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SOME NOTES ON THE ARABIC VERSIONS OF IV EZRA AND THE APOCALYPSE OF BARUCH IN MS MT SINAI ARABIC CODEX 589

BY
Adriana Drinț

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*) This article is based on my dissertation The Mount Sinai Arabic Version of IV Ezra. Text, Translation and Introduction, which I defended at the State University of Groningen on March 2nd, 1995. The text and translation of this Arabic version of IV Ezra will appear in the series Scriptores Arabici of the Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vols. 563 [48] and 564 [49].
INTRODUCTION

The Arabic versions of IV Ezra and the Apocalypse of Baruch were written by the same copyist and were bound together in Arabic Codex 589 of the manuscripts in the Monastery of St. Catharine at Mount Sinai. The manuscript does not contain a colophon. Now the question arises where the manuscript was originally made, since no mention is made of its origin. Here the Monastery of St. Catharine makes a bid, especially since the unique manuscript with the full text of these versions is kept in its library, indicating that the manuscript was written in the scriptorium of that monastery. However, the handwriting and the occurrence of a decoration suggest that the manuscript has been written in the late ninth/early tenth century in one of the monasteries in the Judean desert, namely the monastery of Mar Saba.

1) Abbreviations:
ApBar = Apocalypse of Baruch;
Gildemeister, Esdræa = Johannes Gildemeister, Esdræa Liber Quartus Arabice et Codice Vaticano Nune Primum Editus, Bonn, 1877.
2) The text of the Apocalypse of Baruch was edited by Leemhuis/Klin/van Gelder.
3) A very similar, though not identical, handwriting is found in Ms Borg Ar. 95. This manuscript originates from the Monastery of Mar Saba and is dated to the ninth century. See Eugenius Tisserant, Specimina Codicum Orientalium, Bonn, 1914, plate 55, description on p. XXXIX. Ms Mt Sinai Arabic Codex 589 contains a figure which bears resemblance to a figure found in two other manuscripts from the Monastery of Mar Saba, namely Ms Pat. Ar. 71 and Ms Strasbourg Ar. 151. A picture of these figures can be found in Tisserant, Specimina, plate 54, description on pp. XXXVIII-XXXIX, and W. Heffening, «Die griechische Ephraem-Paraenesis gegen das Lachen in arabischer Übersetzung. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der a-
A. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Graf's inventory of translations into Arabic makes it clear that the earliest dated manuscripts of Bible translations belong to the ninth century and originate from the Melkite community in Palestine. Griffith has shown in various articles that the reason for this phenomenon lies in the dual need for Arabic texts—especially of the Gospels—not only in the liturgy, since the Arabic language had superseded the Greek and Palestinian Aramaic, but also for apologetic material because of the increasing islamization of Palestine and Syria. The existence of Christian Arabic literature can be already traced back to the eighth century.

In Palestine there had been an earlier need for vernacular translations of the liturgy. This resulted in the use of Palestinian Aramaic since the fourth century, not only for liturgical texts but also for the writing of genres like homilies and saints' lives. When the vernacular language became Arabic, liturgical texts had to be translated into Arabic. Likewise the lack of regular contacts between the Melkite community in Palestine and the Byzantine mother-church for several centuries also played an important role in the superseding of Greek by Arabic as ecclesiastical language. This trend was continued with the apparent absence of significant scholarship in the indigenous Aramaic dialect as appears to have been the case especially after the revolt of 750 A.D., when the Omayyads were dislodged by the Abbasids.

Furthermore, the decreasing mastering of the Greek language in the monasteries together with the increasing arabization evoked a need for Bible translations.

bischen Ephramübersetzungen und ihrer Bedeutung für eine kritische Ausgabe des griechischen Ephraëmus», in OC 24 (1927) 99 (article pp. 94-119).

4) GRAF, GCAL 1 (1944) 85-195, supplemented by the on-going bibliographies in the Bulletin d'Arabe Chrétien / Bibliographie des auteurs Arabes chrétiens (BAC) and in the review ParOr.


The systematic translation activities in the Melkite community in Palestine should be distinguished from the activities of the translation movement in Baghdad, although in Baghdad Christians were also similarly involved in translating religious texts. However, the translations made by Hunayn ibn Ishāq and other Nestorian writers seem to have been made primarily for scholarly purposes and not for liturgical usage, since the liturgy continued to be celebrated in Syriac. It is significant that Hunayn’s Bible translation was from the Greek (the Septuagint) and not from the Syriac, which was the language of the Scriptures used in the liturgy. In the Nestorian and Jacobite churches there was no necessity for Bible translations in Arabic, since Syriac was the sole ecclesiastical language.

The same situation pertains to the Coptic Church in Egypt at that time: the Coptic language was the living church language, so religious works in Arabic were not required. In Egypt the first important works of Christian literature in Arabic are found only in the tenth century and these belong to the category of apologetical literature. The Syro-Arabic version of IV Ezra seems to have been unknown in Egypt, but there was apparently a need for an Arabic version of IV Ezra which resulted in two other versions, both translated from the Greek, of which the earliest witnesses are found in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries respectively.

In ninth/tenth century Palestine, however, translations of religious works were made in the monasteries of the Melkite community for internal use: in the liturgy (Bible translations), to learn from them (homilies, hagiographic literature) and to be strengthened by them (apologetical treatises). By contrast in these communities Arabic had become the common language

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8) See GRAF, GCAL I (1944) 74. The first Christian author in Egypt to write in Arabic was a Melkite, Eutychius of Alexandria.


10) One of these versions has been edited by Johannes GILDMEISTER, Exsae Liber Quartus Arabice e Codice Vaticano Nunc Primum Editus, Bonn, 1877, the other by Heinrich EWALD, Das vierte, pp. 133-230.

11) GRIFFITH, The Monks, p. 4: «The basic characteristic of these writings is that they were composed with an eye to the outside. In them the authors intend to bring the traditional theological considerations of their own Christian party to bear on the intellectual challenges of the day, in the very idiom of the current socio-political scene. Inevitably, of course, in the Christian Arabic literature of the first Abbasid century, Islam was the major horizon in view of which the Christian writers had to discuss not only their own internal differences, but their reactions to the claims of the newly established religion as well. Furthermore, in addition to commend the credibility of Christian faith to the Muslims, in the first Abbasid century there was also the increasingly important requirement to furnish Christians themselves with persuasive reasons, stated in clear Arabic, for not heeding the evermore persistent call to Islam.»
creating a need for texts in Arabic\textsuperscript{12}. In the Melkite community from the second half of the eighth century onwards the increasing translating activity from Greek and Syriac\textsuperscript{13} into Arabic suggests that the translations of the Apocalypse of Baruch and of IV Ezra came from one of the Palestinian monasteries, more precisely the monasteries of St. Catharine, Mar Saba and Mar Chariton\textsuperscript{14}.

B. THE TRANSLATOR OF IV EZRA CANNOT BE IDENTIFIED WITH THE TRANSLATOR OF THE APOCALYPSE OF BARUCH

It is noteworthy that the full texts of the Syriac versions of both the Apocalypse of Baruch and IV Ezra are only extant in one manuscript as are the full texts of their Arabic translations. Both texts were placed together in the same order in the Codex Ambrosianus\textsuperscript{15} as well as in the Sinai manuscript. This phenomenon raises the assumption that they were translated by the same translator. Closer scrutiny of the texts, however, reveals this not to be the case.

A comparison between the texts demonstrating how certain words and constructions were translated from Syriac into Arabic reveals divergencies in idiom and grammatical constructions, as these examples show.

\textsuperscript{12} The question arises if the early arabization of Southern Palestine may also have been influenced by the neighbourhood of the Christian Arabs of the northern Hijaz and Jordan, whose predecessors were the Arabic-speaking and Aramaic-writing Nabataeans. These Christians belonged largely to the Melkite community, too.

\textsuperscript{13} From the early ninth century onwards the writers in the monasteries originated largely from Syriac-speaking communities, see Griffith, Greek, pp. 127 and 133, and IDEM, The Monks, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{14} The monasteries of Mar Saba (the Great Laura) and Mar Chariton (Souka) are situated in the Judean Desert. They were founded in the fifth and fourth centuries respectively. See Yizhar Hirschfeld, The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period, New Haven / London, Yale University Press, 1992.

\textsuperscript{15} Ms Milan, Ambrosian Library, B. 21 Inf.; this manuscript is listed as 7al of the list of Peshitta-manuscripts.
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Another significant example of the difference in translating a grammatical construction is found in the case of the Syriac construction ܡܫܡܚܐ whose use is explicit to express the future tense. The word مشدحا means «ready, prepared, to come, future»19. In IV Ezra this is rendered by the equivalent construction ب يرمع ان or مزمع ان «decided / imminent / forthcoming», but in six cases by the strange construction على ان. Neither con-

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16) In Classical Arabic.
17) The figure between brackets indicates the number of instances.
18) The combination is the following: سنة الناموس .
19) The combination is the following: الحياة الخلق .
20) In Classical Arabic.
struction occurs in the Apocalypse of Baruch. There the Syriac ḫṣfrā is rendered by the construction َفِضِيَّانَ, «he decided to», or with َبِيْكُونَ or يتَكَلَّمين, «it will be» and «being» respectively.

Aside from the divergencies in idiom and grammatical constructions, the Arabic text of IV Ezra is a far more literal rendering of the Syriac text than the Arabic version of the Apocalypse of Baruch, where the translation is often very liberal.

Additionally, there are other indications which lend support to the supposition that the original texts from which the Sinai manuscript has been copied were of different origin. The first is the numbering of the quires suggesting that they were copied from two separate originals. Secondly the spelling of the proposition من أجل, «because of/on account of», is always written as two separate words in IV Ezra, but in the Apocalypse of Baruch it is usually one word, من أجل. Furthermore, the punctuation marker which consists of a circle with a dot inside occurs far more frequently in IV Ezra than in the Apocalypse of Baruch.

These phenomena suggest that the translator of IV Ezra cannot be identified with the translator of the Apocalypse of Baruch.

C. DIFFERENT STYLE OF TRANSLATION

A notable phenomenon is that in certain passages of the Arabic version of the Apocalypse of Baruch Qur'anic phraseology is used. Also in IV Ezra a few words known from Islam appear, for example سنة for ‘Law’, اخاذية for ‘Sheol’ and طالوت (IV Ezra VII 108) for ‘Saul’. At first sight it is striking that the idiom which is connected with the Qur’an and with Islam in general also occurs in Arabic texts of Christian origin. Yet it is important to remember that Islam adopted existing Arabic religious terminology that was employed by Christians and Jews already before Islam.

Vice versa, with the arabization of the Islamic empire, the terminology

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of Muslim religious concepts was also adopted by the new speakers of Arabic. Since this vocabulary was connected primarily with the Qur'an, it lent a definite Islamic tenor to any religious work, whether or not it was of Muslim origin. When the antagonism between Christians and Muslims increased, at the time of the crusades and later, Christian authors discarded phrases and words which had an Islamic overtone. As a consequence, Qur'anic phraseology can be considered to be a characteristic of early Christian Arabic translations. The presence of Islamic phraseology in Arabic texts of Jewish origin lends further support to this initial phenomenon.

It is therefore not unusual to find «Islamic» religious vocabulary in an early context. Like other Christian Arabic texts from the ninth and tenth centuries, the Arabic version of the Epistle of Baruch begins with the hasmalah formula, «In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate»; its usage suggesting that the Apocalypse itself was probably also preceded by the hasmalah formula, as does IV Ezra.

The most striking difference between the two texts in Ms Mt Sinai Arabic Codex 589 is that the Arabic version of the Apocalypse of Baruch is a far less literal translation of the Syriac text than the Arabic version of IV Ezra and other Bible translations. However, it is not unique, since there are other translations renowned for their nonliteral rendering of biblical texts. One of these is the translation of the book of the prophet Jeremiah, made by Fāṭūn (Pethion) ibn Ayyūb al-Sāḥbār, who worked around the second half of the ninth century as a translator in Baghdad.

According to Richard Frank this translation of the book of Jeremiah leaves the impression that the translator's first concern was to make a «good, literary Arabic» rendering, not a slavish reproduction of the Peshitta. In order not to deviate from the standard of usage which was based on the Qur'an

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27) See Graf, GCAL I (1944) 126 and 134.
and Tradition (Hadith) as well as on the classical Beduin poetry, Pethion made use of Arabic religious vocabulary and had to recast many typical Syriac expressions which were characterised by the background of a settled, chiefly urbanized, agricultural society. In many cases this resulted in a conflict of styles which Pethion resolved through doublings and repetitions of single words or whole phrases, in which the quasi-Muslim rendering is set alongside the literal one. And because the meaning of roots and even specific forms of the roots in Arabic are determined only by context, the translator’s choice of words was primarily governed by his feeling for the individual passage, while his reasons for his choice often remained obscure. However, Pethion’s style was not flawless, and his mastering of Arabic can be also questioned.

Also other Christian authors from the tenth and eleventh century, among whom Sawirūs Ibn al-Muqaffa, adopted religious terms and expressions from the Qur’an, since the literary idiom of Arabic was new to them and the great model of style and idiom was the Qur’an.

If Bible translations made in Palestine are generally more literal, it seems that the Arabic translation of the Apocalypse of Baruch does not belong to this type of translation. It may be a product of another tradition of translation, namely the type found in the Arabic translation of Jeremiah by Pethion. Furthermore, the ‘Muslim’ cast of the Arabic version of the Apocalypse of Baruch can be explained from the often divergent translation of the Syriac into Arabic, arising from the previously discussed method of translation, which was meant to give a good, literary Arabic rendering, even if this was not always successful. It seems that this type of translation was the product of professional translators or scribes. The above-mentioned Sawirūs Ibn al-Muqaffa, for example, had been a kāthib before he became a monk. He was therefore well-versed in literary Arabic.

28) Frank, The Jeremias, pp. 139-140. Compare the phenomenon found in the Arabic version of the Apocalypse of Baruch that the passage ApBar 51:4-7 has been rendered twice, the second rendering being the more literal one.


30) Dr van Gelder drew my attention to a passage on this Pethion in Ibn Abi Uṣaybi’a, Uyun al-amb’d, Beirut, n.d., p. 280: وجدت نقله كبير النحن و يكمن يعرف علم العربية أصلا.

31) Farag, The Usage, p. 55.

32) Blau, A Grammar, Fase, 1, p. 20

In view of the contacts between the Palestinian monasteries and Christian communities elsewhere it is possible that the Arabic translation of the Apocalypse of Baruch was not made in Palestine\textsuperscript{34}.

Before a definite statement can be made about the origin of the Arabic version of the Apocalypse of Baruch, a comprehensive study not only of the Arabic translations from Syriac made by the Melkites in Palestine but also of the translations made by the Nestorians and Jacobites in the Mesopotamian area and the Copts in Egypt as well as a comparison of the translation techniques used by these translators should be undertaken. It should be borne in mind, however, that translations were often revised, not only in view of their Vorlage, but also in view of other translations or according to the copyist’s view.

D. PECULIARITIES OF THE ARABIC VERSIONS OF IV EZRA AND THE APOCALYPSE OF BARUCH

As the translations do not reflect upon their origin other means might reveal the purpose of the translations and the milieu in which they were made.

The book of IV Ezra in the Sinai manuscript commences with an introduction to the text. Neither the Syriac version nor the other Arabic versions contain such an introduction to the text. Since the outer sheet of the first quire of the bookblock is missing, it is unknown if the Apocalypse of Baruch had an introduction, too. The introduction to IV Ezra in the Sinai manuscript was apparently copied from the Vorlage. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that the names mentioned in it are written correctly, whereas one of them is written incorrectly in the text of IV Ezra itself\textsuperscript{35}. The introduction introduces the book of IV Ezra to the reader as the book about the books of Ezra, the scribe. It then highlights the nature of these books by summarizing the account of the restoration of the lost holy books through Ezra, as recorded in IV Ezra 19-50 and in particular XIV 38-50, where the divine


\textsuperscript{35} Namely the name Darîyû, compare IV Ezra XIV 24, see Adriana DRINT, «The Mount Sinai Arabic Version. Characteristics and Relevance of an Early Arabic Translation of the Syriac Text», in OCP 58 (1992) 418 (article pp. 401-422).
inspiration is emphasized.

It is striking that the introduction does not mention the apocalyptic visions of the book of IV Ezra, which form its largest part, but only deals with the account of the restoration of the holy books. This account may have been viewed as referring to the completion of the book of IV Ezra itself, but it is also possible that it was chosen because it was the most well-known part of the book of IV Ezra in the Arabic-speaking world.

In contrast to the Apocalypse of Baruch the book of IV Ezra also contains headings and marginal notes. These headings and marginal notes were for the larger part written in red ink, by the same hand as the rest of the text, excepting the last two marginal notes, which were written by a later reader, a monk from Sinai.

Three of the headings written by the copyist of IV Ezra have an equivalent in the Syriac version, namely at the beginning of the text of IV Ezra and at the beginning of the prayers of Ezra. The remaining headings and the marginal notes have no counterpart in the Syriac or other versions. Some of the headings were probably already present in the Vorlage from which this manuscript was copied. Further support is given by the blank spaces which were left for three headings. By contrast one heading was written at the top of the page, above the frame of the text, and the other notes were written in the margin.

From these headings and marginal notes it is evident that at the time of its production by the copyist of the Sinai manuscript, the text was interpreted as referring to the Messiah, his crucifixion, his incarnation, his apostles and the descent of the Spirit in the baptized people. The application to Jesus Christ is also made explicit by a gloss inserted in XIII 52: Syriac text: «that they will see my son or those who are with him»; Arabic text: «that they will see my son and my beloved or those who are with him». This is clearly an allusion to Matth. 3:17.

The interpretation to which the headings and notes refer is not an obvious one, on the contrary, sometimes it is far-fetched, best seen in the marginal note which refers to the incarnation of the Messiah. It is striking that headings and notes are not added to the text where it is manifest that the text

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36) Accounts of the restoration of the Tawrāh through ʿUzayr/Ezra are found in Muslim legends of the Prophets - Qiṣṣa al-ʿanbiyāʾ- commentaries on the Qurʾān and historical writings from the eighth through the eleventh century.
refers to the coming of the Messiah at the end of time\textsuperscript{37}.

The presence of interpretative headings and marginal notes in the Arabic version of IV Ezra offer clues for interpretation which are absent in the Apocalypse of Baruch. It is possible that the text was considered suitable for edifying reading. This contrasting situation might offer an explanation for the problem of the restricted transmission of the Apocalypse of Baruch compared to IV Ezra. Apparently IV Ezra was far more popular than the Apocalypse of Baruch, witnessed by the fact that IV Ezra was transmitted in many versions, found in several manuscripts, whereas the Apocalypse of Baruch survived in only two versions, each in only one manuscript.

Moreover, a phenomenon in the Apocalypse of Baruch which does not occur in the Arabic version of IV Ezra, might indicate that there were problems in accepting the text of the Apocalypse of Baruch. It is striking that two passages of the Apocalypse of Baruch were deleted and not rewritten\textsuperscript{39}. The fact that these lines were erased and not rewritten might mean that there were problems in accepting the text of the Apocalypse of Baruch, especially regarding the fall of the angels. What is not clear, but crucial, is whether this erasure was done by the copyist of the text himself or by a later reader.

In view of the introduction and headings and notes added to the book of IV Ezra and the erasures in the Apocalypse of Baruch it is possible that the text of IV Ezra was considered more suitable for edifying reading than the Apocalypse of Baruch.

The possibility cannot be excluded, but a translation made for liturgical purpose in the Melkite community seems unlikely. Whilst fragments of the Syriac versions of IV Ezra and the Apocalypse of Baruch were found in lectionaries, they are of Jacobite origin and there are only three\textsuperscript{39}. Of course,

\textsuperscript{37} For example, the Coptic author Mu'taman al-Dawla Abû Ishâq ibn al-Assâl quotes the extract of another Arabic version of IV Ezra in his chapter on the end of times, the coming of the Messiah and the condition of the souls before the resurrection, and also in the chapter on the Revelation to Saint John. This Arabic version of IV Ezra has been edited by Johannes Gildemeister, \textit{Esdræ}, the extract has been published earlier by Ewald, \textit{Das vierte}, pp. 178-189.

\textsuperscript{38} The first passage concerns Apocalypse of Baruch 50:3-4, the other one Apocalypse of Baruch 56:9-14.

since the Syriac and Arabic lectionaries in the Monastery of St. Catharine are not published, it is possible that they may include portions of IV Ezra and the Apocalypse of Baruch.

E. THE BOOK OF IV EZRA AND THE MONASTERY OF ST. CATHARINE

There might have been a special reason for the current repository of the manuscript. In fact, the text of IV Ezra, referring to chapter XIV which draws a close parallel between Moses and Ezra, seen especially in the striking resemblance between the giving of the Law to Moses and the restoration of the Law through Ezra. Thus, as Moses was called by a voice coming from the midst of a bush, so was Ezra. When Moses received the Law at Mount Sinai no one was allowed to approach the mountain for forty days. Likewise the Israelites were not allowed to come near Ezra for forty days when he went to the desert to receive the revelation. Moreover the Monastery of St. Catharine in which this manuscript is kept is situated at the foot of Mount Sinai. The site of the burning bush from which God called Moses is reputedly contained within the walls of this monastery. Indeed, the Monastery of St. Catharine would seem to be the proper place to keep an account of the restoration of the Law! Therefore it is, in my opinion, likely that the manuscript of IV Ezra was produced on behalf of this Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. This is not exceptional, since many of the manuscripts now kept in the Monastery of St. Catharine were produced on behalf of this monastery in the Monasteries of Mar Saba and Mar Chariton40.

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In the Latin Church another portion of IV Ezra (IV Ezra VIII 20-36), has played a role in the liturgy: the Prayer of Ezra is contained in numerous liturgical manuscripts. See A.F.J. KLIN, Der lateinische Text der Apokalypse des Esra, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 131, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1983.