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Mathād, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Radawī 300, f. 1v
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v
On a Pair of Greek Quotations in the Arabic Version of Aristotle’s Rhetoric

Geoffrey Moseley

Abstract
I closely examine two Greek quotations in Aristotle’s Rhetoric analyzed in the GALex in order to determine the text of the Arabic translator’s exemplar and the text of the Arabic translation. This analysis also sheds light on the translator’s understanding of linguistically difficult and culturally remote terms and phrases.

For the past several decades, Rüdiger Arnzen has contributed to A Greek and Arabic Lexicon (GALex): Materials for a Dictionary of the Mediaeval Translations from Greek into Arabic. Alongside Profs. Gerhard Endreß and Dimitri Gutas, he has shepherded this landmark project in Graeco-Arabic studies through its infancy and childhood (the notecard stage and first fascicles) to the cusp of adolescence (a second, revised edition of the first volume, alif, has recently appeared and volume two, bāʾ, will appear soon). As a kind of ‘Rosetta stone’ for Arabic philology, the corpus of Graeco-Arabic translations analyzed in the GALex provides scholars with a unique window into the lexicon, syntax, and even stylistics of mediaeval Arabic. The uses of the GALex, however, extend across both sides of the hyphenated adjective ‘Graeco-Arabic’: on the Greek side, the GALex illuminates the transmission of classical and post-classical Greek texts in late antiquity and the translators’ understanding of classical and post-classical Greek prose and poetry (the latter usually as quoted by prose writers). Having only recently begun to labor alongside Rüdiger in the vineyard of Graeco-Arabic lexicography, I am grateful to him for his learning, his clear-mindedness, and his candor. As a token of my admiration for his contributions to the GALex and to Graeco-Arabic studies generally, I offer below some observations on a pair of quotations of ancient Greek authors found within the GALex corpus, both drawn from Aristotle’s Rhetoric. My aim throughout is twofold: (a) to reconstruct the Greek text from which the translator worked,
I. Theodectes, Alcmaeon apud Arist. Rhet. 1397 b 5-7 (GALex I s.v. anā I.1)

At Rhet. 1397 b 5-7, in arguing that the question whether the patient of punishment deserved to receive it can be distinguished from the question whether the agent of punishment was entitled to exact it, Aristotle quotes from the lost Alcmaeon of Theodectes as follows (I reproduce Kassel’s text and critical apparatus below):

| 1397 b 2 | ἐνίοτε γὰρ διαφωνεῖ τὸ τοιοῦτον καὶ οὐδὲν κωλύει, [b3] όσπερ ἐν τῷ Ἀλκμέωνι τῷ Θεοδέκτου “μητέρα δὲ τὴν | 2 | ἐν | 3 | αὐτὴν | 4 | σὴν οὔτις ἐστύγει βροτῶν;” φησὶ δ’ ἀποκρινόμενος “ἀλλὰ | 5 | διαλαβόντα χρὴ σκοπεῖν”. ἐρομένης δὲ τῆς Ἀλφεσιβοίας | 6 | πῶς, ὑπολαβῶν φησὶ “τὴν μὲν θανεῖν ἐκριναν, ἐμὲ δὲ μὴ | 7 | κτανεῖν”.

In Lyons’s edition, the Arabic version reads:


4 For a text, Italian translation, and commentary see now V. Pacelli (ed. and tr.), Teodette di Faselide – Frammenti poetici. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento, Narr Francke Attempto, Tübingen 2016 (DRAMÁ - Studien zum antiken Drama und seiner Rezeption, 19), pp. 74-9. The GALex refers to Nauck’s classic Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta.
As Lyons’s edition indicates, the text is corrupt and lacunose in several places. Nonetheless, the underlying Greek of the translator’s exemplar can sometimes be discerned. For instance, at 1397 b 2-3, the translator’s exemplar clearly read ἐνίοτε (rubbamā) and ὡσπερ (ka-llaḏī), but whether the exemplar read or omitted ἐν and the exact spelling of Alcmaeon’s name in the translator’s exemplar is uncertain, at least at this stage in the study of the Arabic version. Further, as the classicist Kassel knew from the Arabo-Latin version of Hermannus Alemannus, the reading οὔτις (lam...ahadun) is clearly rendered by the Arabic; perhaps the translator wrote something along the following lines: lam yakun ahadun mina l-nāsi (i.e. the partitive genitive βροτῶν) yataẓallamu minhā. Some of Aristotle’s contextualization of the exchange, namely the phrase ἐρομένης δὲ τῆς Ἀλφεσιβοίας πῶς, has fallen out, perhaps as the result of a saut du même au même in the transmission of the Arabic (the phrases φῆσι δ’ ἀποκρινόμενος and ὑπολαβών φῆσι are both likely to have been translated by (fa-) qāla muḡīban); more strangely, as Lyons also notes, Alcmaeon’s reply, “ἀλλὰ διαλαβόντα χρὴ σκοπεῖν”, has been transposed to the end of the passage. The first person plural pronouns (yanbaġī lanā…) suggest that the translator probably read διαλαβόντας in the plural, modifying ἡμᾶς, with Kassel’s β, and the use of yanbaġī suggests that the manuscript preserved the reading χρή omitted by Kassel’s β.

Finally, I would venture the following tentative reconstruction of Alcmaeon’s reply to Alphesiboea at 1397 b 6-7:


The verb ḥakama, yahkumu (verbal noun: al-ḥukm) is attested as a translation of κρίνω ‘to judge, to decree’ and its compounds and derivatives and often governs the prepositions ἐπὶ (person) and βι (a penalty), i.e. ‘to sentence s.o. to s.th.’. As for the μέν clause, the translator likely used an ammā...fa-construction to translate τὴν (μέν),7 perhaps the translator read τὴν μὲν μαθάνειν, as suggested originally by Lyons in a note ad loc., or even τὴν μὲν μανθάνειν.

II. Iphicrates and Callias apud Arist. Rhet. 1405 a 19-22 (GALex I s.v. adībun 3)

At Rhet. 1405a19-22, Aristotle quotes a quip of the Athenian general Iphicrates against the aristocrat Callias, a hereditary torch-bearer (διδοῦχος) in the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and Callias’ riposte:

5 Cf. Lyons ad loc.: “the Arabic text is uncertain and may conceal a version of βροτῶν”.
6 See, for a very similar example (in the passive) in the Arabic version of On Thoricta to Piso in which the phrase ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν k. a. θηριδίων ἄποθεσεῖν is rendered by ilā qawmin qad ḥukima ʿalayhim bi-l-qatli, GALex I s.v. ammā 1.3.
7 See GALex I s.v. ammā 1.1-1.5 for ammā rendering mév in various uses. Cf. Vagelpohl, Aristotle’s Rhetoric (above, n. 3), pp. 129-34.

The Arabic version renders the passage as follows:

In the unique Paris MS, the text is again corrupt and lacunose. As Lyons notes, كلام is almost certainly a corruption of مصباح, since the term δᾳδοῦχος (δαίς/δᾴς + ἔχω) is correctly etymologized as ‘possessor, holder of the lamp’ when the word is repeated in the passage; further, the Arabo-Latin version of Hermannus Alemannus reads ‘candelabrum’, i.e. مصباح. The first lacuna should be filled with a transliteration of δᾳδοῦχος and the second with the Arabic equivalent of υτόν καλεῖν, i.e. Badawi’s conjecture an tusammiyanī (Hermannus: ut nominares me) or the like.

What to make of the remaining textual problem, the gloss of μητραγύρτην twice as فحل ‘stallion’?8 The rare and difficult word μητραγύρτης, lit. ‘mother-collector’ i.e. ‘mother-beggar,’ denotes (as the LSJ puts it) ‘a begging priest of Cybele,’ the Magna Mater of the Romans. Clement of Alexandria in his Protrepticus states that Antisthenes fittingly dubbed the μητραγύρται beggars (ἐλεγεν ὁ Ἀντισθένης ἐλεγεν κύτως μετατοῦσιν).9 Perhaps, then, the Arabic translator glossed the word twice as فحل ‘beggar’ i.e., a beggar,’ the final two letters – ذ – of which a later copist misread as a single ل, before re-reading the consonantal skeleton سحل as the more suitable فحل. If ‘beggar’ is in fact the original reading, then the translator had a remarkable grasp of the pejorative meaning of μητραγύρτης, thanks either to an accurate analysis of the noun as derived from άγείρω, or to access to an accurate gloss or glossary.

Through the above close look at a few of the Classical Greek quotations included in the GALex, I hope to have shown that these quotations bear further analysis for our understanding of (a) the translators’ Greek exemplars (and whatever value the reconstruction of these exemplars may have for Greek textual critics), (b) the language of the translations, which we might call Graeco-Arabic ‘translationese’, and (c) the translators’ (mis)understanding of difficult literary or cultural terms such as δᾳδοῦχος and μητραγύρτης. It is a challenge but also a privilege of Graeco-Arabic lexicography to be able to participate, indirectly but not insignificantly, in the study of these texts and the elucidation of their cultural and intellectual contexts. I salute Rüdiger for his years of pathbreaking research and wish him many more years of happiness, health, and hard work. As my teacher once reminded his, “after all, we still have to finish GALex!”10

8 Lyons notes ad loc.: “The rare term may have been unknown to the translator but there is no clear explanation of the gloss, which itself may be corrupt”.

