysis on contextual grounds would therefore be if not entirely conjectural, then at least heavily unequal. Which historical reality would we turn to for causes of alterations in a new linguistic version: the one of the scribe of the lost source-language manuscript, the one of the author of the oldest conjectured target language manuscript, or all the ones of all the scribes between those version and the ones we have?

In an attempt to circumvent the contextual complexities and lacunae of *Panchatantra*'s long history, grasping for notions such as 'Arabic medieval mentalities' or 'the Middle Byzantine court culture' are too generalized to be useful. Furthermore, none of these scribes and translators believably aspired to write a representation of theirs or anyone else's reality. While some 'domestication' of the meaning of the text might have taken place, *Panchatantra* remained a didactic and imaginative composition containing narratives on distant lands, strange characters and unbelievable events.[7] The only context that it would partially make sense to conjure for interpretation, is that of what it meant to translate in a given period.

Rather than hypothesizing about the contexts the different translations of *Panchatantra* sprang from or represented, we prefer focusing on texts themselves and the worlds that the translations created. More pointedly, we are interested in the strategies employed by the text's translators for navigating the untranslatability of characters' gender, on the intersection of grammatical, social, political and 'natural' categories. The authors and translators of the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, above all Barbara Cassin and Emily Apter, define the untranslatable as "not that which we do not translate but that which we do not cease – not – translating."[8] They argue that the transposition of concepts that cannot be unproblematically rendered in another language does not preclude the transfer of meaning, but keeps creating new meanings over and over again. The generative locus of new meanings is the Derridian deconstructive aporia, the "quilting point" or the "nub of conceptual opacity."[9] In our particular case, the aporia is located in specific historical moments when past translators of *Panchatantra* found themselves lacking in target language the networks of signification between the grammatical, social and political aspects of gender that would be deemed identical to the ones of the source language. In those moments they became interpreters in the double sense of the word. In this article, we focus on the choices of resignification the translators made, as well as the consequences of those choices for the narratives they produced and their potential performative imprint onto the world they lived in.

Grammatical gender is a notoriously complex category. While its (non)existence and variability across languages is readily acknowledged, questions of its arbitrariness or semantic rootedness, spatiotemporal contingency or naturality are often either disputed or avoided. Generally speaking, the grammatical gender of inanimate objects poses no particular problem, and the human grammatical gender ends up being too

easily aligned with the socially-shaped category of biological sex – or else consciously deconstructed.[10] But animals present us with a controversial middle ground. In order to capture the elusive grammatical gender of animals, linguists speak of epicenes (words of any grammatical gender, which dictate the gender of the surrounding words and allegedly do not imply the gender of their referent) and common-gendered words (whose grammatical gender can be modified by the surrounding words to fit the gender of the referent). These categories could be helpful but they imply the existence, the precedence and the verifiability of the gender of the referent, often referred to as 'sex'. An excellent example of this are the diligent studies of Cristiana Franco, who examines anthropological aspects of the animal gender in ancient Greek literature, with focus on Artemidorus' *Interpretation of dreams*. While her surveys are valuable, parts of Franco's interpretation are undermined by a lack of engagement with gender theory and the uncritical adoption and projection of binary human 'sex' and monogamous, reproductive, heterosexual relationality onto animals. This leads to a neglect of the effect that diverse (non-heterosexual, perverse) sexual practices and anxieties of cross-racial miscegenation and hybridization have on the production of human gender.[11] Conversely, we see human gender not as inherent and essential but as performative – that is, as being permanently produced through normative, citational practices and societal interactions that are tightly intertwined with human sexuality and relationality – and the grammatical gender of narrated animals as indelibly linked to the construction of gender as a social categorization of humans.[12]

The animal heroes in the stories analyzed below, being mirrors of human behavior without ever fully becoming human, present us with examples of how human gender constructs are materialized in animal characters and narrated in diversely gendered languages. By comparing five linguistic versions of three stories from the *Panchatantra*, we offer case studies of the historical shifts in conceptions of gender and animality as grammatical, social and political categories, focusing in particular on the translators' strategies for dealing with the untranslatability of gender and the aporia it creates. While avoiding the pitfalls of either severing the linguistic gender from the human or animal sexuality or stitching them together by threads of 'nature', we choose to query the tension in the intersection of gender, sexuality, animality and sociality. And importantly, we argue that the continued (mis)translation of those untranslatable gender tensions gives the narratives we read both normative and worldbuilding power. That is why we choose to mobilize philology, narratology, translation studies and gender theory in order to analyze the multilayered animal genders in these narratives – not as words reflecting or representing genders that simply 'are', but as stories that continuously shaped gender across languages and cultures.[13]

Querying the linguistic differences of gender, we compare stories of selected characters from three different fables in Greek **(G)**, English **(E)**, Old Slavonic **(O)**, and Serbian **(S)** versions, while also looking at the Arabic source text *Kalila and Dimnah*.[14] Although the question of Symeon Seth's Arabic source text of *KwD* still needs more detailed research, it appears that it belonged to the so-called London continuum.[15] Each section will start with an account of the manuscript London Or. 4044 (L4044) to provide an impression of what a 'source text' for the Greek translation might have looked like. Symeon Seth follows the structure of the manuscript but cuts varying amounts of text, streamlining it into a quicker read.

The three chosen stories each show very different situations in which translating gender creates new meanings. First, the story of the lion king's mother fighting an evil conspirator presents shifting meanings of an individual's gender in a political court setting; second, the story of the war between owls and crows contrasts the gender of groups and individuals in and out of court settings; and third, the story of the monkey and the turtles offers a view of the gender shifts of individuals engaged in cohabitation and intimate friendship. In each of these cases, gender aporia is resolved in a different way, pertaining to how political aspects overshadow those of animality, how collectivity is conceptualized, and how gender fluidity springs out of concerns of intersecting species and gender difference. Arguably the way these scenarios are handled by different translators in various cultures in a time span of 900 years establish the *Panchatantra* as a perfect test case for the performativity of *both* gender *and* translation. Accordingly, our main focus will be on the historical shifts of gender as grammatical, social and political categories, through an inductive analysis of the four selected translations and the way the translators managed the aporetic situations of the dissonance between different aspects of the grammatical gender, animal sociality and human institutions.

The Lion's Mother

Our first example is the story about the lion king's mother, from the second book written by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ. In the events of the first book, the evil jackal – called Dimnah in Arabic, Ichnelates in Greek – managed to sow distrust between the lion king and his closest friend and advisor, the bull. In the *Panchatantra*, their story ends with the lion killing the bull and honoring the treacherous Dimnah for his loyalty. Apparently, this ending inspired Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ to avenge the murdered bull in his continuation of the story by taking Dimnah to court and sentencing him to death at the end of the second book. In the attempt to bring the villain of the first book to justice, the lion is encouraged by his mother to put Dimnah/Ichnelates on trial and convict him for plotting the bull's murder. Significantly, translations avoid using a word for 'female lion' when designating the king's mother, thus emphasizing her role as queen-dowager and mother at the cost of her animality.

In the case of the lion king's mother, the first passage quoted below is translated nearly word for word from the probable Arabic source text. In both linguistic versions, the character is referred to as 'the lion's mother' whenever she speaks, avoiding the word for 'lioness', admittedly rare in Greek.[16] Compared to *KwD*, Symeon Seth alters the second part of the story significantly. In L4044, Dimnah/Ichnelates is convicted due to the testimony of two independent witnesses who overheard his confession of plotting the bull's death. In *KwD*, justice and law prevail against an evil scheme, with the lion's mother and her son as the main forces in their enactment.

In *SkI*, Ichnelates is more careful with his confessions, so the court cannot prove his guilt. To reestablish justice, the lion king orders an extrajudicial killing of Ichnelates in prison. Accordingly, the story turns into an example of what to do when law and justice fail to convict evil. In her short and decisive speech, the lion's mother warns her son that Ichnelates will turn into a bad example for others to attempt the same, jeopardizing the state. From an intercessor between the leopard and the king, she turns

into an active, protective force of the state, instigating the ruler to use his royal power to eliminate the threat. In this regard, she is more than just the lion's mother; she is the mother and protectress of the kingdom itself. Nevertheless, both stories result in Ichnelates' death, with the lion's mother as the driving force behind his trial and punishment. Her function as a character remains stable despite the significant changes in the Greek translation.

(G1) καὶ ἀκούσας τούτων εἰσῆλθε πρὸς τὴν μητέρα τοῦ λέοντος καὶ ἀνήγγειλεν αὐτῇ, ὅσα ἀκήκοεν. (191)

And after hearing these things, he [the leopard] went to the lion's mother and told her what he had heard.

(G2) ἡ δὲ τοῦ λέοντος μήτηρ ἔφη (191)

The mother of the lion said:

(G3) μετὰ δὲ τὸ φρουρηθῆναι τοῦτον καθωμολόγησε τῷ λέοντι ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ τὸν εἰπόντα καὶ ὡς λεοντόπαρδος ἦν. (195)

After he [Ichnelates] was detained, the lion was confessed to by his mother what had been said and that it was the leopard.

(G4) ἰδὼν οὖν ὁ λέων τὴν ἔνστασιν τῆς ἰδίας μητρὸς προσέταξε τὸν Ἰχνηλάτην ἀναιρεθῆναι. (200)

Seeing the resolution of his own mother, the lion ordered Ichnelates to be killed.

The examples quoted above consistently name the character as 'the lion's mother' (G1, G2). Only when the focalization shifts to the lion, is she called 'his own mother' (G3, G4). Nevertheless, why would *SkI* keep this complicated character naming found in *KwD*? Possibly since it emphasizes the character's function as a king's mother, linking her to the ruler's power and influence. As such, it is a good example of the consequences of the deconstructive aporia for translation. The mother of the lion is the only character legible as 'female' in the story. Still, the supposed referent of her grammatical gender, that is, her animal sex(uality), is suppressed in favor of the familial and political. Through translation and narrative strategies, the tension between the 'natural' and socio-political aspects of gender leaves its trace on the lexical choices: there is no place for a 'lioness' at the court or in this story, and accordingly both her sexuality, and her animality had to give way to her political role. And even though the trace of 'sexual difference' between her and her son is thus erased, she still does not become a universally masculine 'lion counselor.' Although 'mother' could imply her past status as a female and potentially sexual character, her function as caretaker and protectress of the state becomes crucial when the first two episodes describe her acting in an official setting on her political power (G1, G2).

A near contemporary translated text could serve as a useful comparison here. The *Martyrdom of Saint Michael* was translated from Georgian into Greek and incorporated into the extensive *Life of Saint Theodore of Edessa*, in the eleventh century on Mount Athos. In a scene set in Jerusalem, a young and handsome monk is preyed upon by the lustful wife of a sultan. The Georgian text has the wolf enter the heart of the woman at the sight of the innocent lamb, spurring her to corrupt him. The Greek text transforms the woman into a "a bitter lioness."[17] There seems to be a definite conflation of sexuality and animality associated with the term 'lioness' in the court setting, both of which are suppressed by the circumlocution "the lion's mother."

Symeon Seth's translation also introduces a slight change of perspective compared to *KwD*. The king's mother's character is designated as "his mother" (G3), stressing the scene's intimacy, when the other characters are gone. While remaining king and queen mother, their interaction evokes a familial secret-sharing setting. This is especially important since the lion's mother promised not to reveal the identity of the leopard. While she asks for the leopard's consent first in *KwD*, the family bonds in *SkI* outweigh the promise to a non-relative.[18] The same function is repeated in the final passage (G4), where her display of resolution convinces the lion. Although she speaks in court (SkI II, 200), the effect she has on the lion is largely due to her being "his own mother." Ichnelates is sentenced to death because her political and familial influence, united, convince the king.

Accordingly, the focus on mother's status as *mother* overtakes her classification as an animal. The text never refers to her as a lioness and assuming she would be one just because her son is a lion would already be unfounded in this narrative setting. Her gender is not determined by her animal nature or species. The story neglects her animal-ness, letting her position within family and politics define her gender. In other words, although "the lion king's mother" opens up for a plurality of implications like "female", "mother", "romantic/sexual relationship with the former king", "lioness", "queen dowager" and more, the story reduces its ambiguity by only narrating her familial and political characteristics.[19] Therefore, the narration's focus and the selection of words signifying a character become tools to shape a character's gender.

(E1) When the leopard heard this, he went to the lion's mother and told her what he had heard. (171)

(E2) The lion's mother said (173, 183) His mother said (173)

(E3) And after Ichnelates had been bound and imprisoned, the lion's mother confessed to him that it was the leopard who had spoken to her. (183)

(E4) When the lion understood his mother's position, he gave orders to one of his officers for Ichnelates to be killed. (195)

As can be seen by comparing Noble's English translation to our translation of Symeon Seth's Greek text above, the quoted examples are very close. Symeon Seth's abridged version of *KwD* was copied and filled in with additional material from Arabic sources to create the thirteenth-century Eugenian version, and there is an almost complete overlap

between the versions of this story. Therefore, the mother's position as the protectress of the lion king and the state and her role in Ichnelates' death remain the same.

The Eugenian *SkI* also adds no material containing the lion's mother asking the leopard for consent to reveal his identity, showing that the later extension of Symeon Seth's version continues to put family bonds before promises to unrelated characters. Similarly, the lion's mother's courtly female-ness and position as queen mother still take precedent over her animality.

(O1) Сїа же {слышавь} леѡндопардѡсь и ѹразѹме вса по дробнѹ, и въшьдь къ матери львове сказа ен вса елика слыша (283)

(S1) Кад ово чу, леопард схвати све подробно, и ушавши ка матери лавовој, исприча јој све што чу. (176)

When the leopard heard this, he understood it all thoroughly. Entering to the lion's mother, he told her everything he heard.

(O2) Львова же мати рече: (283)

(S2) А лавова мати рече: (176)

And the lion's mother said:

(O3) И по ѡковани его исповѣда львѹ мати его: ꙗко лѣѡндопардось сказа ми ꙗже о Ихнилате. (285)

(S3) И по окивању његову, рече лаву мати његова: 'Леопард ми исприча о Ихнилату.' (178)

After he was chained, the lion's mother told the lion: 'The leopard told me about Ichnilates.'

(O4) Видѣвь ѹбо львь насилїе матере своe, повѣле ꙗко да ѹбїють и погѹбеть Ихнилата. (288)

(S4) Видевши лав наваљивање своје мајке, заповеди да убију и погубе Ихнилата.

Seeing his mother's violence [**S**: insistence],[20] he ordered for Ichnilates to be killed and executed.

The Old Slavonic text follows Symeon Seth's *SkI* closely for the most part. The character in question is consistently referred to as the "lion's mother." Equally, the modern Serbian translation is close to the Old Slavonic one, signaling the text's antiquity to modern readers with archaizations. Still, a certain ambiguity of the lion's mother's character is stronger in the Old Slavonic. During Ichnilates's trial, most of the judges

succumb to his convincing rhetoric and mesmerizing narratives, leaving them unable to convict him. At one instance, Ichnilates's gendered and sexist rhetoric directly target the lion's mother, advocating for steadfast gender roles and inducing a brief self-doubt in her. But when all the existing male verbal instruments fail to convict Ichnelates, she still insists on his execution. While the other versions speak of her resolution, position or insistence, in Slavonic, the lion sees her "violence." The Serbian translator seems to go back to the Greek, rather than his source text. This underlines the ambiguity of her position: even though her belief does not seem to ensue from discursive rationality, it turns out to be both in accordance with the reality available to the reader, and salvific for the son she protects.

The comparison of these five languages shows how even slight changes, resulting from the tension emerging in attempts to translate gender, alter the lion's mother's character. While her lexical designations remain translatable across languages, her narrative positions change. In *KwD*, she is an ally of institutional justice, inspiring the lion king to punish Ichnelates and keeping her promises to her subjects like the leopard. This delicate position of an intercessor changes starting from *SkI*, where her familial bonds outweigh other commitments and she is more active. She becomes a motherly, extralegal, protective force for the state and the king against the disruptive potential of Ichnelates. Neither text questions her position in the court; in *KwD*, the king is even absent from the trial and informed about it by his mother in a way that incites his emotional reaction. Although, from *SkI* onwards, the lion king presides over the trial, both texts agree that his mother's insistence and resolution get Ichnelates executed.

In the Old Slavonic, the mother's readiness to kill Ichnelates is named "violence." This violence is a necessary evil to protect the state, being directed against the disruptive force but also against the law that would exonerate Ichnelates. Although the Serbian translation softens the tone, her transformation from a caring court intercessor into a resolute decision-maker is completed, while her gender's irrationality and violence are narratively transformed into truth and justice, refuting her opponent's views on gender roles. She turns from an important supporting character to a protagonist. Finally, all the texts continue to refer to the character as the lion's mother. Her species remains an assumption, with the emphasis on her familial and political practices, making clear her gender does not originate in nature but springs from those practices.

The Owls and the Crows

In book number four of *Panchatantra*, a longstanding war between the owls and the crows is resolved through the feats of a crow spy. The events of the story tell that a crow once insulted an owl in public and thus prevented the owl from becoming king of all birds. After this, owls and crows have been caught in an ongoing strife. In the present time of the story, the crows are on the verge of losing after a night raid from the owls. Following the advice of his clever minister, the crow king sends said minister as a spy. The owl king falls for the spy's deception because he ignores the warnings of his minister. When the crow spy returns with his intel on the enemy, the crow king successfully annihilates all the owls. Interestingly, the story of the owls introduces different grammatical genders for the birds outside of the court, while the individual owl ministers and their king have to be male in the court setting.

Since Symeon Seth keeps the same structure for the owl-crow chapter, *KwD* is easily comparable to *SkI*. Although the two benevolent owl ministers are fused into one in *SkI*, the remaining characters provide enough comparison material. The main differences between *KwD* and *SkI* stem from *SkI* removing nearly every embedded story except one, leading to a more straightforward narration.

Overall, the Arabic in L4044 pursues a similar strategy for the owls as it did for the lion's mother. Since the Arabic word for owl, *buma* (بُومَة), is feminine, their male king is continuously called "the owls' king." This wording avoids mistaking him for a queen or the king of crows. The owls themselves remain feminine whilst in a group or during simple tasks like carrying messages. When the owl ministers are mentioned, the word owl is left out altogether, emphasizing the male-ness of the owl courtiers.[21] Much like "the lion's mother," the way that the story is told creates the court as an all-male social and political setting, where the grammatically feminine 'owls' become an inadmissible species designation. The Arabic text translates its own grammatically female characters into a culturally acceptable male equivalent by using strategies of either avoidance or specification of the term 'owl'.

(G5) νυκτὸς δὲ αἱ γλαῦκες ἐπὶ τὸ δένδρον παραγενόμεναι οὐκ εἶδόν τινα ἐν αὐτῷ εἰ μὴ τὸν τυφθέντα κόρακα κείμενον, καὶ ἀνήγγειλαν τοῦτο τῷ οἰκείῳ αὐτῶν βασιλεῖ. (221)

At night, as the owls came to the tree and they saw no one but the wounded crow lying there, and they reported this to their own king.

(G6) ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ βασιλεὺς εἶπε πρός τινα τῶν πρωτοσυμβούλων αὐτοῦ·(222)

Hearing this, the king said to some of his councilors:

(G7) ἕτερος δέ τις τῶν τοῦ βασιλέως συμβούλων ὑπολαβὼν εἶπεν (222–223)

But another one of the king's counselors said

(G8) ὁ δὲ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν τούτου συναινέσας ἔφη (223)

He who advised the destruction [of the crow] said

(G9) ἤρξατο οὖν ὁ κόραξ ταῖς γλαυξὶ προσομιλεῖν καταμόνας καὶ οἰκειοῦσθαι ταύταις καὶ φιλιοῦσθαι. (223)

The crow began to converse alone with the owls and live with them and befriend them.

(G10) μοχθηρὰν καὶ πονηρὰν καὶ ἀνώμαλον καὶ ἄτακτον καὶ τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτὸν ὁμοίους αὐτῷ ἐκτὸς μόνου τοῦ τὴν ἀναίρεσίν μου συμβουλεύσαντος. οὗτος γὰρ πάντων συνετώτερος ὤφθη. (227)

[The owl king's way of life] was wretched, wicked, unruly and undisciplined and his subjects were the same as him, except only the one advising my destruction. He of all can be considered clever.

Like in Arabic, 'owl' is grammatically feminine in Greek. Probably for that reason, *SkI* adopts the same strategies when referring to the owls as a group or in court. In court, the owl king is only called "the king" (G5, G6, G7), whereas his councilors remain gender neutral since the Greek genitive allows it (G6). Only when the councilors present their individual opinions are they revealed as male, while their animal species is no longer mentioned (G7, G8, G10).

However, appearing as a group, the owls revert into feminine owls that attack the grammatically male crows and are later on tricked by the male spy crow (G5, G9). It becomes apparent that, like for the lion's mother, gender is essential in a court setting and can become a challenge for the translator when a tension appears between the grammatical gender and the projected social and political categories. A host of female owls attacking the crows and a group of female owls conversing with a crow remain female. In contrast, a court setting requires creative solutions for gendering the characters. Again, like the lion's mother's female gender is more important than what animal she is, the owl-ness of the owl characters seems to diminish in the face of a political setting. The crows, on the contrary, appear as an all-male society, both in individual and in collective emanations.

(E5) That night, when the owls arrived at the tree, they saw no one in it, only the crow which had been beaten and was lying there, and they reported this to their own king. (251)

(E6) Hearing this, the king of the owls said to one of his chief counselors (253)

(E7) Another of the owl king's chief counselors said (255)

(E8) But the one who favored killing him said (263)

(E9) the crow began talking to the owls individually, making them his friends and endearing himself to them. (263)

(E10) Wretched, wicked, disorderly, and undisciplined, and his subordinates were like him, with the sole exception of the one who advised that I should be killed. Rather, he seemed to me more intelligent than all the others. [slight differences in the Greek] (273)

While the later Greek and its modern English translation still follow Symeon Seth's version closely, the lack of gendered nouns in English comes into play. The difference between the female owl collective and male political positions at the owl court is thus not reflected in English. Accordingly, the male gender of individual owl characters spills over to the collective and neutral "they" in English, implying either an all-male society, or a one where female owls are invisible. As a result, the tension between the group's female gender and the single owl's male gender disappears by default.

(O5) Ноштїю же виплювви кь дрѣвѹ прїдоше, и не обрѣтоше никогоже, тьчїю бїенаго гаврана лежешта. И сказахѹ виплюєви своемѹ царѹ (296)

(S5) Ноћу дођоше сове до дрвета и нађоше никога осим претученога гаврана како лежи. И испричаху сове свом цару. (186)

In the night the owls came to the tree and found no one except for the beaten raven lying on the ground. They told it to their emperor.

(O6) Сїа слышавь царь рече къ некоемᲂу ѡть прьвосъвѣтникь своихь (297)

(S6) Чувши ово, цар рече некоме од првосаветника својих: (187)

Hearing this, the emperor said to one of first councilors:

(O7) Дрᲂуги же нетко ѡть съвѣтникь царевехь рече: (297)

(S7) Неки други саветник рече: (187)

Some other councilor said:

(O8) прьвосъвѣтникь же онь иже о ᲂубїени его съвѣтовавїи (297)

(S8) А првосаветник онај, који саветоваше да се убије, рече: (187)

And that first councilor who advised for him to be killed:

(O9) И начеть ᲂубо гаврань съ виплѥви бѣседовати не едние и любити се с ними. (297)

(S9) И поче, дакле, гавран разговарати са совама не једанпут и зближавати се са њима.

So, the raven started conversing with owls not once and they started loving each other [**S**: getting close to them].

(O10) Скотьско ѥсть и лᲂукаво и негладько и безчиньно. и иже подь нымь подобнїи сᲂуть емᲂу тьчїю единого на ᲂубїенїе мое съвѣтовави; ть ᲂубо ѡть вьсехь ꙗви ми се мᲂудрѣнши (298)

(S10) ‘Скотски, и лукаво, и неудобно и неуредно. И они који су му потчињени слични су му, осим једног који саветоваше да ме убију. Он ми се од свих учини мудрији.’ (188)

Cattle-like and cunning and uncomfortable and without rank. And his subordinates are like him, except for the one who advised my killing. He appeared wiser than all to me.

The Old Slavonic uses a seemingly rare, masculine word for owls. The ornithological vocabulary is uncertain, but the Greek seems to use the same word for crows and ravens, and the Slavonic translator choses the latter ones as heroes. In any case, the Slavonic text makes both bird species and all individuals masculine, avoiding the Greek gender-bending. In modern Serbian, however, crows and owls are feminine, while

ravens are masculine. This is particularly interesting, since not only do we know the names of modern translators, but we can also presume their approach to translation of medieval texts as being a diligent scholarly endeavor that makes materials from the past accessible to experts and laypeople of the present. Being given multiple possible combinations, Tomislav Jovanović pits the feminine owls against the masculine ravens. Thus, he circumvents the gender scenario of the Slavonic text and re-establishes the hierarchy of *SkI*, where all crows/ravens are masculine, while owls are feminine as a collective but masculine in their individual roles as a king and advisers. This solution produces renditions that although grammatically incongruous, apparently are tolerable for the translator, such as: "Of all the owls (f), I have not seen a single (f) rational (f) one (f), except the one (m) who advised them to kill me."[22] Furthermore, the Serbian translation replaces "love" between the masculine owls and the masculine raven spy from the Slavonic version with a less affective "closeness." It also paradoxically establishes female as the norm in the owl society. Regardless of individuals of power or intellect performing masculinity, when the owl army attacks the ravens, they are gendered female in their collectivity.

As comparing various languages shows, in three out of five languages the owls face similar but inversed gender troubles as in the example of the lion's mother. Greek and Arabic use the same strategy to work their way around the grammatically female owls by focusing on the owls' offices, or by calling them "subjects" of the owl king (G10) to avoid the female gender. The Serbian translation exhibits similar difficulties but overrides its source, being less reluctant to have collective female and individual male characters. The owls remain a feminine group whereas the only clever owl is singled out as masculine. This rendition does not only revers the usual 'generic masculine' when referring to a group of a single masculine and even countless feminine nouns, but creates a productive tension in translation. Thus, while the gender tension in the story of the lion's mother came from the interaction between two individual characters, here it originates from the gender difference between the individual and the collective. In the case of Old Slavonic, the whole situation is solved by choosing a masculine word for owl and avoiding any gender confusion. The king is furthermore referred to without stating his species, which leads to his owl-ness becoming a marginal fact. English avoids the issue by the grace of not being gendered beyond pronouns. The pronouns tacitly follow *SkI* when they appear. But in consequence, these two versions produce an all-male warrior society.

The point of tension in translating the story of the owls and the crows lies in the clash between the social or communal aspects of gender on the one hand, and the idea that the grammatical gender of a textual animal can be verified against a real or an ideal referent on the other. It thereby connects to wider issues of the representations of animals in late-capitalist Western popular culture, which have been criticized for their bourgeois, Christian undertones and the imposition of notions of monogamous, heterosexual, reproduction-oriented animality; an imposition that ultimately provides basis for a stable gender binary and obscures diversity of animal communality and cooperation.[23] The translators of the story of owls and crows had to retell a tale of grammatically gendered characters who were organized in radically non-reproductive and collaborative social structures. The owls and the crows fight for survival in the present through communal care and cooperation and with a complete disregard of

reproductive futurity. As such, they open a space for deconstructive aporia that all four translators bring to diverse closures. Their translation strategies result in the multiplication of ways gender relates to their sociality: either one or both flocks being universally male, reversed gender relations between the source and the target texts, the suppression of 'love' as a part of communal care between the owls and the undercover crow from the Slavonic version in its Serbian translation.

The Turtles and the Monkey

In the book number five, an exiled monkey king uses figs to build a close relationship with a turtle who promptly stays with the monkey and forgets about the companion at home. Out of grief, the turtle's companion feigns illness curable only by eating a monkey's heart. The monkey's friend tries to lure the monkey into a trap by inviting him for a visit on the turtles' island. Since the monkey cannot swim, the turtle intends to drown him in the lake, but a moment of moral hesitation on the turtles' side and the monkey's wisdom let the monkey escape into the safety of the trees.

The main points and the ending of the turtles-monkey story overlap in *KwD* and *SkI*, but Symeon Seth introduces significant changes. Whereas *SkI* only has the bare minimum of characters – the monkey and the two turtles – L4044 has an additional female friend of the abandoned turtle and mentions the turtle's and the monkey's families and children.

KwD is very clear in the distribution of gender roles. The male turtle interacts with the male monkey, whereas the turtle's wife is grieving at home, supported by her female friend of an unknown species. Interestingly, L4044 choses the Arabic term for a female turtle (سلحفاة - sulhufa) for the husband, despite an existing word for male turtle. Yet, the grammatical female gender of *sulhufa* is suppressed in the case of the male turtle character by masculine verb conjugation, pronouns, and adjectives, and by him being called "husband."[24] In this way, the turtle's male gender can be identified without additional explanation, turning the *sulhufa* more into a sort of a character's name rather than a common noun. The turtle's wife, however, is referred to as female, in agreement with the grammatical gender. The tension between the social (that is, marital) and grammatical gender leads to grammatically unusual sentences requiring attentive reading.

Furthermore, the way that the friendship between the monkey and the turtle is told implies a potential erotic or romantic relationship that transcends species differences and endangers the heterosexual relationship with the turtle-wife. Both the monkey and the male turtle long for each other and profess their love on multiple occasions. Additional misogynistic remarks stage the turtle-wife and her female friend as disruptive factors harming the preferable bond between the male characters.[25] From a different perspective, however, the story could prove the superiority of female friendship based on true concern for each other, which easily manages to destroy the superficial bond between the two male characters who depend solely on each other for the satisfaction of needs and desires.

(G11) μιᾷ δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐσθίοντι πέπτωκε τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ μία συκῆ, ἣν ἅρασα ἡ χελώνη ἔφαγεν, ἐφ' ᾧ ὁ πίθηξ γελάσας οὐ διέλιπε τὴν χελώνην

συκίζων. ἡ δὲ ἡδυτάτην εὐροῦσα τροφὴν τῆς οἰκίας ἐπελάθετο·καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἡ σύζυγος αὐτῆς ἀθυμοῦσα ἦν τὰ μέγιστα καὶ πόρον ἐζήτει, δι᾽ οὗ τὸν πίθηκα ἀπολέσει καὶ τὸν σύζυγον ἀπολήψεται. (228)

One day while eating, one of the figs fell out of the [monkey's] hand. Picking it up, a turtle ate it, which made the monkey laugh and he did not cease [to give] figs to the turtle. Having found very sweet fruit she forgot about home and because of this her wife became disheartened greatly and searched for a path through which the monkey might be destroyed and she would receive back the husband.

(G12) μιᾷ δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἡ χελώνη οἴκαδε ἀπιοῦσα καὶ περίλυπον τὸν σύζυγον ἰδοῦσα εἶπε πρὸς αὐτόν· τί ὅτι σκυθρωπὸν ὁρῶ σε καὶ νοσερόν; ἡ δὲ εἶπε· νόσῳ δεινῇ περιέπεσονκαὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἴασιν εὑρεῖν, εἰ μή γε καρδίᾳ πίθηκος χρήσομαι. ὁ δὲ ἀπορήσας καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν διελογίζετο τὴν τοῦ ζητουμένου δυσχέρειαν καὶ ὡς οὐχ ἑτέραν καρδίαν εὑρήσει εἰ μή γε τὴν τοῦ ἑταίρου αὐτῆς. (228–229)

One day, the turtle went home and seeing the husband very sad she said to him: "Why do I see you so gloomy and sick?" She said: "I have become terribly sick and there is no other cure but a monkey's heart." Confused, he reasoned with himself about the difficulty he found himself in and how there was no other heart to be found but her companion's.

The most striking aspect of the quoted passages is how both turtles switch their gender even within the same sentence, making it hard to follow the story if one relies on their gender to distinguish between the characters. The fig turtle starts as a female and has a wife at home. The Greek uses a term that is gender neutral, like 'partner', but becomes gendered through the use of masculine or feminine articles. However, this article changes mid-sentence for the fig turtle, turning "her" into a "husband" (G11). In the continuation, the fig turtle reverts to being female, asking the now male home turtle about his wellbeing. The home turtle turns female again, when she replies (G12). After the dialogue, the fig turtle has become male yet again, but switches to female by the end of the sentence (G12).

SkI varies significantly from the distinctive gender roles taken on in *KwD*. Despite this, technically speaking *KwD* is probably the source of *SkI*'s genderfluidity. Although L4044 is only a variant of the manuscript used for Symeon Seth's translation, it can be assumed that the source text must have used a similar strategy in depicting the male turtle. It combined the grammatically female noun with incongruent masculine pronouns and verbs in Arabic. With *SkI*'s translational cuts and edits, it was probably even harder to trace the gender of each turtle. *SkI* also lacks misogynist remarks and the home turtle's female-friend character, providing the chance for even more ambiguity since no turtle is distinctively female. Additionally, Greek manuscript variations of *SkI* offer different gender discrepancies but in an equally genderfluid manner, implying that this could not have been a mistake of a single manuscript or a branch of them.[26]

These observations agree with the impression from the other two cases we've examined, where the gender attribution was generated by the political setting or a type

of sociality. In the story that lacks apparent political structures or a wider community, the grammatical gender seems to be randomized. This could have been the product of a tension between the social gender in a common household and implications of interspecies intimacies. Remarkably, the apparent turtles' gender fluidity did not irritate most Byzantine readers and copyists. The gender fluidity might also stem from the use of animal protagonists. As the previous story exemplified, and as the below linguistic versions will show, the medieval narrative engagement with the animal world seemed to be going well beyond the modern heteronormative imagination.

(E11) One day, as he was eating, a fig fell from his hand, which a male turtle took and ate. The ape laughed happily at this and carried on fattening the turtle with figs. As the turtle found the food very sweet, he forgot about his own home and, because of this, his wife became very depressed and sought a means by which she could get rid of the ape and get her husband back. (277-279)

(E12) One day, when the turtle returned home, he found his wife looking very sad, and he said to her, "Why do I see you looking miserable and sick?" And his wife said to him, "Poor me, I've caught a terrible sickness, and there's no cure to be found for me, unless I eat an ape's heart, just as the physicians told me." Her husband was quite at a loss, for he was pondering the difficulty of getting what was being sought, as he would not find any heart other than that of his companion.

The genderfluidity of the turtles is reduced in some of the manuscripts that Noble uses for her edition of the Eugenian *SkI* and completely erased in her English translation, through curious translational practices. In the "Note on the text," Noble explains her intention to establish the twelfth-century Eugenian recension of *SkI* on the basis of much later manuscripts. She specifies that when different readings appear, she gives a preferential treatment to the manuscript P, since it is more complete and higher in style than the other three manuscripts (BLO). Still, against this principle, in the first sentence of E11, she adopts the phrasing "male turtle" (*arrenikè*) from BLO, instead of "wild turtle" (*agria*) from P, thus setting the precedent for the gender of the fig turtle.[27]

Noble's choice allows her to consistently gender the fig turtle as male even though her Greek text mentions "her wife" (E11). Since the manuscript reading of "male" was chosen as better from the first appearance of the character, it was easier to treat any subsequent ambiguity as a mistake. The gender 'correction' is passed in silence, creating a tension between the Greek and the English texts printed on opposite pages. If Noble consulted an Arabic version of the text in an attempt to amend gender ambiguity through a recourse to the 'original', she does not mention it in the book. Prioritizing gender conformability, she establishes clear gender roles of a hurt, clever female at home and an adulterous or neglectful male, who needs to be tricked into fulfilling his marital duties.

(O11) Въ едниь же ѡть дьни ꙗдоуштоу паде иꙁ роукы его единa смоква, юже дївїа жельва прїемьши иꙁеде. О нѥмже питикь посмїавь се, и не прѣстае жельвоу питае смоквами, она же сладькоу обрѣтьши пиштоу и своего дома ꙁабы. Того ради подроугь его малодоушаствоваше, и вельми

искаше како би питика погоубиль причьтею и подроуга своего въꙁметь. (188–189)

(S11) И док јеђаше, једног дана паде му из руке једна смоква, коју дивља корњача узе и поједе. Томе се мајмун насмеја и не престаде хранити корњачу. А она, нашавши слатку храну, заборави на свој дом. Због тога супруг њен беше очајан и много помишљаше како да погуби мајмуна и да узме своју супругу. (188–189)

While he was eating, one day out of his hand a fig dropped, which a wild turtle (f) found and ate. The monkey laughed at that and did not stop feeding the turtle. She, finding the sweet food, forgot about her (n) home. Because of that his companion [**S**: her husband] despaired, and thinking, sought a lot how he (n) could execute the monkey and take their companion (m) [**S**: his wife].

(O12) И единоѭ оубо шьдьши желва въ дѡмь свои, и скрьбьна своего дроуга обрѣтьшїи, рече къ нѥмоу: по что дрѣхла виждоу те и больна? Она же рече: въ болѣꙁнь лютоую въпадѡх, и нѣст ми исцѣленїа обрѣсти, аште не полоучоу срьдьце пиѳїково. Она жє недооумевьши се о сѣмь помышлꙗше въ себѣ: ꙗко ино срьдьце не имамь обрѣсти тьчїю госта своего.

(S12) И једанпут, кад корњача оде у дом свој, затече жалосног свог супруга и рече му:

‚Зашто те видим смрченог и болесног?‘

А он рече:

‚У болест љуту падох и нећу наћи исцељење ако не добијем мајмунско срце.‘

Она, пак, не досећајући се шта је, помишљаше у себи:

‚Друго срце нећу наћи осим пријатеља мог.‘ (189)

And once, when the turtle went to her home, she (n) found her (n) grieving companion [S: husband], she (n) told him (m): ‘Why do I see you gloomy and sick?’ And she [S: he] said: I fell into a grave disease and I will not find healing unless I receive a monkey’s heart.’ She (f), however, not seeing through it, thought to themself (n): I can find no other heart, save the one of my host [S: friend].

The earliest ever Greek-Slavonic book translator was aware and commented on gender incompatibilities between the two languages, giving precedence to the ‘meaning’ of the text.[28] With diverse word categories or grammatical forms being gendered or not in the two languages, the ‘gender reveal’ can come sooner or later in the text, while

gendering can seem more pronounced in one of the texts. In the story of the turtles, the Slavonic translator follows the seemingly incongruous gendering of *SkI*. There are alterations, but no normative or corrective ones. 'Turtle' is a female epicene in Greek, Slavonic and Serbian. When O11 is compared to its presumed source text G11, it shows that the Greek female present participle *heurousa* becomes a gender neutral *obrět'ši* in Slavonic. Similarly, the indirect speech phrase "no other than the heart of her friend" at the end of G12, becomes a direct speech phrase in O12, which changes the subject and removes the gender marking of the possessive pronoun to "no other heart, save the one of my (own) host."

Apart from that, the Slavonic text maintains the gender ambiguity of *SkI*, occasionally pushing it even further. In O11, the fig turtle starts out as a *she*, but *his male companion*, the home turtle plots to get *his male companion*, the fig turtle, away from the monkey. In O12, the fig turtle, *female* again, asks her *male companion* about *his* illness, and the home turtle replies that *she* needs a monkey's heart. The Slavonic text also translates the Greek *he/ho syzygos* (= pair, spouse; noun with a 'male ending' that can be gendered female through the use of the article) into a consistently male '*(po) drug'*', whose dominant meaning is 'comrade' or 'companion'. The translator does not use the neuter noun '*podroužiie*' or any other words meaning 'wife' or 'female partner' for any of the turtles. In the Slavonic version of the text, two genderfluid turtles cohabit in a partnership that shows no clear sign of a marital bond.

Like the modern English translation of the Eugenian *SkI*, the modern Serbian translation of the Slavonic one suppresses all the ambiguity related to gender and sexuality. The fig turtle is consistently female and a wife, while the home turtle is consistently male and a husband. Interestingly, this reverses the initial Arabic gender division and the latest English translation of the Greek version.

The fact that both modern translations of this text 'correct' their source texts against their editorial and interpretative principles reveals unstated norms they choose to favor. Under the presumed effort of removing inconsistencies on textual and narrative levels, the conventional fidelity to the source text is sacrificed to the idea of a heterosexual, monogamous norm originating in nature. But why was the ambiguity introduced and preserved in medieval translations, and why was it erased in the modern ones? In the versions dependent on Symeon Seth's Greek translation, this is one of the rare stories about a couple of same-species animals sharing a household. Diverse animals share their dwellings with the multitude of their species, with members of other species, or with humans. Yet only humans are almost exclusively narrated as forming heterosexual marital unions, whether monogamous or polygynous.

While *SkI* transmits the story about 'love' and cohabitation between two ducks and a turtle, the later Eugenian *SkI* also includes the kingfisher's story from *KwD*. In both stories, the same-species monogamous union is threatened by a member of another species interfering in the reproduction process, or by the potential disclosure of inter-species non-monogamy, respectively. The desire of the male kingfisher to stay inside the sea nymph's reach against his wife's advice endangers his progeny's survival, until king Phoenix's patriarchal authority reintroduces the order. The trilateral cohabitation between two ducks and a turtle can persist as long as it is kept secret from the world. The order is violently re-established by patriarchal intervention and death, respectively.[29] What these stories share with the turtles-monkey story is the apparent

third-party threat to the patriarchal, heterosexual, endogamous marital order. The tension between grammar and the possibilities and anxieties regarding gender, sexual and trans-species relations contributed to our characters' genders becoming ambiguous.

Judith Butler offers a critique of certain psychoanalytic engagements with Lévi-Strauss's stance on incest taboo and kinship as negotiating a patrilineal line through marriage ties. Butler examines how the opponents to both non-heterosexual kinship and immigration in Europe strived to find intellectual grounding for their stances in ethnology and psychoanalysis. Without claiming that such patriarchal anxieties are ahistorical, they can be detected in the way both medieval and modern translations of our text suspend aporia and re-signify gender. The way our stories were written and translated reflects a patriarchal anxiety over the preservation of both the heterosexual marital unit and the racial or ethnic 'purity'.[30]

The non-human animals often constitute a battleground claiming 'naturalness' of specific visions of gender and sexual practices. These claims can be heard from both the heteronormative side and their opponents, since animals doing something makes it natural and justified for humans to do the same. Inversely, as J. Halberstam notes, "[m]ost often we project human worlds onto the supposedly blank slate of animality, and then we create the animals we need in order to locate our own human behaviors in 'nature' or 'the wild' or 'civilization.'"[31] Simultaneously, serious debates and reassessments are taking place among biologists on the question of sexual selection and using the term gender when referring to non-human animals.[32]

However, as being primarily discursive or narrative creatures, our characters' gender precedes their sex. No real-life turtle with a real-life sex was 'described' by the authors – and even less so by the translators. Furthermore, their gender is performative and temporally bound to the narrative time. They can exist genderless until the first word that genders or un-genders or re-genders them in a given language appears in the text, either in the order of grammar or syntax (noun, pronoun, participle), or in the order of vocabulary and semantics ('husband', 'wife'). The trouble comes when the continuity of a character's gender is interrupted in a temporal sequence of the text. Even though the modern editors and translators act as if there is an ontological rupture when a diverse gender marker appears, there did not seem to be one for some of the medieval Greek and Old Slavonic translators and scribes. Based on the surviving evidence, we have to suppose that they perceived neither a logical contradiction in the existing sequences, nor an impediment in understanding and transmitting the story. Neither was the gender of the turtles crucial for them to distinguish between the two characters of the same species, nor were the sexuality and marital status of the turtles essential for the narrative action and the relations in the storyworld. Their actions, experiences and emotions – grief, love, care, fear – were generated by their communal cohabitation, but not necessarily by their gender difference or sexual practices.

Final thoughts

We have analyzed the translational life of three animal stories in specific points in time from the eleventh until the twenty-first century, with the specific focus on how the tension between diverse significations of grammatical, social and political aspects of gender was resolved by different translators. All of our examples have shown both the

creative, worldbuilding power of the translated texts, and the normative capacity of translation itself. Gender seems to be an 'untranslatable,' not solely as a philosophical term, but also as a grammatical and potentially social category. As such, with every attempt of translation, the aporia that the untranslatable creates has generated new meanings. In the story of the lion's mother, her familial and political position imposes or removes gendered elements of her character depending on the linguistic version. Subtle alterations from Arabic, to Greek, to Slavonic take her character from a helpful mediator to a violent protagonist. The interplay and tension between the collective and the individual genders of owls and crows (or ravens) opens up spaces of diverse societal imagination, supplanting the monogamous reproductive futurities, with cooperative and collective survival presents. This story shares concerns of gendered cohabitation and partnership with the story about the turtles and the monkey, highlighting both the social anxieties the translators might have registered and the ways they tried to relieve them through their translational worldbuilding.

The first medieval Greek and the Old Slavonic translations of the turtles' story created a storyworld in which genderfluid characters could exist and act, even though the term we now use to designate their specific gendered existence would not become common for about a millennium. At the same time, already in a string of medieval manuscripts, some scribes found it more coherent that a turtle should be 'male' rather than 'wild'. Modern translators dealt with the same untranslatable aspects by generating a normative behavior for animals, based on the certain human models. Their decisions could not have been based on faithfulness to an original text, linguistic limitations of the target language, or biological facts. It is true that turtles are not know to change sex, like, for example, clown fish. But turtles are famously polygamous and uninterested in either coupling or child care. We decided not to verify whether they are keen on figs.

As stated, our inquiry has been less interested in the contextual elements that predated and surrounded these translations, than in the traces of prismatic proliferation of both texts and meanings that they left in the world. The historicity of such an approach is based in the snapshot insights it yields of the conceptualization of gender, but also in the permanent mark on those conceptualizations left by the very act of translation. We see these prismatic texts as generating gender possibilities, not as a historical justification of today's gender modalities (since none of them needs to justify their existence), but as both autonomous historical alterities and the translational challenges that can generate a diverse present.

Notes

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1 Matthew Reynolds, "Introduction," in *Prismatic Translation*, ed. Matthew Reynolds (Oxford, 2019), 1–3. Idem, "Prismatic Agon, Prismatic Harmony. Translation, Literature, Language," in *Prismatic Translation*, ed. Matthew Reynolds (Oxford, 2019), 35–42.

2 Franklin Edgerton, *Panchatantra Reconstructed* vol. 2 (1924), 3-270.

3 Johannes Hertel, "Was bedeuten die Titel Tantrākhyāyika und Pañcatantra?" *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* vol. 20 (1906), 81.
4 Friedrich Max Müller, "On the Migration of Fables," *The Contemporary Review* vol. 14 (1870), 573; Frithiof Rundgren, "From Pañcatantra to Stephanites and Ichnelates. Some Notes on the Old Syriac Translation of Kalīla wa-Dimnah," in *Λειμών*, ed. Jan Olof Rosenqvist (Uppsala, 1996), 173.
5 On erased stories in Symeon Seth, see Lilli Hölzlhammer, "Altindische Weisheit in Byzanz. Zu den didaktischen Erzählstrategien in Symeon Seths Stephanites und Ichnelates und seinen arabischen Vorgängern," *Fabula* vol. 63 (2022:1–2), 99–103, https://doi.org/10.1515/fabula-2022-0004; The translation history of the text: Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis, *Übersetzung und Rezeption. Die byzantinisch-neugriechischen und spanischen Adaptionen von Kalīla wa-Dimna*, Wiesbaden (2003), 10–60. Heinz Grotzfeld, Sophia Grotzfeld, Ulrich Marzolph, "Kalila und Dimna," in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens Online 7*, ed. Rolf Wilhelm Brednich et. al. (Berlin/New York, 2016), 888–892. The number of books varies greatly, even in the surviving Arabic manuscripts: Beatrice Gruendler, Jan J. Ginkel, Rima van Redwan, et. al., "An Interim Report on the Editorial and Analytical Work of the AnonymClassic Project," *Medieval Wolds* vol. 11 (2020), 241–279, http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-32988.
6 The correct chronology of the Greek translations is established by Lars-Olof Sjöberg, *Stephanites und Ichnelates. Überlieferungsgeschichte und Text*, (Uppsala, 1962), 55–70.
7 Jennifer London, "How to do Things with Fables: Ibn Al-Muqaffa's Frank Speech in Stories from Kalīla Wa Dimna," *History of Political Thought* vol. 29/2 (2008), 189–212.
8 Barbara Cassin, *Éloge de la traduction. Compliquer l'universel*, (Paris, 2016), 24. Our translation.
9 Emily Apter, "Afterword: Trans-Ontology and the *Geschlecht* Complex," in *The* Geschlecht *Complex. Addressing Untranslatable Aspects of Gender, Genre, and Ontology*, eds. Oscar Jansson & David LaRocca (Bloomsbury: New York 2022), 293; François Raffoul, "Deconstruction as Aporetic Thinking," *Oxford Literary Review* vol. 36 (2014:2), 286–88, https://doi.org/10.3366/olr.2014.0135.
10 Regarding questions of grammatical sex in connection to social and political issues, it should be noted that linguistics and philology as academic disciplines are not immune to societal biases, such as patriarchy and sexism, and still have a long way to go before catching up with decades of feminist and queer critique, as well as transformative societal changes. See Emily Apter, "Lexilalia: On Translating a Dictionary of Untranslatable Philosophical Terms," *Paragraph* vol. 48 (2015:5), 168–171, DOI:10.3366/para.2015.0155; Greville G. Corbett, *Gender*, (Cambridge, 1991); Françoise Balibar, "Masculine, feminine, neuter," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, eds. Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, et. al. (Princeton, 2014), 970–971.
11 Cristiana Franco, "Gendering animals. Feminine and masculine species in Artemidorus' Interpretation of dreams. Part One," *I Quaderni del Ramo d'Oro* vol. 12 (2020), 73–103; "Gendering animals. Feminine and masculine species in Artemidorus' Interpretation of dreams. Part Two," *I Quaderni del Ramo d'Oro* vol. 13 (2021), 41–76.
12 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York, 1990), 175–193. Judith Butler, "Gender and gender trouble," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, 377–379.
13 Cf. Michela Baldo, "Queer Translation as Performative and Affective Un-doing. Translating Butler's Undoing Gender into Italian," in Queering Translation, Translating the Queer Theory, Practice, Activism, eds. Brian James Baer & Klaus Kaindl (New York, 2017), 188–205.

14 The page numbers of our excerpts are quoted in brackets from the following editions: Arabic = *Kalilah and Dimnah. Fables of Virtue and Vice. Ibn al-Muqaffa'*, ed. Michael Fishbein (New York, 2021); **G** = Sjöberg, *Stephanites und Ichnelates*; **E** = *Animal Fables of the Courtly Mediterranean. The Eugenian Recension of Stephanites and Ichnelates*; ed. & transl. Alison Noble with Alexander Alexakis & Richard P. H. Greenfield, (Cambridge, MA/London, 2022); **O** = Đuro Daničić, "Indijske priče prozvane Stefanit i Ihnilat," *Starine* vol. 2 (1870), 261–310; **S** = Tomislav Jovanović, 'Стефанит и Ихнилат, са српскословенског превео и уводну белешку саставио Томислав Јовановић', *Источник. Часопис за веру и културу* vol. 29/30 (1999), 158–197.
15 Gruendler et. al., "An Interim Report," 259.
16 *Kalilah and Dimnah*, ed. Fishbein, 148; Franco, "Gendering animals, Part One," 91–98.
17 Monica Blanchard, "The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery," *Aram* vol. 6 (1994), 151; Ivan Pomjalovskij, *Житие иже во святых отца нашего Феодора архиепископа Едесского*, (Saint Petersburg, 1892), 18.
18 The Ancient Greek stories of coupling between lionesses and leopards and on the violent relationships between lionesses and their cubs could have made an interesting backdrop to this story, if known in Byzantium. Franco, "Gendering animals, Part One," 93–94.
19 This reduction of meaning is comparable to the phenomenon described by: Marc Crépon, "Geschlecht," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, eds. Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, et. al. (Princeton, 2014) 394–396 and further developed in Oscar Jansson & David LaRocca, "Contending with Untranslatable Categories; or, Inducing the Nervous Condition of the *Geschlecht* Complex," in *The* Geschlecht *Complex. Addressing Untranslatable Aspects of Gender, Genre, and Ontology*, Idem, eds. (New York, NY, 2022), 1–34.
20 When significant, we mark the (gender) of a word and [differences between O and S] in our English translation.
21 *Kalilah and Dimnah*, ed. Fishbein, 230–232.
22 'Не видех ни једну од сова разумну осим једног који рече савет да ме убију.' (188)
23 Brett Mills, "The animals went in two by two: Heteronormativity in television wildlife documentaries," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* vol 16, (2012:1), 100–114, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549412457477.
24 *Kalilah and Dimnah*, Fishbein, ed., 256–258. In an Arabic manuscript closely related to Symeon Seth's translation, MS Or. 8751, the Arabic word for turtle is "male turtle". This shows that gender variations can be found even within the same manuscript continuum.
25 *Kalilah and Dimnah*, Fishbein, red., 263.
26 Sjöberg, *Stephanites und Ichnelates*, 228.
27 *Animal Fables*, ed. & transl Alison Noble, 393–396, 444.
28 André Vaillant, "La préface de l'Évangéliaire vieux-slave," *Revue des études slaves* vol. 24 (1948), 5–20.
29 The kingfisher and the ducks and the turtle: *Kalilah and Dimnah*, ed. Fishbein, xxx; **E**:150–155; The ducks and the turtle: **G**: 184; **O**: 279–280; **S**: 173. The story of the couple of doves living together and dying due to a misunderstanding, without interacting with other species is preserved in Seth's version as well: **G**: 241–241; **O**: 304; **S**: 192–193.
30 J. Butler, "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?," in *Undoing Gender* (New York, 2004), 122–124.
31 J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 32–33.
32 See Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*, (Berkeley, 2004), and one of the reviews Ellen D. Ketterson, "Do Animals Have Gender?", *BioScience* Vol.55 (2005:2), 178–180, https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2005)055[0178:DAHG]2.0.CO;2. We are grateful to Dr. Vladimir Jovanović (FU Berlin) for his guidance and recommendations of biological references.