

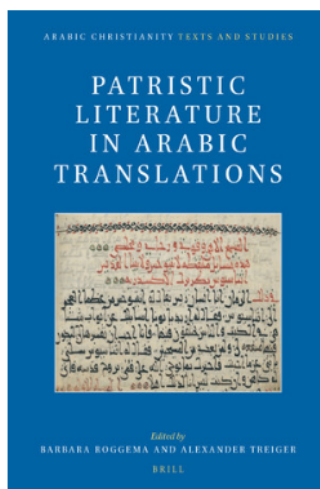
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ALEXANDER TREIGER, BARBARA ROGGEMA

Patristic Literature in Arabic Translations

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Review by Adrian C. Pirtea, University of Vienna.

Despite many significant advances over the past decades, Arabic Christian literature remains one of the least explored literary *corpora* of Eastern and Oriental Christianity. In part, this is certainly due to the sheer amount of authors, texts and manuscripts available: an inventory of the Christian Arabic translations alone make up the daunting first volume of Georg Graf's five-volume *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Città del Vaticano, 1944-1953). Together with a growing awareness of the relevance of Arabic Bible translations, scholars are increasingly turning their attention to the equally important body of Greek (but also Syriac, Coptic, Latin, etc.) Patristic translations into Arabic.

As the first collection of studies devoted entirely to this subject, Barbara Roggema and Alexander Treiger's *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translations* brings together ten excellent essays which, for the most part, concentrate on the two earliest stages of this long and on-going process, i.e., the translations made in Palestine and Sinai (ca. eighth to tenth centuries) and those made in and around Antioch during the period of Byzantine rule (969-1084).

The opening chapter (pp. 15-52) by Barbara Roggema is an in-depth discussion of the Arabic version of Pseudo-Athanasius' *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem* (CPG 2257), a seventh-eighth century Greek collection of questions and answers that deals with a wide range of topics. Roggema's study corrects some longstanding misconceptions regarding this text (see e.g., p. 17, 19n15) and provides key insights into its early reception history in Arabic. Thus, aside from the selection of 45 questions in the well-known manuscript *Strasbourg BNU 4226* (885/6 ad), Roggema has identified a complete translation of the *Quaestiones* on which the former abridged collection can be shown to draw (see pp. 23-40). This is remarkable, since it suggests an extremely early date for the initial Arabic translation, possibly within decades of the original composition in Greek. Already by the early ninth century the *Quaestiones* were used in Arabic Christian apologetics (pp. 40-47) and they remained a popular reference work throughout the Medieval and modern periods.

While the following two chapters deal primarily with the Arabic reception of the Syriac Church Father Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), Tamara Pataridze's contribution (Chapter 2, pp. 53-88) also includes a survey of the early Patristic and hagiographic translations into Arabic made in Palestine and Sinai in the ninth and tenth centuries. Moreover, Pataridze rightly draws attention to the fact that these translations cannot be properly studied without taking into account the *Georgian translations* that were made in the same period and milieu (all the more since they sometimes preserve lost Greek or Arabic originals). The chapter provides an annotated inventory of twenty-six early Christian Arabic manuscripts that share some common features (script, style, structure, etc.) and were produced in the major monastic centers of the Palestinian-Sinaitic area (pp. 54-58). In her final section on Jacob of Serugh (pp. 74-80), Pataridze shows that the Arabic reception of Jacob was characterized first by a sincere appreciation of his *oeuvre* among the Melkites, followed by a gradual *damnatio memoriae*. This *damnatio* (also addressed by Aaron Butts, pp. 98-99) was probably motivated by the Coptic and Syriac Miaphysite use of Jacob's writings in their arguments against the Chalcedonians (p. 79).

In Chapter 3 (pp. 89-128), Aaron Butts follows the Arabic reception of Jacob in more detail, while also highlighting the merits and the shortcomings of earlier research (pp. 93-97). Butts compares select passages from Jacob's *memrē* in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni showing how the three main strands of reception in Arabic (Melkite, Syriac Orthodox, Copto-Arabic) relate to and interact with each other (pp. 101-121). Like Pataridze in the preceding chapter, Butts stresses the distinctiveness of the Melkite textual tradition and the importance of the earliest Sinaitic manuscripts (pp. 113-121). The conclusion (pp. 122-124) offers some guidelines for future research on Jacob's diverse legacy in Arabic, such as creating a systematic list of all manuscripts and texts (with titles and incipits) and identifying their Syriac *Vorlage* wherever possible.

Jonas Karlsson (Chapter 4, pp. 129-157) studies the Arabic *Life* of John of Daylam, a seventh/eighth-century East Syriac saint and missionary in the region of Daylam, south of the Caspian Sea. Originally written in Syriac, John's *Life* is also preserved in Sogdian and Ethiopic. Interestingly, the *Life* was especially popular in Arabic, where we find at least three different translations (discussed on pp. 137-149). Karlsson's conclusion that no clear relationship of dependency can be established between these versions (p. 154) only testifies to the large diffusion of John's cult in Arabic Christianity. Despite

being an East Syriac saint, John came to be venerated in the Miaphysite Churches (as shown by the extant Syriac, Ethiopic, and two of the Arabic versions), but also among Chalcedonians (the third Arabic version is preserved in two Melkite manuscripts from Sinai). Although it is not entirely uncommon for saints' cults to cross confessional boundaries, the issue of why and how this happened in John's case would require further study, as it may help shed light on the reception of East Syriac hagiography (but also ascetic literature) in the Syro-Orthodox and Melkite/Byzantine traditions.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 discuss three towering figures of the Graeco-Syro-Arabic translation movement in Byzantine Antioch. Habib Ibrahim's chapter (pp. 158-179) focuses on Antonios, the abbot of the Monastery of St. Symeon near Antioch, who is best known for his Arabic translations of John of Damascus. Revising some earlier assessments by Georg Graf and Joseph Nasrallah, Ibrahim demonstrates that Antonios was active in the first half of the eleventh century, not in the tenth century as was previously assumed (pp. 165-166). Another merit of Ibrahim's chapter is his brief discussion of Antonios' translation method, which may be used to establish his authorship of other anonymous translations from Greek (pp. 163-165). After a detailed analysis of Antonios' rendering of John the Damascene's *Philosophical Chapters* (pp. 167-177), Ibrahim is able to trace the peculiar chapter division in Antonios' translation to the same (lost) Greek model used by the Georgian translator Ephrem Mtsire, who was active in the same period and geographic area as Antonios (pp. 175-176).

Another Antiochian translator at the turn of the eleventh century was the *protospatharios* Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā, whose biography Joshua Mugler reconstructs in Chapter 6 (pp. 180-197). In his youth, Ibrāhīm had studied under the tutelage of Christopher, the famous Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch (d. 967). Ibrāhīm later composed a hagiographic account of his mentor, *The Life of Christopher*, from which Mugler extracts valuable information about its author (pp. 181-185). Ibrāhīm also left a number of translations of Patristic and hagiographic texts, although in the cases of Ephrem the Syrian and Gregory Nazianzen it remains unclear if he translated the entire extant collections or only parts of them (pp. 185-189). Other translations by Ibrāhīm include an excerpt from Pseudo-Dionysius' *On Divine Names*,^[1] homilies by Basil of Caesarea and (Pseudo-)John Chrysostom, and a number of panegyric texts from the menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes (pp. 189-192).

Alexandre Roberts tackles the work of the most prolific and well-known Greek-Arabic translator in Byzantine Antioch: 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl (Chapter 7, pp. 198-240).^[2] 'Abdallāh's large-scale translation program of the Greek Patristic heritage included the writings of John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus Confessor and Basil of Caesarea. The latter's *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* are at the center of Roberts' study. Following a brief review of the extant Late Antique and Medieval translations of Basil's popular work (pp. 205-209), Roberts discusses the three Arabic translations and their manuscript tradition. Of the thirty manuscripts that Roberts lists (p. 210), at least five contain 'Abdallāh's translation (pp. 211-219), while five others preserve a second translation by an unknown author predating 'Abdallāh (pp. 219-222).^[3] Through a comparison of the opening paragraph of Homily 1, Roberts convincingly shows that 'Abdallāh's version is a careful reworking of the earlier anonymous translation (pp. 230-236). As Roberts further demonstrates in an excursus, the third Arabic translation of the *Hexaemeron*, preserved in only one manuscript from Vienna (*ÖNB, Cod. Mixt. 1381*), was made independently from a lost Coptic original (pp. 225-230).

The final three chapters of the book provide critical editions of hitherto unpublished Christian Arabic translations of Patristic texts. In Chapter 8 (pp. 241-275), Joe Glynnias presents an edition and analysis of Germanus I of Constantinople's *Homily on the Deposition of the Belt of the Theotokos at Chalkoprateia* (CPG 8013, BHG 1086). This eighth-century Byzantine homily was typically read on the eponymous feast on 31 August. As such, the Arabic translation is part of the Antiochian (Byzantinized) Menologion

compiled by Yūḥannā ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, who was previously dated to the thirteenth century, but whose *floruit* Alexander Treiger recently reassigned to the late tenth/early eleventh century.[4] Although Glynias could not have been aware of this new dating (cf. p. 241), he rightly places the translator of Germanus’ *Homily*, a deacon named Yānī ibn al-Duks, in the same eleventh-century Antiochian context as Yūḥannā and the disciples of patriarch Christopher. This may suggest, in turn, that Yānī worked as a translator directly under Yūḥannā’s supervision. Glynias then discusses Yānī’s translation technique (pp. 244-249), which is characterized by a strong tendency to conform to the Greek *Vorlage* (sometimes to the detriment of good Arabic grammar and style). The remainder of Glynias’ chapter is devoted to a synoptic transcription of the Greek and Arabic text of the homily, accompanied by extensive notes, but without an English translation (pp. 253-273).

Sergey Kim’s chapter (Chapter 9, pp. 276-327) consists of a critical edition and French translation of an Arabic homily on Nativity attributed to Severian of Gabala (CPG 4290). After a brief summary of the homily, Kim discusses the identity of the Arabic translator Gregory, who was an abbot of the monastery of Our Lady at Dafnūnā (on the Black Mountain) in the late tenth century. Gregory is known from other sources as yet another disciple of the patriarch Christopher. As Kim shows, the attribution to Severian is undoubtedly spurious and the real author is more likely to be placed in a Syriac-speaking, perhaps even Mesopotamian-Persian environment (pp. 281-284). Another hint regarding the origin of the homily may lie in the strong polemical tone against Judaism and in the author’s references to Marcion (p. 277, 294-295). For his edition of the Arabic text (pp. 288-325), Kim has relied on eight manuscripts that can be divided into three distinct groups (see the *stemma codicum* on p. 286). The oldest and most reliable group is represented by four Sinaitic manuscripts, which once again confirms the enormous importance of the library at St. Catherine’s Monastery for the history of Arabic Christianity.

Finally, Alexander Treiger offers a critical edition and English translation of Chapter XXIV of *The Noetic Paradise* (*al-Firdaws al-‘aqlī*), an anonymous ascetic treatise translated from Greek into Arabic in the twelfth century (Chapter 10, pp. 328-376). Although very popular in the medieval and modern period, as attested by the 66 manuscripts ranging from the late twelfth to the nineteenth century listed in an appendix (pp. 344-354), *The Noetic Paradise* has remained almost completely ignored by scholars prior to Treiger’s research.[5] By comparing the Biblical quotations with other known Arabic translations of the Scriptures (pp. 340-344), Treiger further argues that the translator of *The Noetic Paradise* is probably identical to the anonymous Arabic translator of the Epistle Lectionary in *Sinai ar. 164* (a. 1238) and *Sinai ar. 169* (a. 1192). This may prove very helpful for identifying and better understanding the historical context in which the *Paradise* was first translated into Arabic. The critical edition of Ch. XXIV and the important findings in this chapter herald Treiger’s promised complete edition and translation of this fascinating treatise.

The volume ends with an extremely useful “Bibliographical Guide to Arabic Patristic Translations and Related Texts” (pp. 377-418). The “Guide” neatly illustrates how much has been achieved since the days of Georg Graf, but it also makes painfully clear how much work still remains to be done. The bibliography covers general works, studies on individual manuscripts and translators, translations of Patristic texts from Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Latin, and Romanian into Arabic, as well as Ethiopic and Georgian translations of Christian Arabic texts. I would merely add two important editions to this otherwise comprehensive list: Michel Nicolas, *La version arabe de la collection des lettres de Jean de Dalyatha* (Paris: Publibook, 2013) at section 3.15, p. 409; and id., *La version éthiopienne de la collection des lettres de Jean de Dalyatha dit Aragawi Manfasawi* (Paris: Publibook, 2016), at section 5.1, p. 414.

To sum up, Barbara Roggema, Alexander Treiger and all the contributors to the volume have undoubtedly succeeded in setting a prime example of how research on Arabic Christian literature can

(and should) be done in the future. Given the wealth of unpublished and unstudied Christian Arabic material, one can only hope that this new book will encourage other scholars to follow suit.

Adrian C. Pirtea

University of Vienna, Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies

[adrian.pirtea \[at\] univie.ac.at](mailto:adrian.pirtea@univie.ac.at)

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[1] See now S. Noble, “A Byzantine Bureaucrat and Arabic Philosopher: Ibrāhīm ibn Yuḥannā al-Anṭākī and his Translation of *On the Divine Names* 4.18-35,” in *Caught in Translation. Studies on Versions of Late Antique Christian Literature*, eds. M. Toca and D. Batovici (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 267-312.

[2] Discussed in detail in his recent monograph: A. Roberts, *Reason and Revelation in Byzantine Antioch. The Christian Translation Program of Abdallah ibn al-Fadl* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020).

[3] Fortunately, some of the manuscripts inaccessible to Roberts (Table 7.1, p. 210) are now digitally available via vhmml.org (last visited: 10/03/2021): *Sarba (Jūniyah)*, *Ordre basilien alépin*, MS. 324 (probably identical to *Dayr al-Šīr* 324 in Roberts’ table), MS. 1152 (incomplete); *Bikfayyā*, *Ordre Basilien Choueirite*, MS. 220, MS. 221 (probably identical to *Dayr al-Šuwayr*, 121 and 122 in Roberts’ table). They all contain ‘Abdallāh’s Arabic translation of Basil’s *Hexaemeron*.

[4] See A. Treiger, “The Beginnings of the Graeco-Syro-Arabic Melkite Translation Movement in Antioch,” *Scrinium* 16 (2020), 306-332.

[5] For a selection of passages in English translation, see A. Treiger, “The Noetic Paradise,” in *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700-1700. An Anthology of Sources*, eds. S. Noble and A. Treiger (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2014), 188-200.