

B. Roggema – A. Treiger (eds.), *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translation*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2020, XI-430 pp.

The study of Christian literature in Arabic language is a promising and vast field of research, considering the quantity and variety of the texts it embraces, the breadth of the time span of their composition – presumably from the 8th century¹ up to the contemporary age – as well as their diverse geographical provenance – in particular, monasteries in Palestine and Sinai, Antioch and the surrounding monasteries, centers in Syria, Iraq and Egypt – and thus their circulation within different Christian communities. It covers translations of the books of the Bible (from Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Latin and occasionally Hebrew), translations from Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and other languages, of hagiographic, homiletic, liturgical and patristic writings, historical sources and canon law, and original works by Arab Christian authors.² Yet, much of this literature remains insufficiently researched if not almost completely unknown. One example is the Arabic translations of the Greek Church Fathers, which, according to recent estimates by Alexander Treiger, remain 99% unedited.³ This percentage also includes works that risk remaining in the shadows because they are transmitted in unstudied manuscripts, which escaped Georg Graf's impressive cataloging in the first volume of his *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (and in the later repertories that supplement it) or are inadequately described in the library catalogs.⁴ The situation is complicated by the fact that historical sources do not provide useful indications for the reconstruction of a unified picture, comparable to the service rendered by

¹ The 772 AD Arabic version of Ammonius' *Report on the Martyrdom of the Monks of Sinai and Raithu* is "the earliest securely dated Arabic translation of any Christian text", see A. Treiger, "The Earliest Dated Christian Arabic Translation (772AD): Ammonius' *Report on the Martyrdom of the Monks of Sinai and Raithu*", *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 16 (2016), pp. 29-38, here p. 30. The dating of the first Arabic translations of the Bible remains a debated issue: S.H. Griffith, "When Did the Bible Become an Arabic Scripture?", *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 1 (2013), pp. 7-13; Id., *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, Princeton U.P., Princeton 2013, pp. 97-126.

² For an orientation on the Bible in Arabic see: Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic* (above, n. 1); R. Vollandt, "The *Status Quaestionis* of Research on the Arabic Bible," in N. Vidro - R. Vollandt - E.-M. Wagner - J. Olszowy-Schlanger (eds.), *Semitic Linguistics and Manuscripts: A Liber Discipulorum in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Khan*, Uppsala Universitet, Uppsala 2018, pp. 442-67; a "Bibliography of the Arabic Bible. A Classified and Annotated History of Scholarship" is available at <https://biblia-arabica.com/bibl/index.html>. The latest overviews of Arabic versions of Christian writings are: A. Treiger, "Christian Graeco-Arabica: Prolegomena to a History of the Arabic Translations of the Greek Church Fathers", *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 3 (2015), pp. 188-227; Id., "The Fathers in Arabic", in K. Parry (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, West Sussex, and Malden, MA 2015, pp. 442-55; Id., "Translations II: Greek Texts into Other Languages (Fourth-Fifteenth Centuries). Section IV. Arabic", in S. Papaioannou (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2021, pp. 642-62. Further bibliographical references can be found in the volume under review: Treiger - Roggema, *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translation*, pp. 378-9. For original works by Arab Christian authors, see the fundamental series edited by D. Thomas, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, which to date consists of 19 volumes.

³ Treiger, "Christian Graeco-Arabica" (above, n. 2), p. 189; Id., "The Fathers in Arabic" (above, n. 2), p. 442.

⁴ See S.Kh. Samir, "L'avenir des études arabes chrétiennes", *Parole de l'Orient* 24 (1999), pp. 21-43, here pp. 33-4; Treiger, "Christian Graeco-Arabica", p. 196-7; Butts's contribution contains an excellent discussion on the subject: Treiger - Roggema, *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translation*, pp. 89-128, here pp. 93-7. See also the cases studied by Ibrahim, pp. 158-79, here pp. 158, 167-8, and Roberts, pp. 198-240, here pp. 209-10.

Ibn al-Nadīm with his *Kitāb al-Fihrist* or by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a with his ‘*Uyūn al-anbā’ fī tabaqāt al-aṭibbā’* to scholars of the ‘Abbāsīd translation movement.⁵

This multi-author volume entitled *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translation* aims, first and foremost, at reducing the above-mentioned striking percentage by offering historical-philological studies and critical editions. The merits of this publication, that was created as a collection of conference papers presented at the workshop on Arabic translations of patristic texts held at the *XVII. International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Oxford, August 2015), to which other contributions have been added (p. VII), are manifold and remarkable. As well as fulfilling the specific purpose of making unedited texts accessible – such as the three *editiones principes* published in the contributions by Glyinias, Kim and Treiger, two of which concern Arabic versions whose Greek originals are lost –, and of conducting sound philological groundwork for future editions – such as the contributions by Roggema, Butts, Karlsson and Roberts –, it also insists on important preliminary methodological questions (Introduction on pp. 6-10, Butts’s paper on pp. 93-97), reflects on the translators (the focus of the papers by Ibrahim and Mugler) and on the historical-socio-intellectual context in which the translations were produced and used (for instance, Roggema’s paper, pp. 40-7, Pataridze’s paper, especially on pp. 59-64, 74-5, Glyinias’ paper on pp. 249-52), and thus aims, through painstaking analyses, to stimulate further investigations in this field. The projection towards future research is manifested in the decision to include an updated bibliographical guide at the end of the volume.

After the table of contents (pp. V-VI), the preface (p. VII), a list of the abbreviations of the most frequently cited works (pp. VIII-IX), and biographical notes on the contributors (pp. X-XI), one finds the introduction (pp. 1-14), authored by Alexander Treiger and Barbara Roggema. In it, the editors not only contextualize the subject of the publication and present the individual contributions, but also map out a framework of research lines and methods by which they can be pursued (pp. 6-10).

This is followed by the 10 contributions that make up the volume, arranged in chronological order, each covering a specific aspect of the first two phases of Christian Arabic translation history in the periodization established by Alexander Treiger.⁶ These are the early period, represented by the late 8th century–early 10th century Palestinian-Sinaitic translations, and the medieval period, when various translations were prepared in Byzantine-reconquered Antioch (969-1084), but also in other centers in Syria and Egypt.

Opening the collection is “The Integral Arabic Translation of Pseudo-Athanasius of Alexandria’s *Quaestiones ad Antiochum duces*” (pp. 15-52) by Barbara Roggema. This compilation of questions and answers – 137 in number in the most complete version –, dating from the period between the mid-7th and early 8th century, is preserved in a variety of recensions and translations that attest to its extreme popularity. These include a complete and a partial Arabic translation, the latter containing 45 questions and answers, both dating from the 9th century and originating from the Syro-Palestinian area. The textual comparison conducted here by Roggema shows that the *versio brevior* was probably established from the full translation by comparing it with the Greek original (pp. 23-40). Finally, the scholar examines the influence of this text on three Melkite Arabic treatises (pp. 40-7).

⁵ Treiger, “Christian Graeco-Arabica” (above, n. 2), p. 197.

⁶ Treiger, “Christian Graeco-Arabica” (above, n. 2), pp. 195-6.

The second contribution is “Patristique et hagiographie palestino-sinaïtique des monastères melkites (IX^e-X^e siècles)” (pp. 53-88) by Tamara Pataridze. First of all, the scholar offers a repertoire of Arabic Christian manuscripts produced in monasteries in Sinai and Palestine between the 9th and 10th centuries, with a paleographic study of the writing style that characterizes this corpus (pp. 54-9). This is followed by a review of texts translated and originally composed in Arabic, of patristic and hagiographic content, including Arabic-Georgian translations, in the Palestinian-Sinaitic Melkite centers and in the same centuries (pp. 59-74). In the concluding part of her paper, Pataridze delves into the Syro-Arabic and Arabic-Georgian translations of Jacob of Serugh’s writings coming from this geographical area (pp. 74-80).

The latter Syriac author is the subject of Aaron Michael Butts’ study, entitled “Diversity in the Christian Arabic Reception of Jacob of Serugh (d. 521)” (pp. 89-128), focusing mainly on pre-modern Arabic translations of his homilies. After an accurate and effective discussion of the state of the art (pp. 93-7), Butts examines the Arabic manuscripts, classifying them according to provenance into Melkite, Coptic and Syriac Orthodox traditions (pp. 97-101), and provides three sample analyses in which he compares different translations of the same passage (pp. 101-21).

Jonas Karlsson’s “The Arabic Lives of John of Daylam” (pp. 129-57) examines four linguistic traditions, Syriac (pp. 130-5), Sogdian (p. 135), Ethiopic (pp. 136-7) and Arabic (pp. 137-49), in the transmission of the *Life* of East Syriac saint John of Daylam (d. 738). While the Syriac materials (indirect testimonies by Thomas of Marga and ʾĪšōʿdēnaḥ of Basra, a West Syriac prose life and an East Syriac verse homily) have already been studied and partially edited, and we have a critical edition even for the Sogdian fragments, the three Arabic versions isolated by Karlsson as well as the Ethiopic version have received very little attention. After a detailed discussion of the sources, a comparative analysis is undertaken to identify points of contact and potential relationships between the various linguistic traditions (pp. 139-42 and especially pp. 149-54).

The paper that follows, “Some Notes on Antonios and His Arabic Translations of John of Damascus” (pp. 158-79), by Habib Ibrahim, consists of two parts. In part one (pp. 158-66), Ibrahim examines the life and translations attributed to Antonios, *abbot* of the Monastery of Saint Symeon the Younger near Antioch, proposing a revision of some of the information on this author found in reference works, namely Graf’s *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* and Nasrallah’s *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l’Église melchite du V^e au XX^e siècle*. These include the dating of Antonios’ life, which should be placed between 1000 and 1053, and not in the 10th century. In the final part of his paper (pp. 167-78), the scholar focuses on the corpus of texts by John of Damascus translated by Antonios, which only partially coincides with the group of works by the same author included in Poimen’s corpus, compiled before 1223 and whose translator(s) is unknown. For the Arabic version of John of Damascus’ *Dialectica* Ibrahim identifies a possible model in a branch of the Greek tradition of the *recensio brevior* (pp. 170-7).

Joshua Mugler’s “Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā and the Translation Projects of Byzantine Antioch” (pp. 180-97) offers a useful overview of the biography and activity of one of the most important translators of 10th-11th century Antioch, examining the *Life of Christopher* (pp. 181-5) – the only extant original work by Ibrāhīm, composed in Greek and then translated into Arabic by himself –, the Greek-Arabic translations attributed to him (pp. 185-92) and other sources (pp. 192-4). The reader would be curious to know more about the individual

nature, reciprocal relationships and scope of the “translation projects of Byzantine Antioch” mentioned in the title, which are just hinted at in the discussion (p. 190, 194-5).

Alexandre M. Roberts’ contribution, “A Re-translation of Basil’s *Hexaemeral Homilies* by ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl of Antioch” (pp. 198-240), is part of a larger project devoted to the translation program of this important 11th-century Antiochian deacon, theologian and translator (p. 198 n. 1). The author offers an overview of the multilingual reception of Basil’s *Hexameron* (pp. 199-200, 205-9) and presents the three Arabic translations in more detail: ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl’s version (pp. 201-3), dated 1050-1051; an anonymous version (pp. 203-4), of which Ibn al-Faḍl’s translation is a revision systematically compared with the original Greek; and a 13th-century Copto-Arabic version by the monk Ğurayġ ibn Yuḥannis al-Rarāwī (pp. 204-5). The examination includes an inventory of the manuscripts known to date, a preliminary investigation of the relationships between the witnesses of Ibn al-Faḍl’s translation, and a linguistic comparison between the anonymous version and that of Ibn al-Faḍl (pp. 209-36). The frequent use of relevant textual examples makes Roberts’ argument particularly effective and persuasive.

In his “Homiletic Translation in Byzantine Antioch: The Arabic Translation of a Marian Homily of Patriarch Germanos I of Constantinople by Yānī ibn al-Duks, Deacon of Antioch” (pp. 241-75), Joe Glynias presents the first critical edition of the Greek-Arabic version of the *Homily on the Sash of the Theotokos*,⁷ included in the famous Antiochian Menologion. Facing the Arabic edition, based on the two known manuscripts, is the Greek text published in the *Patrologia Graeca*, while the commentary notes provide a comparative analysis of the Greek and Arabic (pp. 253-73). The edition is preceded by a presentation of the context of translation in which Glynias attempts to answer some crucial questions, namely who the translator was and the environment he worked in, what are the salient features of his translation style, but above all with what purpose and for what audience the translation was conceived, and whether and how these aspects influenced the final rendering (pp. 241-52).

This is followed by “L’homélie arabe *In Nativitatem Domini* (CPG 4290) attribuée à Sévérien de Gabala: Édition, traduction française” (pp. 276-327) by Sergey Kim. The critical edition of the Arabic text, based on eight witnesses, although one of them was consulted only partially, is accompanied by the French translation (pp. 288-325) and preceded by a *stemma codicum* (pp. 284-6). In the opening pages of his paper, Kim presents the content of the homily as well as the translator – Gregory, *abbot* of the Monastery of Our Lady in Dafnūnā, who produced a Syriac-to-Arabic version of the homily between the late 10th and early 11th century –, and questions the authorship of the lost original text (pp. 277-84). The scholar excludes that the author is Severian of Gabala based on stylistic and metatextual evidence and speculates that the homily was composed in a Syriac literary context (pp. 281-4).

The last contribution, written by Alexander Treiger, is entitled “*The Noetic Paradise (al-Firdaws al-‘aqlī)*: Chapter XXIV” (pp. 328-76). The author investigates the concluding part of the Arabic version of a lost Greek mystical and ascetic work, which is dated to the period between the 8th and 11th century and might have been translated into Arabic in the 11th or 12th century, probably in the Antiochian milieu. Treiger provides an English translation of Chapter XXIV (pp. 329-38), based on a sample critical edition included in Appendix B (pp. 353-72), and an extensive commentary focusing mainly on biblical quotations (pp. 338-42).

⁷ The contribution does not include the translation of the edited text referred to on p. 243.

The textual assonances between the Arabic rendering of the quotations from the *Epistles* contained in *The Noetic Paradise* and the corresponding passages in the *Epistle Lectionary* in the ms. Sinai ar. 164 have led the scholar to evaluate the hypothesis that the two texts were penned by the same translator (pp. 342-4). Finally, Appendix A (pp. 344-53) contains an inventory of the manuscripts that transmit the work, an inescapable starting point for the complete critical edition of this text that remains a strong desideratum.⁸

“A Bibliographical Guide to Arabic Patristic Translations and Related Texts” (pp. 377-418) precedes the “Index of Manuscripts” (pp. 419-24) and “Index of Names, Texts, and Subjects” (pp. 425-30), that close the volume. This bibliographical tool is exceptionally important and useful because it supplements and updates information found in major reference works, especially the first volume of Graf’s *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, Nasrallah’s *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l’Église melchite du V^e au XX^e siècle* and *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* by Geerard and Noret. This list is divided into several parts: a general section (pp. 378-84), including reference works, general studies, studies on manuscripts, studies on individual translators (organized by translator in alphabetical order), and Christian Arabic Patristic anthologies; a section on Arabic translations of Greek authors and works (pp. 384-404), consisting of 60 entries in alphabetical order; a section on Arabic translations of Syriac authors and works (pp. 404-10), consisting of 22 entries in alphabetical order; a section on translations of Armenian, Coptic, Latin, and Romanian authors and works (pp. 411-4), organized by linguistic tradition; a section on Ethiopic and Georgian translations from Christian Arabic (pp. 414-6), organized by linguistic tradition; a section on Muslim and Jewish reception of Arabic Patristic translations (pp. 417-8). The structure is cleverly devised to meet the needs of those searching by translator (paras. 1.4), by author (paras. 2 and 3) or by language of source and translation (paras. 2-5).

Beyond the variety and quality of each individual contribution, this volume as a whole has the merit of attempting to outline a history of the early Arabic translations of the Church Fathers, through the scrupulous investigation of a number of case studies. The urgency of this task is recalled in the introduction (p. 9: “we need to establish a history of these translations and of their diffusion, influence (both within their Christian communities of origin and beyond), and interpretation”), as already highlighted by Treiger in 2015. In his cutting-edge article, he set an agenda for the research in this field and proposed to pursue it by applying the tools and methods used for the investigation of the so-called ‘Abbāsīd translation movement: “[...] research into Christian Graeco-Arabica is hampered by a dearth of historical sources. There is therefore no substitute for the careful philological analysis of these translations, which will go a long way towards establishing their provenance, identifying translation ‘complexes’, or even individual translators, and thus piecing together—for the first time—a history of Christian Graeco-Arabica”.⁹

Only by outlining this history, which goes along with the study of translation techniques and styles (the so-called *Übersetzungsgrammatik*), will it be possible to constructively answer questions about the intellectual life of these monasteries and cultural centers, the circumstances and needs that dictated the selection of texts for translation, their intended use and intended audience, their impact on religious communities and Christian literary

⁸ The complete critical edition has been announced in Treiger, “Christian Graeco-Arabica”, p. 196 n. 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

production in Arabic, but also their influence on Muslim and Jewish thinkers,¹⁰ the potential interaction between the translation activity carried out between the mid-8th century and the late 10th century in the monasteries of Sinai and Palestine and in Antioch and the contemporary ‘Abbāsid translation movement of secular texts,¹¹ and one shall indeed try to “answer the calls of colleagues working on early Islam, especially on the question of how Islam was shaped by its late antique environment” (p. 8).¹²

Although there is obviously still much work to be done, the volume offers a clear picture of the maturity and awareness achieved by the discipline and constitutes a solid foundation for future research.

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¹⁰ See Id., “Christian Graeco-Arabica” (above, n. 2), p. 219; Id., “The Fathers in Arabic” (above, n. 2), pp. 449-50, and the case studied in Id., “From Dionysius to al-Ġazālī. Patristic Influences on Arabic Neoplatonism”, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 9 (2021), pp. 189-236.

¹¹ Id., “Christian Graeco-Arabica (above, n. 2)”, p. 203; Id., “The Fathers in Arabic” (above, n. 2), p. 444.

¹² On the latter issue, in addition to the scholarly debate summarized in this volume on pp. 8-9, mention should be made of the ERC project “The Qur’an as a Source for Late Antiquity” (QaSLA), P.I. Prof. Dr. Holger Zellentin, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen (2020-2025). The project aims at “utilizing the Qur’an, in an inter-disciplinary perspective, as witness to the history of Judaism and Christianity, in two unprecedented ways. The Qur’an, firstly, will become the primary literary source allowing us to sketch the religious landscape of the Arabian Peninsula at the turn of the seventh century C.E. Secondly, the Qur’an’s testimony to the religious culture of its contemporaries will enable us to approach the development of Jewish and Christian culture throughout Late Antiquity from a new perspective” (URL <<https://uni-tuebingen.de/it/fakultaeten/evangelisch-theologische-fakultaet/lehrstuehle-und-institute/religionswissenschaft-und-judaistik/religionswissenschaft-und-judaistik/quran-project-erc/>>, 2022-11-10).