

LIBRO LLAMADO *FEDRON*
PLATO'S *PHAEDO*
TRANSLATED BY PERO DIAZ DE TOLEDO

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EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
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PREFACE

This book has been too long in the making, and the euphoria of finishing it carries some risk of over-estimating its importance. But the fact which supplies its point of departure is, by any standards, remarkable. That the first complete version in any European vernacular of a dialogue by Plato should have appeared in Spain might well surprise many Spaniards (and not a few others). That the translation should have been made in Castile in the 1440s seems more remarkable still; it was to be a very long time indeed before anything of the kind happened elsewhere.

Doctor Pero Díaz de Toledo, who translated the 'Phaedo', was not – as might perhaps have been expected – an eccentric devotee of the latest cultural fashions out of humanistic Italy. Castile in this period did have such figures, but Pero Díaz was not among them. He was a well-read but stolidly conventional lawyer, combining sober moralism of a Christian-Stoic tinge with a talent for plain, though prolix, literary exposition. These were qualities well-suited to his favourite genre: the extended gloss on some authoritative text. His major patrons – the King of Castile and the Marquis of Santillana – seem to have valued these orthodox attributes no less highly than they valued his sometimes enterprising choice of a source for quotation or a text to be translated. Of this last the Castilian 'Phaedo' offers a notable instance – up to a point at least, for its source is not the original Greek but Leonardo Bruni's Latin version, produced in Italy a generation earlier. The translation itself bears the mark of Pero Díaz's rooted traditionalism – again up to a point, for the approach to the translator's task which such an enterprise demanded was something still relatively new in Castile.

The outcome, imperfect as it inevitably was, must command a good deal of respect, especially when its translator's aims and assumptions are borne in mind. It won readers and influence in Santillana's immediate circle. But then, quite abruptly, its influence declined. When Platonic ways of thought began to assume a more permanent importance within Castilian culture, they came from other

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sources; the earliest vernacular Plato was rendered marginal by these developments, and eventually forgotten.

Such a story will clearly repay more detailed investigation. Pero Díaz is in several respects a representative figure: of the cultural movement of Juan II's Castile; of the 'letrados' - lawyers and churchmen, often of converso-Jewish stock - who serviced the administrative and cultural life of that time; of the translator's art and method at a moment of great historical interest. And the 'Phaedo' itself is very clearly a work of whose fortunes it is always of interest to learn more.

Our most essential witness in these matters is the actual translation, here published for the first time. The range of comparative and cross-cultural perspectives which it opens is further multiplied by Pero Díaz's use of Bruni's Latin 'Phaedo', and by the existence of Henry Aristippus' very different Latin version, dating from the twelfth century. Yet even this is only half of the matter. For a translation also makes it possible to study in unique detail what mental operations the translator had to perform, and by so doing, to understand in an especially authentic way something of the intellectual life of its time. I have tried in this edition to make Pero Díaz's 'Phaedo' intelligible in both its extrinsic and its intrinsic relationships.

In the Introduction this proved relatively easy. The successive treatment of the several contexts in which Pero Díaz's work had to be viewed imposed an obvious historical and logical movement: from broadly philosophical and cultural themes to issues of linguistic and textual detail. In editing the text, by contrast, it was necessary to do justice to both aspects at once. The choice of Santillana's own manuscript as a base-text was in some measure made inescapable by its importance as a culturally representative document. The explanatory end-notes are likewise addressed to the work's external relationships. But the apparatus to the text invites discussion of the inwardness of the translation - the actual process of Pero Díaz's work with his own and Bruni's language. In this regard, the present edition must still be seen as provisional - as the raw material out of which others may make more.

Pero Díaz's 'Phaedo' first attracted my attention in the early 1960s, when I was writing a doctoral thesis on the translator's life and output. This edition, first drafted in 1971-72, has been rewritten twice: in 1981, and again in 1987-88. I owe thanks to the many friends and colleagues who have helped to improve it over that very long period; in the space available to me here, I can single out only a few of them. Professor Alan Deyermond improves every piece of work which I discuss with him. Professor John Varey observed and encouraged the book's progress towards the Tamesis imprint without giving way to either impatience or alarm; his tolerance has grown with the demands placed on it. A number of younger researchers, some of them my own students, have been notably generous with their own findings: I have to recall here Mr Gerard Breslin, Dr Jeremy Lawrance, Father P.M. O'Callaghan, Dr Leslie Turano, and Dr Julian Weiss.

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There are many others, young and old, whom I must ask to accept a general thanks.

I am also grateful to the librarians of the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, and to Dr Teresa Santander, University Librarian at Salamanca, for supplying microfilms of their MSS of Pero Díaz's translation; to colleagues in the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland, the University of Oxford, and the University of British Columbia, for listening to partial drafts in the form of lectures and conference papers; to Professor Daniel Eisenberg for publishing one such in the 'Journal of Hispanic Philology' and for allowing a much-revised version of it to appear here; to Seamus Heaney for permission to quote the lines used here as an epigraph; to the British Academy for grants to finance a visit to Spanish libraries, and to assist the processing of text and apparatus; to Professor G.K.S. Browning of Glasgow University Computer Publishing Unit for expert and patient help with that and other tasks; to the Modern Humanities Research Association for help with publishing costs; and to the University of Glasgow for periods of study-leave in which the work was finished.

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