

# Studia graeco-arabica

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### *Cover*

Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḡawī 300, f. 1v  
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *grec* 1853, f. 186v

the science of nature in the sense in which Daniel of Morley speaks about it, comparing in a vibrant account the Toledan discoveries and the bookish teachings imparted in Paris, and another one is the continuity of the Graeco-Roman classical culture during the Middle Ages. On this specific point, the absence even from the bibliography of reference studies like Pierre Courcelle's *Les lettres grecques en Occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* (1948) is revealing. A clear-cut distinction of the two concepts of "scientific knowledge" (i.e. the science of nature in the sense given to it by the translators) and "Greek legacy" would help the debate about the role of the translations from Arabic into Latin to be freed from confusions.

CDA

R. Pergola, *I luoghi del tradurre nel Medioevo. La trasmissione della scienza greca e araba nel mondo latino*, Pensa MultiMedia Editore, Lecce 2016 (La stadera. Collana di linguistica, letteratura e glottodidattica), xxxii + 168 pp.

At first sight, the reader of *I luoghi del tradurre* may get the impression that this volume is the double of *The Attitude of the Medieval Translators Towards the Arabic Sciences* reviewed above, because the two books contain a series of entries each on a medieval translator from Arabic into Latin, and most names obviously overlap. In reality, the two books are surely and inevitably twin brothers, but they are different and in some sense complementary, as I hope will appear from this brief account.

*I luoghi del tradurre* falls into three parts and seven chapters, five of which belong to the second part. After an introductory essay authored by P. Mazzotta – which however is only very loosely connected with the subject-matter of the book, dealing as it does with the issue of translation in contemporary socio-linguistic theories – Chapter 1 (pp. 5-36) sets the scene for the analysis to be conducted in Part II, and outlines the historical context of the translations.

This first chapter provides a synthesis of a quantity of studies that can count as a *status quaestionis* on the contemporary scholarship about the medieval translations. Unfortunately, some slips risk to lead astray the reader not already acquainted with the subject, and this is especially regrettable given that it is precisely to such a readership that the book is addressed (Preface, p. x). The sentence "A Costantinopoli, sebbene gli interessi teologici prevalessero su quelli scientifici, l'attività di traduzione e revisione dei testi di Aristotele conobbe un momento aureo con Giacomo Veneto e Guglielmo di Moerbeke" (p. 6) suggests that the place where both translators were active was indeed Constantinople, thus raising in the reader the question "why on earth should there have been an activity of translation from Greek into Latin in Constantinople, and for which readership?". And indeed, Pergola goes on with the following: "Spagna, Sicilia e Costantinopoli mantennero il ruolo di principali centri di traduzione anche nel corso del XIII secolo, ma ora la scelta delle opere da tradurre, diversamente da quanto era avvenuto sino a poco tempo prima, non era più effettuata solo dai traduttori perché le traduzioni venivano prodotte o commissionate sia per colmare lacune nei diversi campi del sapere sia per sostituire traduzioni oscure o imprecise a causa dei passaggi intermedi da lingua a lingua; esempio celebre di questa nuova tendenza è Guglielmo di Moerbeke" (*ibid.*). Apart from some other problems of detail into which my present purpose does not compel me to enter, this inevitably suggests that there was in Constantinople a learned audience that commissioned or at least acted as the intended audience of William's translations from Greek into Latin – something that did not happen at all. It is true that in the relevant entries, respectively pp. 103-4 on Giacomo Veneto, and pp. 105-7 on William of Moerbeke, Pergola provides the biographical details available on both translators, thus enabling the reader to realise that the former was indeed active in Constantinople in

the retinue of Bishop Anselm of Havenberg, but also that it remains unknown where, and for what readership did he translate Aristotle's logical works and his *Metaphysics* from Greek into Latin. As for the latter, the relevant entry mentions that William spent some years in Nicaea and Thebes before sojourning at the Papal curia in Viterbo; a survey is provided of the available data about what William translated, when and where. Thus the impression of oddity fades, giving the more familiar picture of two Latin scholars that, at different times and for different reasons, travelled East, sojourned in the Byzantine empire and acquired there a linguistic competence that enabled them – once again for different reasons from one another and with different audiences – to translate philosophical and scientific works from Greek into Latin. However, it remains that both Giacomo Veneto and William of Moerbeke are dealt with in a chapter devoted to translations made in “Asia Minor”, something which is true only in part, as will appear in that chapter (see below). On a more general count, the reader of Chapter 1 is presented with a framework that, as for this issue, only in part matches what is detailed in Part II.

Part II is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 2 (pp. 39-52) is devoted to Italy: individual entries deal with the translators working mostly in Italian cities and courts, like Costantine the African, Burgundius of Pisa, Henricus Aristippus, Eugene the Admiral, Michael Scot, and Barthlemy of Messina, to mention only the most famous; an Appendix deals with Frederick II and Manfredi. Chapter 3 (pp. 53-96) contains the entries on the translators working in Spain: Plato of Tivoli, Hermann of Carinthia, Robert of Ketton, Robert of Chester, Hugo of Santalla, John of Seville, Avendauth, Dominicus Gundissalinus, Gerard of Cremona, Mark of Toledo, Hermann the German are the most famous names. This chapter ends with two Appendices, one of which is apt to substantiate the claim made above, namely that Pergola's survey is in some way complementary to that of Gázquez. As I have said above, *The Attitude of the Medieval Translators Towards the Arabic Sciences* does not address the question of the so-called “School of Toledo”, which instead is discussed in Appendix 1 of *I luoghi del tradurre* (pp. 77-91). The Appendix offers a synthesis of the positions held in scholarship on this issue. Chapter 4 deals with the translations made by English scholars: Adelard of Bath and Alfred of Sareshel, both translating from Arabic thanks to the linguistic skills they had acquired during their respective travels to Syria and Spain; an entry is devoted to Robert Grosseteste, who on the contrary translated from the Greek. Chapter 5 is entitled “Asia Minore” (pp. 103-7): it is here that the information on Giacomo Veneto and William of Moerbeke mentioned above is given. An entry on Leone Toscano (*fl.* in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century) informs that there were indeed Western scholars translating from Greek into Latin in Constantinople, but in their capacity of officers appointed by the chancellery: “L'occupazione principale di Leone fu quella di traduttore presso la cancelleria imperiale di Manuele I Comneno, incarico ricoperto dal 1166 al 1182 circa” (p. 104). That these scholars, during their stay in the Byzantine empire, also translated one or another work – as is the case not only with Leone Toscano, but also with William of Moerbeke – does not license the overall picture of p. 6 quoted above. Chapter 6, entitled “Siria” (pp. 109-10) contains two entries, respectively on Stephen of Pisa and Philip of Tripoli.

Part III contains only one chapter, devoted to “Teorie, prassi e critiche traduttive”, dealing with the same point raised also by Gázquez in his chapter on “Criticisms of the Translation Process”, and inevitably pivoting on the same harsh critic of the translations from Arabic, once again voiced by Roger Bacon. Also this, as I have said, may give the impression that the two books are a double. But, as I said, the two are complementary: the focus of *The Attitude of the Medieval Translators Towards the Arabic Sciences* is undoubtedly Spain and other translators are only seldom mentioned, while in Pergola's book there is an evident aim to provide a balanced account of all the places where translations were made, from the Muslim West to the Byzantine East. *I luoghi del tradurre* is useful and the results of decades, not to say centuries, of scholarly research gathered here are precious; one

may doubt if this survey by geographical areas is effective, if the aim is that of presenting the grandiose process of transmission of learning in the Middle Ages. The last translators presented are, as we have just seen, Stephen of Pisa and Philip of Tripoli, who belong rather to the first stages of the process with which this book deals. All in all, a chronological presentation still remains the best option in my opinion, but the book is useful and its author deserves our gratitude.

CDA

Ruth Glasner, *Gersonides. A Portrait of a Fourteenth-Century Philosopher-Scientist*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2015, 160 pp.

This concise book presents the attitude of Levi ben Gerson (1288-1344) towards the Aristotelian cosmology. The background for his reflections about the structure of the cosmos are provided by the so-called ‘Andalusian revolt’, namely the rejection of Aristotle’s description of the nature and movement of the heavens attested in the works of astronomers of the twelfth-century Iberian peninsula like al-Biṭrūḡī – a moment in the history of science on which attention was called by an essay by A.I. Sabra (“The Andalusian Revolt Against Ptolemaic Astronomy: Averroes and al-Biṭrūḡī” (in E. Mendelsihm [ed.], *Transformation and Tradition in Sciences*, 1984).

Chapter 1 (pp. 1-11) briefly discusses the application of mathematics to physics in ancient times (Ptolemy) and in the Arabic Middle Ages (Ibn al-Hayṭam and the Andalusian astronomers). Chapter 2 (pp. 14-18) outlines the life and works of Gersonides. These are subdivided into three categories: the philosophical commentaries, the biblical commentaries and the *Wars of the Lord*, i.e. a lifelong project on which Gersonides started to work in 1317, and whose astronomical part was still on its way in 1340. Chapter 3 (pp. 19-37) addresses the main question of the book: “Aristotle’s physics, cosmology and astronomy (based on the models of Eudoxus) joined to an all-encompassing harmonious structure, held together by the natural motions of bodies. Gersonides refuted the basic premises underlying Aristotle’s concept of motion, thus undermining the whole structure” (p. 19). By dismissing Aristotle’s idea that the celestial motions are governed by the homocentric structure of the universe, by going instead for the eccentric model, and finally by challenging the idea of absolute natural motion, Gersonides parted company with the basic laws of Aristotle’s cosmology. “Gersonides’ account of the natural motion of a body, as dynamically determined by the relation between its heaviness (or lightness) and that of the medium at each point of its path, undercuts the basis of the Aristotelian distinction between natural and forced motions. The regular upward motion of fire and its exceptional motion in other directions are equally due to external circumstances” (p. 25). In this chapter finds its place a discussion on the “Prehistory of the Principle of Inertia”. It is worth noting that Gersonides was well aware of his debt to John Philoponus’ attack to the Aristotelian cosmology: the relevant passage from the *Wars of the Lord* is quoted at p. 32.

Chapter 4 (pp. 39-50) discusses the Ptolemaic account of the celestial bodies as animated, and the problems Gersonides sees in it. Glasner describes Ptolemy’s transmission of motion in an eccentric universe as an “animistic model of propagation (התפשטות). The motion which originates in the world’s soul propagates (מתפשטת) in the different spheres, which are analogous to the limbs” (p. 40). The passage from Ptolemy’s *Planetary Hypotheses* that supports this claim is quoted at p. 31. One might wonder if, besides the (Platonic) idea of the whole cosmos as a living being that survives in the Hellenistic cosmologies, one should not also have recourse to the idea of a δύναμις that permeates the heavenly structure and permits the transmission of movement, like that which – more or less in the same age as that of Ptolemy – was adopted by Alexander of Aphrodisias. Be that as it may, Gersonides