

THE ARABIC LIFE OF JOHN THE MERCIFUL AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SYRIAC VERSION AND THE GREEK TEXT

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INTRODUCTION

The study of the Arabic version of the *Life of John the Merciful*, originally written in Greek by the Byzantine hagiographer Leontios of Neapolis towards the middle of the 7th century, offers the opportunity for an overall reconsideration of the entire manuscript tradition of the work. The importance of the Arabic *Life* in the history of the transmission of Leontios' hagiography is primarily connected to its central position among the oriental versions (including Syriac and Georgian), the Greek original, and the medieval translations into Latin. This contribution aims to clarify the origin of the Arabic version (from Greek or Syriac). It offers a definitive clarification of the mutual relationship between the ancient translations of the *Life of John the Merciful*. After outlining the *status quaestionis* and the latest advancements on the topic, the article will study the Arabic version from an ecdotic point of view. By focusing on the most relevant *loci critici* of the work, the author will show the close connection between the Arabic, Syriac, and Latin ver-

sions. Excluding their common dependence on a lost Greek *Vorlage*, the author will provide evidence of the direct relationship between Arabic and Latin on the one hand, and between Syriac and Arabic on the other. Finally, the Arabic text will be studied as an indirect witness of the Syriac manuscript tradition by comparing it with the multiple forms of the Syriac version.

THE STUDIES ON THE LIFE'S MANUSCRIPT TRADITION IN THE LAST TEN YEARS

The research on the hagiographic masterpiece of Leontios of Neapolis, the *Life of John the Merciful*, has made considerable advances in the last decade. Scholars have attended to both the history of the Greek text and its ancient translations, which also offer helpful evidence for reconstructing the original.¹

The Greek text

The Greek tradition of the *Life* has received noteworthy attention from the group led by P. A. Cavallero at the University of Buenos Aires. He has dedicated the last fifteen years to the literary production of Leontios of Neapolis. In addition to the Spanish edition of the *Life*,² which has substantially improved

¹ The importance of the ancient translations for reconstructing the Greek original has rekindled the debate on this hagiographic work and was the starting point of my research. For the ancient versions of the *Life of John the Merciful*, cf. DÉROCHE, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 39-43. For the relationship between the Greek text and the Syriac version, cf. VENTURINI, *Quale modello greco?*, p. 375-380.

² CAVALLERO, *Vida de Juan el limosnero*. The work of Cavallero improves Festugière's edition, with a new proposal of *stemma codicum* and the con-

the edition of A. J. Festugière,³ these developments include studies of the multiple versions of the Greek text.⁴ Cavallero's group is also studying the fragments and the unedited recensions of the *Life* and is working on a new critical edition, which will be published soon. This edition will consider a new collation of the Greek manuscripts, the Syriac version, and the Latin versions.⁵

The Latin version (BHL 4392)

Regarding the ancient translations of the *Life*, many discoveries have been added to the information collected in the study of V. Déroche, which provided scholars with important starting points for studying the Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions.⁶

tribution of the “abridged versions” of the Greek text. It also provides an in-depth stylistic and linguistic study and a Spanish translation.

³ FESTUGIERE, *Vie de Syméon le Fou*.

⁴ For the relationship between the abridged versions and the original text, cf. CAVALLERO—FERNÁNDEZ, *La Vida de Juan*. A specific study of an extract from the *Life*, the *Story of Peter the Tax Collector*, clarifies the relationship between this edifying tale and the primary source, cf. CAVALLERO, *Leoncio de Neápolis y los relatos*. Recently the so-called “selective version” has also been published, cf. CAVALLERO—GUTIÉRREZ—FUENTES, *El texto ‘selectivo’ de la versión ‘corta’*. The study of the “mixed version” and the “uncertain version” is still in progress, and an edition of both is being prepared.

⁵ CAVALLERO—FERNÁNDEZ, *Leoncio de Neápolis, Vida de Juan*. The new critical edition will primarily consider the essential contribution of the Syriac version. I worked on a systematic comparison of the Syriac version with the Greek (and its variants) in the summer of 2018, during my research stay at the University of Buenos Aires. I am grateful to Professor Cavallero for sharing the results of his new collation with me at that time.

⁶ Leontios' work circulated widely both in the Christian East and in the Latin West, as is clear from the large number translations: three in Latin and one each respectively in Syriac, Arabic, Georgian and Slavic, cf. DÉ-

The critical edition of the anonymous Latin version known as BHL 4392 has recently been published, which had remained the only unedited version after the one by John of Amalfi.⁷ The edition provides a text of extreme interest because of its significant affinities with the Syriac version.⁸

The Syriac version

In 2020, I published a new critical edition of the Syriac version, using recensions, manuscripts, and indirect witnesses unknown to P. Bedjan, who had published the text for the first time.⁹ This edition details the manuscript tradition, a *stemma codicum*, and an Italian translation.¹⁰ More recently, I pub-

ROCHE, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 37-39. Déroche considered the Syriac version to preserve an ancient form of the Greek text: his theory was based on the analysis of Bedjan's edition, which is extremely deficient from an ecdotic point of view, especially in the part of the prologue which was examined by Déroche, cf. VENTURINI, *Nuove considerazioni*, p. 78-79. In his work, Déroche clarifies the dependence of Anastasius' Latin translation on the "short version" of the Greek text, and of the other two Latin translations on the "long version", DÉROCHE, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 73-75 and 42-43. Concerning the Arabic version, Déroche does not say whether it derives from Greek or Syriac; he does, however, provide to the reader with important data for a first approach to the text, cf. *infra*.

⁷ CHIESA, *Vita e morte di Giovanni Calibita e Giovanni l'Elemosiniere*. The relationship of the Amalfitan version with the Greek text is being studied in the University of Buenos Aires. My opinion about the ecdotic position of this translation is exposed *infra*.

⁸ Cf. *infra*.

⁹ BEDJAN, *Acta Martyrum*, p. 303-395.

¹⁰ VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679). The main improvement of the new edition is due to the contribution of the so-called *versio syra minor* (manuscript Paris BnF Syr. 234), of the manuscript Dayr Mar

lished other studies on the subject: a critical edition of all the existing recensions of the Syriac text, with an explanation of their mutual relation; a study of the ecdotic link between the Syriac version and the Greek manuscript tradition; and a study of the contribution that the Syriac provides to the reconstruction of the Greek original.¹¹

The Arabic version

New data concerning the Arabic version of the *Life* have emerged recently. The Arabic version, which is almost entirely unedited,¹² has been recently studied by André Binggeli, who in 2019 presented his work in Leuven at a conference dedicated to the Lavra of Mar Saba. The study, which will be published soon in the Proceedings of the conference, considers cases of several hagiographical works with a tradition in Arabic and Syriac, among which is the *Life of John the Merciful*.¹³

Mattay, ms. 142 (27), and of an unedited fragment found in Sinai Syr. 24, cf. *infra*.

¹¹ VENTURINI, *La leggenda di Pietro il Pubblicano*; VENTURINI, *La versio syra minor*. My proposal of a tripartite *stemma* suggests the substantial contribution of the Syriac version for a new edition of the Greek text: when the two main branches of the Greek tradition disagree, the preference must be given to the one which agrees with Syriac, cf. VENTURINI, *Quale modello greco?*, p. 378-380.

¹² The only available parts of the text are the extracts from the *Annals* of Eutychius of Alexandria, published by BREYDY, *Das Annalenwerk* (CSCO 471), p. 119-121.

¹³ BINGGELI, *Writing in Syriac* [forthcoming]. I thank André Binggeli for giving me the opportunity to read his unedited contribution, which was essential for the development of this study.

THE ARABIC VERSION OF THE LIFE: STATUS QUAESTIONIS

Breydy's remarks on three excerpts of the Arabic version

The Arabic version of the *Life of John the Merciful*, preserved in several manuscripts of different eras,¹⁴ is still inaccessible to scholars who do not read Arabic. An exception regards the three excerpts quoted in the *Annals* of Eutychius, edited and translated into German by M. Breydy, reproducing the content of chapters 6, 18, and 45 of the *Life*.¹⁵ Breydy observed that the source of Eutychius must have been a Sinaitic copy of the Arabic *Life*: the three excerpts preserve a high-quality text, reproducing more accurately the Greek than the Arabic manuscripts copied in Mar Saba do.¹⁶ Apart from the ecdotic relationship between the *Annals* and the *Life of John the Merciful*,¹⁷ it is noteworthy that Breydy had already realized the significant differences, even in the earliest manuscripts, between the Greek text and the Arabic version “réalisée dans les milieux melchites palestiniens, qui prétend traduire directement d'un

¹⁴ A list is provided by GRAF, *Geschichte der christlichen*, p. 409, who does not mention two ancient Sinaitic witnesses, Sinai Ar. 428 [late 9th century] and Sinai Ar. 431 [10th century], cf. BINGGELI, *Writing in Syriac*, n. 117.

¹⁵ BREYDY, *Das Annalenwerk* (CSCO 471), p. 119-121. The use in the *Annals* of material coming from the *Life of John the Merciful* helps to fix the epoch of the Arabic translation before 935. Breydy's theory that Eutychius knew the *Life* in Arabic translation is confirmed by the peculiar form of a chapter XVIII, cf. *infra*.

¹⁶ BREYDY, *Études sur Sai'id Ibn Batrīq*, p. 17-18.

¹⁷ The problem involves the relationship between the two recensions of the *Annals*, cf. EBEID, *Sa'id ibn Batrīq* and CONTERNO, *The recensions of Eutychius*.

*original grec, mais dont la correction stylistique laisse beaucoup à désirer.*¹⁸

The study of Vincent Déroche

In his monograph on Leontios of Neapolis, V. Déroche highlighted the most relevant data provided by Breydy's study. First, he remarked that the earliest manuscripts, such as the Syriac version, presented the story in 48 chapters.¹⁹ Secondly, the Arabic version indirectly reflects the Greek text's longer and more complete recension, the so-called *Vie Longue*.²⁰ Moreover, due to insufficient evidence, Déroche does not take a position on the Greek or Syriac derivation of the Arabic version.²¹

Affinities between Greek, Syriac, and Arabic in one of Breydy's extracts

In the preface of my edition of the Syriac version, I inform the reader that the Arabic version —in the form preserved by the *Annals* of Eutychius, the only text accessible to me at that time— preserves original details of the Greek, which are absent in the Syriac text.²² In the same paragraph, I suggest that

¹⁸ BREYDY, *Études sur Sai'id Ibn Batriq*, p. 18, n. 17. The scholar refers here to the colophon of the earliest Arabic witness, Sinai Ar. 428, which informs that the *Life of John the Merciful* has been translated into Arabic directly from Greek, cf. BLAU, *Über einige alte*, p. 370.

¹⁹ DÉROCHE, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 41, n. 15.

²⁰ Déroche comes to this conclusion by comparing the content of chapters 6, 18, and 45 (numeration of Sinai Ar. 428) to their counterparts in the text edited by FESTUGIÈRE, *Vie de Syméon le Fou*.

²¹ DÉROCHE, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 38, n. 7.

²² VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XXVIII.

the Arabic and the Syriac versions may depend on the same branch, considering the subdivision of the work into 48 chapters, which is certainly not original.²³ These two remarks were based on the analysis of a passage that the *Annals* had taken from chapter XVIII of *Life of John the Merciful*, containing the list of provisions sent by the Patriarch to Modestus of Jerusalem, who was rebuilding the city after its destruction by the Persians in 614.²⁴ On the one hand, the correct translation in Arabic of the term *μαينوμένη*, “dried fish”, absent in Syriac, seems to support the translator’s direct knowledge of the Greek original; on the other hand, the order of the provisions is different in the Greek text compared to the Syriac and Arabic versions,²⁵ suggesting a close link between the two latter.²⁶ Without directly examining the Arabic manuscripts, I did not take a position on the Greek or Syriac model of the Arabic translation, just stating that Syriac and Arabic belong to the same branch of the manuscript tradition. In theory, it could not be excluded that the Arabic version was translated from a Greek model similar to the one used by the Syriac translator.

Two new hypotheses on the Arabic *Life*’s origin

The recent analysis of the Arabic version by André Binggeli, based on the earliest manuscripts (Sinai Ar. 428 and Sinai Ar.

²³ VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XXIX.

²⁴ FESTUGIERE, *Vie de Syméon le Fou*, p. 366.

²⁵ The “thousand pounds of iron” are mentioned in the sixth position both in Syriac (ܬܠܬ ܐܠܦ ܕܥܝܪܐ, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. 46) and in Arabic (الف رطل حديد), cf. BREYDY, *Das Annalenwerk* (CSCO 471), p. 121), in the fourth position in Greek, (χίλιας λίτρας σιδήρου, cf. FESTUGIERE, *Vie de Syméon le Fou*, p. 366).

²⁶ VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XXIX, n. 60.

431), convincingly demonstrates a close relationship between Syriac and Arabic versions. First, Binggeli provides a table showing the almost perfect correspondence between the chapter numbering in Syriac and Arabic: the Arabic version has the same omissions and reorganization of chapters we find in Syriac.²⁷ He then offers a table that compares pieces from the last chapter: the Arabic version presents the same omissions, additions, and reformulations that distinguish the Syriac version from the Greek original.²⁸ The Arabic version is much more condensed than the Greek text: it follows the Syriac (almost *ad verbum*) in its drastic reduction of rhetorical and descriptive sections. In conclusion, Arabic and Syriac create a different narrative fabric from the one conceived by Leontios of Neapolis. Nevertheless, the Arabic version keeps one original detail of the Greek which is not present in Syriac: the mention of orphans and widows, which could reveal a direct knowledge of the Greek original. Binggeli concludes by formulating two alternative hypotheses: a) Syriac and Arabic were translated from the same lost Greek model; b) the Arabic version was translated from Syriac and eventually revised according to the Greek original. To support the claim that the Arabic translator knew the Greek original, Binggeli adduces the colophon of Sinai Ar. 428, which informs that the *Life of John the Merciful* has been translated from Greek (*rūmī*) into Arabic at Mar Saba.²⁹ He parallels the Martyrdom of the Forty Monks of Sinai and Raithu, a hagiographic text translated from Syriac

²⁷ BINGGELI, *Writing in Syriac* [forthcoming].

²⁸ The author highlights that the manuscript Sinai Ar. 428 reproduces even the calque from Syriac of the name of Alexandria, instead of its Arabic counterpart, cf. *ibid.*

²⁹ BLAU, *Über einige alte*, p. 370.

into Arabic and later revised according to the Greek original, as A. Treiger convincingly demonstrated.³⁰

In my analysis of the Arabic manuscripts, made possible thanks to a collaboration with Bishara Ebeid, I have found many other agreements with the Syriac version against the Greek original.³¹ I mention here, for example the number of poor people in Alexandria, 8500 instead of 7500 (FESTUGIÈRE, 348.39; VENTURINI, 7.1-2); the last sentence of chapter VII, which was not part of the Greek original (FESTUGIÈRE, 353, 19; VENTURINI, 20.7-8); the different ending of chapter VIII (FESTUGIÈRE, 354, 79-85; VENTURINI, 24.16-25.10); the peculiar conclusion of chapter XIX and beginning of chapter XX

³⁰ TREIGER, *The Earliest Dated Christian Arabic Translation*, p. 32-34.

³¹ Since I am not a specialist in Arabic language, I developed my research [workflow?] as follows. First of all, I examined some Garshuni manuscripts, easier to read, looking for the crucial *loci* of the Syriac version. I consulted two manuscripts, both late but well conserved: Vatican Syr. 202, f. 1r-52v [1672 A. D.] and Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 138, f. 106r-122r [n. d.]. After this preliminary phase, I studied the detected passages with Bishara Ebeid, my colleague in Venice. After translating it, Bishara compared the Garshuni text to that of the oldest Arabic manuscript, Sinai Ar. 428, to register the variants. In this way, we made sure that the Garshuni manuscripts do not reflect a different version from that preserved in the Sinaitic sources. After that, I transcribed the selected passages from Vatican Syr. 202, registering the variants in the footnotes. I am infinitely grateful to Bishara Ebeid for his help, without which this contribution would have never seen the light of day. The content of Vatican Syr. 202 has been described by ASSEMANI, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, p. 458-484, who observes that the work is divided in 50 small chapters. He also transcribes and translates some pieces, including the note at f. 52v, which informs about the place and the date of the copy (Aleppo, 14th October 1672), cf. *ibid.*, p. 458-459. A description of Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 138 can be found in AL-SHAMANI, *Fahâris al-makhtûât*, p. 95.

(FESTUGIÈRE, 368.2-6; VENTURINI, 50.7-13); the price of a slave, thirty coins instead of fifty coins (FESTUGIÈRE, 370, 114; VENTURINI, 55.8); and the suppression of the chapters concerning the heretics in Alexandria.³²

I will go back to the two hypotheses above: do these innovations point to a Greek common ancestor, or do they directly reflect the Syriac text? I will extend my view to the whole manuscript tradition of the *Life of John the Merciful*, looking for other helpful data.

THE LOST GREEK VORLAGE: AN UNNECESSARY THEORY

The Latin version BHL 4392: peculiarities and common features to the Syriac version

The possible dependence of Arabic and Syriac on a common Greek model was suggested by the discovery of the surprising features of the anonymous Latin version known as BHL 4392.³³ This late translation, whose origin is still unknown,³⁴ reproduces almost all the *loci* in which the Syriac version differs from the Greek original (including those common to the Arabic version, listed above). As it is challenging to assume a di-

³² Cf. *infra*. On this problem, see also BINGGELI, *Writing in Syriac* [forthcoming] and VENTURINI, *Quale modello greco?*, p. 381.

³³ *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina*, p. 650. The text is transmitted by a single manuscript, Paris BnF Lat. 3820, f. 166vb-175ra [14th century], which has been recently published by BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, *Vita beati Iohannis*, p. 308-323. For the general content of the manuscript, cf. THOMAS, *Catalogue général des manuscrits*, p. 412-413.

³⁴ A suggestion will be proposed later, cf. *infra*. For a description of the content and the cultural context of the manuscript, cf. BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, *Vita beati Iohannis*, p. 305.

rect relationship between Syriac and Latin, I first supposed that the two versions depended on the same lost Greek model³⁵. I did not exclude that this unknown recension might have been the common model of the Syriac, Latin, Arabic, and Georgian versions.³⁶

The Latin version offers a complete reinterpretation of the structure of the saint's biography, achieved through a new ordering of the chapters, which remains without any parallel in the manuscript tradition. The chapters are arranged in the following order (reference is made to Festugière's numeration): 6 (1st part)+47, 16+46, 45, 4+5, 2, 3, 1, 10, 9, 6 (2nd part), 8, 27, 18, 20+21, 22, 23, 38, 19, 40, 51, 11, 24, 25, 7, 31, 35, 30+32, 12.³⁷ The rhetorical sections are suppressed, as any other author's digression.³⁸ The Latin even includes some new episodes, such as the account of John's youth and a lengthy *excursus* concerning the story of Epiphanius, which is not reproduced by any

³⁵ VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XXVII.

³⁶ VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XXIX. I was motivated to study this version by V. Déroche, who correctly assumed that the Latin text reflects the *Vie Longue* and noted a possible concordance with the Syriac text at the end of chapter VIII, cf. DÉROCHE, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 40-42. I was able to develop my research thanks to S. Bohdiewicz, who kindly shared with me, at the time of my PhD thesis, the drafts of her unpublished transcription.

³⁷ Despite this radical rearrangement, traces of a previous reorganization are still surviving, which reflect the Syriac-Arabic structure. Noteworthy is the fusion of chapters 4-5, 20-21, 30-32 (with the displacement of chapter 31). The only chapters which remain in their original position are number 5 and 19. For the correspondence of the chapters' order in the three versions, cf. BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, *Vita beati Iohannis*, p. 342; VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 680), p. XXIII-XIV; BINGGELL, *Writing in Syriac* [forthcoming].

³⁸ BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, *Vita beati Iohannis*, p. 307.

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 315, chap. 17, §3: *precepit eos capi et separatim carceri mancipari*

VENTURINI, 61.6-7: 𐤒𐤕 𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕 𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕 𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕 𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕

FESTUGIÈRE, 373, 17-18: ἐπέτρεψεν τὴν μὲν γυναῖκα πτερινισθῆναι καὶ ἀποχωρισθῆναι ἐξ αὐτοῦ, αὐτὸν δὲ λωρισθῆναι καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν ἰδιάζουσιν ἀποκλεισθῆναι

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 308, chap. 2, §8: *disparuit*

VENTURINI, 61.12: 𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕

FESTUGIÈRE, 373, 25: ἀνεχώρησεν

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 315, chap. 17, §21: *gratias agebat deo*

VENTURINI, 63.10: 𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕 𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤓𐤕

FESTUGIÈRE, 375, 91: βαβαί

FESTUGIÈRE, 375, 1: chap. XXIV = On the utility of the prayers for the dead + Story of a prisoner in Persia

VENTURINI, 65: chap. XXIII = On the utility of the prayers for the dead; chap. XXIV = Story of a prisoner in Persia BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 320: chap. XXIII = Story of a prisoner in Persia

FESTUGIÈRE, 381-382: chap. XXX = A ruler procrastinates a loan; chap. XXXII = Punishment of the ruler

VENTURINI, 79-81: chap. XXIX = A ruler procrastinates a loan + Punishment of the ruler

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 322: chap. XXVIII = A ruler procrastinates a loan + Punishment of the ruler

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 322, chap. 28, §1: *Eo tempore erat in partibus Alexandrie uir quidam habens casale*

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 318, chap. 20, §10: *tres dragmas*

VENTURINI, 96.8: ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ

FESTUGIÈRE, 392, 33: τριμίσια

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 309, chap. 4, §1: *ciues alexandrini*

VENTURINI, 103.2: ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ

FESTUGIÈRE, 397, 2: τοὺς πολλοὺς

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 319, chap. 21, §4: *qui et peritior et magis intentus operi*

VENTURINI, 110.14-15: ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ

FESTUGIÈRE, 401, 10: καὶ γὰρ πλέον σου σχολάζων

BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 319, chap. 21, §7: *meis acquiesce consiliis*

VENTURINI, 111.2: ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ ܬܪܝܡܝܣܝܐ

FESTUGIÈRE, 402.15: *om.*

Although the agreement between Syriac and Latin is not always literal, it is undeniable that they preserve a significant number of common variants, which are absent in the huge manuscript tradition of the Greek text. Moreover, the other two Latin versions, respectively of Anastasius and John of Amalfi, do not have any ecdotic connection with the anonymous version. While the first one reflects the so-called *Vie*

*courte*⁴¹, the “Amalfitan version” seems to depend on the same branch of manuscript *Vat. gr.* 1669.⁴²

An alternative hypothesis: Arabic as the missing link between the Syriac and the Latin versions

Excluding that the Latin translator knew the Syriac text, there is an alternative to the theory of a lost Greek *Vorlage*: the “Syriac form” of the *Life* may have reached the Latin West through the mediation of Arabic.⁴³ After the publication of the Latin

⁴¹ DEROCHÉ, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 73-74.

⁴² There are no studies on this problem, except for the observation of DEROCHÉ, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 42, about the derivation of this version from the *Vie Longue*. My personal impression, based on a quick collation of the Latin with the main variants of the Greek text, is that its model was somehow related to manuscript *Vat. gr.* 1669 (here: V) and to the lost archetype of the “abridged versions” (here: Δ), but still independent from their common antigraph (for a *stemma codicum* of the *Vie Longue*, cf. CAVALLERO, *Vida de Juan el limosnero*, p. 20). As in VΔ, we find the sentence referring to the oaths of John at the end of the prologue (347.188-189); the omission of the *verbum dicendi* at chapter III (349.8); the absence of the quotation from Psalms 78:8 at chapter IV (349.21-22); the omission of ἐν ἐλέει in the prologue (346.160); the omission of μοδίῳ at chapter XI (358.41). On the other hand, the Amalfitan version is free from some significant errors of VΔ: it preserves *humanam* for ἀνθρώπων, omitted by VΔ (346.176); *eruditus* for σώφρων (350.5), omitted by V and changed in ὁ ἐν αἰγίοις by Δ; *mitis et leni voce* seems to match with πραεὶς καὶ ἡσύχῳ τῇ φωνῇ (350.13), while VΔ suppress καὶ ἡσύχῳ τῇ; *ykonomo ecclesie et ceteris ministris* seems to reflect τοῦ οἰκονόμου καὶ τοῦ λογοθέτου, rather than the inversion of the two terms which we find in VΔ. The Syriac version does not depend on this branch of the Greek tradition, as it agrees with manuscript *Ott. gr.* 402 every time VΔ present an error, cf. VENTURINI, *Quale modello greco?*, p. 379.

⁴³ VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XXVII. At the time of my thesis, I could read only the drafts of the Latin transcription, and I did not have access to the Arabic manuscripts. Furthermore, I could not

text and an examination of the Arabic manuscripts, it is now possible to propose this theory as the most convincing one⁴⁴. One of the most eccentric features of this version is the lexicon: common and proper names, some of which have a Latin origin, are abnormally altered. A possible explanation for these deformations is that they came into Latin through Arabic instead of Greek. The following table compares the lexicon used to translate the same Greek words by John of Amalfi and the anonymous compiler of BHL 4392.

Greek text (ed. FESTUGIÈRE)	John of Amalfi's Latin version (ed. CHIESA)	Anonymous Latin version (ed. BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG)	Arabic (Garshuni) version (Vatican Syr. 202; Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 138)
οἶνου	<i>Vinum</i>	<i>Syrupo</i>	ܫܪܒܐ (<i>sharāb</i>)
κεντηνάρια	<i>Centenaria</i>	<i>Quintaria</i>	ܩܝܢܬܐܪܐ (<i>qintār</i>)
λίτρας	<i>Libras</i>	<i>Rotae</i>	ܪܬܐܝܬ (<i>ratil</i>)
τριμίσιον	<i>tertia pars nu-</i>	<i>Tres dragmas</i>	ܬܪܝܬܐ ܡܝܬܬܐ (3)

explain why the Latin version preserves some original details of the Greek which are missing in Syriac, which is something related to the stemmatic position of the Arabic version, cf. *infra*.

⁴⁴ The translation from Arabic into Latin of a Christian hagiographic work is an unusual event in the cultural history of the Latin Middle Ages. It is thus very difficult to define the place and period of the translation: the lexicon and the epoch of the manuscript suggest that we are dealing with a late version. At chapter 22, the erroneous mention of *Satalia* (the Crusaders' city of Antalya) instead of Sicily, refers to the context of the Crusades, whereas it would be incomprehensible how such an error could have occurred in Muslim Sicily. It should be remembered that even the Latin version of John of Amalfi, which dates to 11th century, reflects the direct relations with the East of the Latin community to which that translation was addressed, cf. GREIF, *La orden de San Juan en Jerusalén*, p. 192 and n. 26.

	<i>mismatis</i>		<i>darāhim</i>)
Βιτάλιος	<i>Vitalis</i>	<i>Petalius</i>	ܕܪܗܝܡ (proper noun)
Τρωΐλος	<i>Troilus</i>	<i>Trophila</i>	ܕܪܗܝܡ (proper noun)

While John of Amalfi translates the Greek words accurately, even using the calque *ceratim* instead of the Latin equivalent *siliqua*, the Anonymous deforms them abnormally, including those of Latin etymology, such as *κεντηνάρια* and the name Βιτάλιος. In the latter, the initial *b* is changed into *p* (*Petalius*), as commonly happens in the passage from Arabic into Latin. The name of the bishop *Troilus* is changed into *Trophila*, which reflects the spelling of the Arabic manuscripts.

The Syriac origin of the Arabic version: a revealing numismatic word

The most interesting case is the translation of the term *τριμίσιον*, used in chapter XL (ar. 36; lat. 20; syr. 35), telling the story of an astute servant, who stole from his master to give to the poor people.⁴⁵ The Latin version certainly depends on Arabic, since it reproduces, in addition to the Arabic word *dirham*, an evident translation error. The *τριμίσιον*, which was a third of a *solidus* at the time of the author, is wrongly translated by both the Arabic and the Latin translators as “three drachmas” (ܕܪܗܡܝܢ ܬܪܝܬ ܒܢܝܢ f. 120ra; *tres dragmas*, BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 318, chap. 20, §10). This is a significant error, unlikely polygenetic, caused by the translator’s misunderstanding of the obsolete monetary term *τριμίσιον*. But which translator are we talking about? The Syriac version presents the same kind of error,

⁴⁵ FESTUGIERE, *Vie de Syméon le Fou*, p. 392.

translating ܠܬܬܬܐ ܕܕܢܐܪ “three coins”.⁴⁶ This situation occurs in two other passages of the Syriac version: in the prologue, when the salaried servant says that he received ܠܬܬܬܐ ܕܕܢܐܪ ܕܥܠ ܫܠܠ “three coins every year” from his master (VENTURINI, 2.12); and in chapter XLIV, when the patriarch calculates the inheritance he has left to the Church of Alexandria, repeating thrice the amount of ܠܬܬܬܐ ܕܕܢܐܪ, “three dinars” (VENTURINI, 114.7; 114.9; 114.14). In all these cases the Arabic text, which in chapter 36 had used the term ܕܢܐܪܝܢ for the Syriac ܠܬܬܬܐ, reproduces the Syriac literally, translating ܠܬܬܬܐ ܕܕܢܐܪ, “three dinars” (Vatican Syr. 202, f. 122rb; Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 138, f. 107rb).⁴⁷ It is challenging to explain how such an error could have been committed in the Greek manuscript tradition: it seems closely connected to a precise choice of the Syriac translator, which was later spread among the manuscript tradition, including the Latin version.⁴⁸ The Arabic translator certainly read the Syriac text to propose such a translation, not the Greek original.⁴⁹ Finally, it is noteworthy that the Georgian version in the first passage also preserves the reading “three drachmas”, which suggests its dependence on Arabic.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁶ VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. 96.

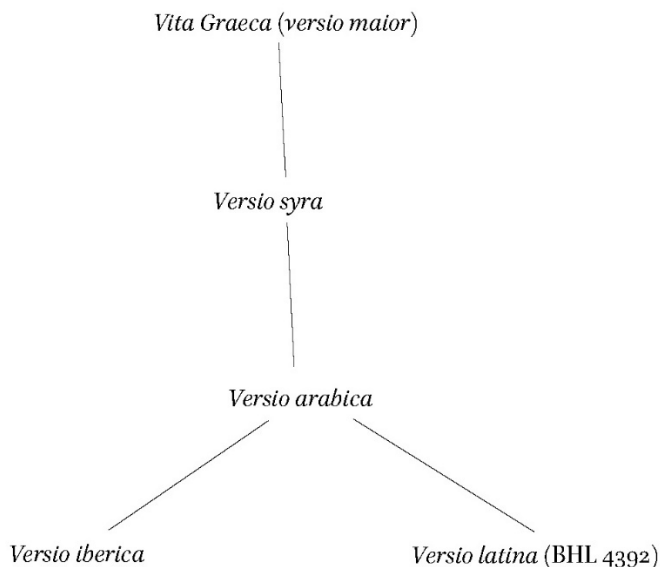
⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the Latin version does not reproduce neither the prologue nor the chapter XLIV.

⁴⁸ In my comment to the Italian translation, I could not explain the origin of this error in Greek, being surprised by its presence in Latin, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 680), p. 69-70, n. 3.

⁴⁹ Another interesting case, albeit is less significant, is the translation of Καῖσαρειον as ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ in Syriac and as ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ in Arabic, both the expressions literally meaning “the house of the poor people”, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 680), p. 35, n. 3.

⁵⁰ After an examination of the Georgian version conducted in Louvain with the help of Tamara Pataridze, I realized that it presents the same features

theory that all the versions derive from the same (and inexplicably lost) Greek model is now even more unlikely. The most realistic solution is also the simplest: a direct link between the three versions, among which the Arabic assumes the role of cultural mediator.



of the Syriac and the Latin versions, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriaca della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XXIX, n. 64. The Georgian version, like its Latin counterpart, reproduces literally the Arabic *dirham*. This suggests that also the Georgian version has been translated from Arabic, as supposed by DÉROCHE, *Études sur Léontios*, p. 42.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE ARABIC VERSION WITH THE SYRIAC MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

Understanding more about the relationship between the Arabic version and the Syriac manuscript tradition is now opportune. The most exciting goal is establishing which branch of the Syriac tradition served as the model for the Arabic translator. Which of the multiple recensions of the Syriac text did the Arabic translator consult? The following section briefly describes the general features of each one.

The multifaceted shape of the Syriac tradition

The manuscript tradition of the Syriac version of the *Life of John the Merciful* is complex, as its text was transmitted in several different recensions.

α = this *siglum* identifies the best-known recension of the Syriac *Life*. Its main feature is that it is shorter and less detailed compared to the Greek text.⁵¹ It is transmitted by three manuscripts, depending on the same archetype,⁵² while a Sinaitic fragment represents an independent branch.⁵³ P. Bedjan edit-

⁵¹ By “shorter” is meant not a selective version but abridged in all its parts. “Greek text”, refers here to the so-called *Vie Longue*, which is the closest to the original and on which the Syriac version depends, cf. *supra*.

⁵² The manuscripts are the following: Paris BnF Syr. 235 (P), f. 275v-312v [12th-13th century]; London British Library Add. 14645 (L), f. 126r-154r [10th century]; Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 142 [27] (M), f. 88v-103v [15th century]. The last two manuscripts are more closely related from an ecdotic point of view. For a description of the manuscripts, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XI-XVII.

⁵³ This is a scattered bifolium (S), dating to 9th century, which was later included in manuscript Sinai Syr. 24, cf. GÉHIN, *Les manuscrits syriaques*, p. 164. The fragment, which basically reproduces the same text of the other

ed this recension based on the manuscript Paris BnF Syr. 235, comparing its text with manuscript London British Library Add. 14645.⁵⁴

Σ = I use this *siglum* to refer to the Syriac version's most complete and detailed form, the closest to the original. We know about its existence only indirectly, thanks to some incomplete witnesses (β and π). It has been almost entirely neglected by the manuscript tradition to the advantage of the abridged version. However, both forms of the text probably circulated together for some time after the translation from Greek into Syriac.⁵⁵

β = this *siglum* identifies a long extract from the *Life*, which contains the *Story of Peter the Tax Collector* (chapter 20 of the Syriac version). This edifying story detached quite early from the Syriac *Life* and was transmitted as a separate work in several hagiographic collections.⁵⁶ It preserves much more details of the Greek than the other sources do, and it represents the

three manuscripts, preserves in addition some ancient textual elements, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita* (CSCO 679), p. XVIII-XIX. The small size of this fragment does not allow to determine precisely its ecdotic position, cf. *infra*.

⁵⁴ BEDJAN, *Acta Martyrum*, p. X. For the text of α , I will always refer to Bedjan's edition, which does not consider the contribution of other recensions.

⁵⁵ Evidence of this co-circulation is offered by the same dismembered manuscript to which belonged the Sinaitic fragment (S), cf. VENTURINI, *La leggenda di Pietro il Pubblicano*, p. 49-50.

⁵⁶ The tale is transmitted independently, in three different sub-recensions, by seven manuscripts, dating from 9th to 20th century, all sharing the copious presence of original details of the Greek, cf. VENTURINI, *La leggenda di Pietro il Pubblicano*, p. 48-52.

most direct (albeit incomplete) witness of the original Syriac translation (Σ).⁵⁷

π = this recension, which I called *versio syra minor*, is preserved by manuscript Paris BnF Syr. 234, f. 104r-127v [13th century], and was recently published by the writer.⁵⁸ It is a metaphor of the Syriac version, which presents a further reduced form if compared to α . This *abrégé* was performed on Paris BnF Syr. 235 (or more likely on a closely related manuscript), but it was retouched with the help of an unknown witness of Σ .⁵⁹ The definition *versio syra mixta* would be equally suitable to this peculiar text, considered the concurrence of ancient and modern textual features, blended and reinterpreted as in a new work.⁶⁰

Arabic's close relation to α : common errors to both versions

I will start my analysis by comparing the Arabic version to π on one hand, and to α on the other. It is pretty easy to exclude a direct dependence of the Arabic text on π : it does not present the highly shortened form of π and its peculiar innovations, a *unicum* in the manuscript tradition of the *Life of John*

⁵⁷ I have shown elsewhere that we are not dealing with a different translation from Greek, cf. VENTURINI, *La leggenda di Pietro il Pubblicano*, p. 46-48. For another Greek version of the legend, which was not part of the *Life of John the Merciful*, cf. CAVALLERO, *Leoncio de Neápolis y los relatos*, p. 31-36.

⁵⁸ VENTURINI, *La versio syra minor*, p. 15-37.

⁵⁹ For a list of the common errors to Paris BnF Syr. 234 and Paris BnF Syr. 235, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriana della Vita (CSCO 679)*, p. XXI-XXII. The list of the correct readings reproduced exclusively by π can be found in the critical apparatus of the Syriac text.

⁶⁰ For the problem of the sources of π , cf. VENTURINI, *La versio syra minor*, p. 7-8 (*stemma codicum* at p. 9).

the Merciful.⁶¹ Furthermore, the Arabic version does not reproduce the common errors to π and its probable antigraph, Paris BnF Syr. 235.⁶² However, comparing the Arabic text with the original readings that π has derived from its secondary source, Σ , is interesting for this study. The first example I have chosen is significant, as π is the only one that correctly reflects the Greek original's meaning, while the rest of the Syriac tradition presents an evident misunderstanding.

Conspectus siglorum

V = Vatican Syr. 202 [17th century]

D = Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 138 [n. d.]

A = Sinai Ar. 428 [9th century]

Σ = original Syriac version

α = *versio syra* = mss, LPM

π = *versio syra minor* = Paris BnF Syr. 234 [13th century]

β = *Story of Peter the Tax Collector*

L = London British Library Add. 14645 [10th century]

P = Paris BnF Syr. 235 [12th-13th century]

M = Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 142 (27) [15th century]

S = Sinai Syr. 24, ff. 199r-200v [9th century]

Greek text = FESTUGIÈRE, 357.70-76	Syriac rec. α = BEDJAN, 325.6-11	Syriac rec. π = VENTURINI (2022), 18.10-11	Arabic version = Vat. Syr. 202, f. 15r; DMMM 138, f. 110r
θαυμάσαντος δὲ καὶ τοῦ πάπα τὴν ὀξείαν τοῦ ἀνδρός	ܠܬܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ	ܠܬܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ	ܬܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܬܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܬܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ

⁶¹ For a description of the features of the *versio syra minor*, cf. *ibid.*, p. 9-11.

⁶² Cf. *supra*, n. 59.

From then on, so strong was the affection knit by God between the two, that (John) became the godfather of the children of the often-mentioned illustrious man.	more comforted him with sweet words. And through this friendship they will be linked with each other, so that he will also <u>receive the holy sacrament of baptism from the blessed man.</u>	children from the baptism.	the law, but he began to console him with good speeches. And after this, a strong love occurred between them, <u>and he received the baptism from him.</u>
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As we can see, the text of α is unsustainable: the patriarch John, instead of becoming σύντεκνος of the patrician Nicetas, baptizes him.⁶⁹ We find the misunderstanding in the three witnesses of α (LPM) and in the Sinaitic fragment (S),⁷⁰ while in π , it is clear that John became godfather of Nicetas' children, who are explicitly mentioned (ܡܬܬܝܬܝܢܐ). The compiler of π , faced with an inconsistency of its antigraph (P), decided to turn to its superior quality source (Σ). The Arabic version here clearly follows the text of α , presenting the same error, almost *ad verbum*, of the manuscripts LPM. There are other passages in

⁶⁹ On the meaning of the term σύντεκνος, which literally means “who shares the children”, therefore “godfather of the children”, cf. FESTUGIÈRE, *Vie de Syméon le Fou*, p. 560.

⁷⁰ It is not clear whether S, which has the variant ܡܬܬܝܬܝܢܐ ܠܡܬܝܬܝܢܐ, reflects an earlier stage of the error (ܠܡܬܝܬܝܢܐ = γενέσθαι?; ܡܬܝܬܝܢܐ < ܡܬܝܢܐ?) or the desperate attempt of a scribe to normalize the passage. In any case, both LPM and S are very far from the original meaning of the passage.

is a bringer of happiness (καλοποδίνος) and <i>God</i> is going to bless you through him”.	servant <u>is</u> <u>blessed</u> , and you will be blessed through him”.	he has a good foot, and <i>God</i> will bless you through him”.	ant <u>is</u> <u>blessed</u> , and <i>God</i> will bless you through him”.
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The literal translation ܐܬܝܬܐ ܒܦܕܝܢܐ (“with a good foot”) of the difficult term καλοποδίνος (“bringer of happiness”) is trivialized by α, whose compiler deduced the meaning of “blessed” from the following verb ܒܠܝܬܐ, which translates the Greek εὐλογῆσαι. The original translation had to seem unintelligible because of its extreme literality, to the scribe who introduced the variant. Here again, the Arabic ܐܬܝܬܐ reproduces the error of α. It is also noteworthy the precise translation of the Greek δάνεισαι (“ask for a loan”) in β, against the Arabic and α, which simplify the concept. Nevertheless, this passage reveals something else: α does not say that God bestows the blessing, although this is explicit in Greek, in β, and in Arabic.⁷² This attests to the better quality of the Arabic text if compared to α.

The Arabic version as a halfway witness between α and Σ

We can explain in two different ways the presence of the Greek’s original details in the Arabic version: a) the Arabic translator also consulted the Greek text to improve his translation; b) the Arabic version depends on an ancient form of the Syriac text, preserving an intermediate stage between α and Σ. The first hypothesis is challenging to demonstrate and refute

⁷² The Arabic text is freely reproduced by the Latin *multiplicabuntur bona uestra a Deo per eum* (BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 314, chap. 15, §40), which also preserves the mention of God.

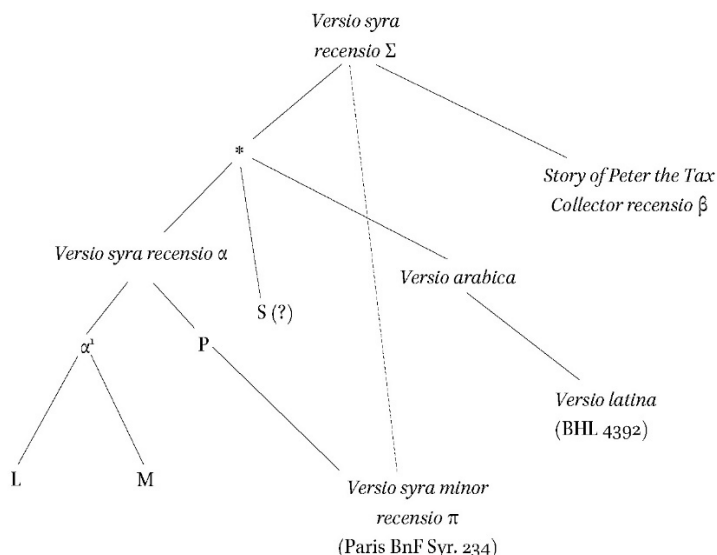
<p>Greek text = FESTUGIÈRE, 366.23-26</p>	<p>Syriac rec. α = BEDJAN, 336.10-12</p>	<p>Syriac rec. π = VENTURINI (2022), 20.30-32</p>	<p>Arabic version = Vat. Syr. 202, f. 21v; DMMM 138, f. 112r</p>
<p>πλὴν ἐκεῖνο ἀντιβολῶ τὴν τιμίαν σου κεφαλὴν μηδαμοῦ ἐντάξει τὸ ὄνομα τῆς ἐμῆς ἀναξιοτήτος, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τοῦτο αἰτήσασθαι Χριστὸν ἐκεῖ με ἀπογράψασθαι ἐνθα ἀληθῶς ἡ ἀπογραφὴ μακάριστος.</p>	<p>ܠܝܢ ܡܥܬܐ ܕܥܬܐ ܠܝ :ܐܠ :ܐܢ ܩܬܐܝܬ ܡܬܥ ܩܥܕ ܕܡܥܬܐ ܕܥܬܐ ܡܠܝܠ ܥܬܐ ܡܥܬܐ</p>	<p>ܠܝܢ ܥܬܐ ܕܥܬܐ ܠܝ ܐܬܐ ܐܬܐ ܡܬܥ ܕܥܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܠ ܡܬܥ ܥܬܐ ܥܬܐ ܡܬܥ ܥܬܐ ܥܬܐ ܥܬܐ</p>	<p>⁷³ ܐܬܐ ܥܬܐ ܕܥܬܐ ܠܝ ܥ ܡ ܥ ܡܬܥ :ܡܬܥ ܥܬܐ ܥ ܥ ܥ ܥ ܥ ܥ ܡܬܥ ܥܬܐ ܥ ܥ ܥܬܐ ܥܬܐ ܥܬܐ ⁷⁴ ܥ ܥ ܥܬܐ ⁷⁵ ܥܬܐ ܥ ܥܬܐ</p>
<p>Further, I pray your honorable head not to place the name of my indignity</p>	<p>I ask you not to write my name in that place, where beatitude is given to those</p>	<p>And further- more, I ask you not to write <u>my name at all on what you build,</u></p>	<p>And I ask your holiness not to write <u>my name on what you build, but pray</u></p>

⁷⁵ ܐ ܡܠܬ add. ante ܡܠܬ V D

anywhere, but rather to ask Christ to in- scribe me where the inscription is truly blessed.	whose names are written there.	<u>but pray for me</u> <u>that my name</u> will be written in the Book of Life.	<u>for me that my</u> <u>name</u> will be written in the place where beatitude is giv- en to everyone who asks for his name to be writ- ten there.
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The Arabic here is almost identical to π , which is the only Syriac recension to preserve the correct text.⁷⁶ It is indeed still immune from the *saut du même au même* produced in α by the confusion between the two identical terms ܡܝܢ ... ܡܝܢ (to which correspond the Arabic ١٥٥٥ ... ١٥٥٥). The concordance of the Arabic text with π occurs this time *against* the Greek, which presents a different formulation of the sentence. In Greek (without any variant in the manuscripts) the conditions for a *saut du même au même* are totally missing, as there is not proximity between two identical terms. It is unlikely that the Arabic translator managed to achieve the same text of π independently, by consulting the different formulation of the sentence that we find in Greek. It is much more probable that the Syriac model of the Arabic translator preserved an earlier stage of the text than α , still immune from its oversight. The following *stemma codicum* summarizes the ecdotic relationship of the Arabic version with the Syriac manuscript tradition.

⁷⁶ I will explain in the next paragraph the ecdotic reason why the Arabic version is the only one to reflect the Greek τὴν τιμίαν σου κεφαλὴν, cf. *infra*.



Albeit indirectly, the Arabic version is the only complete witness of such an ancient stage of the Syriac tradition, because a) the text of Σ is lost, and only partially reflected by the *Story of Peter the Tax Collector* (β); b) the recension π retains only sporadic elements of Σ , but the great part of its text depends on α ; c) the Sinaitic fragment (S) preserves only two tiny excerpts of the work. The intermediate position of the Arabic version between Σ and α is enough to justify its knowledge of the Greek's original details that disappeared in the Syriac manuscript tradition, without involving any awareness of the Greek original.

THE THEORY OF A REVISION ON GREEK: A PIECE OF MISLEADING INFORMATION IN MANUSCRIPT SINAI AR. 428

Considering the above-depicted *stemma*, the theory that the Arabic translation was revised on the Greek text appears no longer necessary. Only the colophon of manuscript Sinai Ar. 428 supports the idea that the Arabic translator somehow read

the Greek original.⁷⁷ The information of the colophon is clear but not necessarily accurate if not supported by textual evidence of a direct transition from Greek into Arabic. The colophon could, for example, simply betray the scribe's awareness of the Byzantine origin of the *Life of John the Merciful*. In theory, it is not impossible that the Arabic translator, despite having available a Syriac model of excellent quality, decided *in addition* to consult a Greek manuscript to improve his translation further. Another compiler could have also performed the revision on Greek many years after the first translation from Syriac. In the following paragraphs, I will show that such a revision appears unnecessary from an ecdotic point of view (5.1), and that it is not supported by any clear textual evidence (5.2).

A simpler explanation for Greek-Arabic concordances against Syriac

As we have seen above, the earliest form of the Syriac version (Σ) is known only from indirect witnesses (β and π). To support the theory of a revision, all we can do is look for significative concordances between Arabic and Greek against β or π . In this paragraph, I will start with the examination of the latter case. The first passage where Arabic and Greek agree against π is found at the very beginning of the work.

Greek text = FESTUGIÈRE, 343-5-14	Syriac rec. α = BEDJAN, 303.6-9	Syriac rec. π = VENTURINI (2022), 11.4-7	Arabic version = Vat. Syr. 202, f. 3v; DMMM 138, f. 106r
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⁷⁷ The colophon says that the *Life of John the Merciful* has been translated into Arabic directly from Greek, cf. *supra*. This same information is not accurate, as it does not even mention the translation from Syriac.

<p>ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένους τῆς ἀμαρτίας.</p>			
<p>One alone is our objective and that of the zealous and pious men before us in the present narration of the biography of the celebrated man: that he becomes, on the one hand, for all an imitation loved by God and something profitable, on the other, to elevate glory and magnificence to the holy and worshipful Trinity, which always, from generation to generation, shows also in this, as in all things, its own luminaries to enlighten “those who are in darkness and shadow of death” of sin.</p>	<p>Glory and praise and thanksgiving to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who purifies and makes his saints shine, so that they shine like bright stars for those who lie in the darkness and shadow of death.</p>	<p>It seemed suitable to me, my brothers <u>and fathers</u>, to present the story of this Saint John, so that <u>those who read and hear</u> may benefit and so that they glorify the Holy Trinity, which openly reveals the light of <u>its saints</u>, who illuminate in everything, like shining stars, those who lie in the darkness and shadow of death.</p>	<p>We have seen <u>the fathers who came before us</u>, describe the narration of this our holy father, something useful to those <u>who will read and hear</u> it, and we praise the Holy Trinity, which in every generation illuminates <u>its saints</u>, who like the stars (illuminate) those who are sitting in the dark and in the shadow of death.</p>

In the Syriac recension α , the first lines of the prologue are missing, maybe because of a material damage in the antigraph. Here again, π reproduces better than α the original form of the prologue. As in the previous example, the Arabic version reflects the knowledge of an ancient form of the Syriac text, as reveals its concordance with π (against the Greek) in the mention of: the “fathers” (Ar.: ܕܟܬܒܬܐܬܪ; π : ܕܟܬܒܬܐ) instead of the “men” (Gr.: ἀνδρῶν); the benefit “of those who read and hear” (Ar.: ܕܟܬܒܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܬܐ; π : ܕܟܬܒܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܬܐ) instead of “for all” (Gr.: πᾶσιν); “his saints” (Ar.: ܕܟܬܒܬܐ; π : ܕܟܬܒܬܐ) instead of “his stars” (Gr.: τοὺς οἰκείους φωστῆρας). Nevertheless, in this case the Arabic retains original details of the Greek which have been suppressed by π : the mention of the fathers “who preceded us” (Ar.: ܕܟܬܒܬܐ ܕܟܬܒܬܐ; Gr.: τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν), and “in every generation” (Ar.: ܕܟܬܒܬܐ; Gr.: κατὰ γένεα καὶ γένεα).

This situation is the direct consequence of the metaphrastic nature of π . On the one hand, most of its text reproduces Paris BnF Syr. 235 (P), while its secondary source (Σ) was used by the compiler non-systematically, and mostly in case of necessity (for example, to fill lacunas). On the other hand, the compiler of π radically abridged its model, by cutting original details, sentences, and even entire episodes. Although sometimes π is the only witness preserving the Greek’s original details,⁸⁵ it remains generally a lower quality source than the Arabic text. Depending on an ancestor of α , the Arabic version well preserves the author’s narrative scheme, which has been destructured by π . Therefore, it is totally to be expected that several passages of the Greek are better reproduced in Arabic than in Syriac. I will enumerate here only a few of them.

⁸⁵ Cf. *supra*.

At chapter VI, the correct transliteration of ܡܕܢܚܐ (Vatican Syr. 202, f. 11v; cf. also the Latin *Britania*, BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 328, chap. 12, §18) = τῆς Βρεττανίας (FESTUGIÈRE, 354.43), against the Syriac ܡܕܢܚܐ (α) and ܡܕܢܚܐ (β);⁸⁶ at chapter XI, the mention of the Nile ܡܕܢܚܐ (Vatican Syr. 202, f. 15v; cf. also the Latin *Nili*, BOHDZIEWICZ-WARBURG, p. 319, chap. 22, §3), which reflects the Greek τὸν ποταμὸν (FESTUGIÈRE, 358.11), omitted in Syriac; at chapter XII, the mention of the “universal prayer” ܡܕܢܚܐ, and of the “anaphora” ܡܕܢܚܐ (Vatican Syr. 202, f. 17r), which reflect the Greek τὴν καθολικὴν [...] καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου καταπετάσματος ὑψοῦσθαι μέλλοντος (FESTUGIÈRE, 360.29-30); at chapter XIV, the mention of the merchant ܡܕܢܚܐ (Vatican Syr. 202, f. 19r), which is the Greek μετὰ τινος τῶν τῆς πόλεως καπήλων (FESTUGIÈRE, 362.3), while the Syriac version has ܡܕܢܚܐ (α) or ܡܕܢܚܐ (β).⁸⁷ At chapter XXIX, the sentence ܡܕܢܚܐ ܡܕܢܚܐ ܡܕܢܚܐ ܡܕܢܚܐ, “I have not yet shed my blood for you, as Christ ordered me!” (Vatican Syr. 202, f. 35r), correctly reproduces the Greek οὐπω τὸ αἷμά μου ὑπέρ σου ἐξέχεα ὡς ἐνετείλατό μοι ὁ δεσπότης μου καὶ πάντων Χριστός (FESTUGIÈRE, 381.12-13), which is not preserved in Syriac.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ VENTURINI, *La versio syra minor*, p. 20, n. 28

⁸⁷ Here the Arabic version confirms the emendation suggested by a marginal note in manuscript L (ܡܕܢܚܐ), which probably consulted an independent source, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriaca della Vita* (CSCO 680), p. 29, n. 1.

⁸⁸ I had already noted that this passage was probably corrupted in the whole Syriac tradition, cf. VENTURINI, *La versione siriaca della Vita* (CSCO 680), p. 56, n. 1.

The Story of Peter the Tax Collector: the Arabic version of the tale and its relationship with β , α , and the Greek text

The independent recension of the *Story of Peter the Tax Collector* (β), despite its fragmentary nature, represents the most direct descendant of the original Syriac translation (Σ) of the *Life of John the Merciful*.⁸⁹ This excerpt reproduces the longest episode of the *Life* (it takes up approximately 10% of the work). The big size and the ecdotic relevance of the fragment allow a systematic comparison with the Arabic version (chapters 20-21 in Sinai Ar. 428), with the form of the tale included in the Syriac *Life* (α), and with the Greek text.⁹⁰ It can be helpful to analyze the following questions.

- 1) Many details of the Greek original are not (or are badly) reproduced by α : are they better reproduced by β or by the Arabic version?
- 2) In the case of discordance between α and the Greek text, does the Arabic agree with α against the Greek and β , or does it agree with the Greek against α and β ?
- 3) It is possible to retrace the history of some variants to understand their progressive stages in the different stemmatic levels?

To answer to the previous questions, I will present a table comparing the four versions of the tale: Greek, Syriac 1 (β), Syriac 2 (α), Arabic. I give the English translation of each one, with the reference to the original text's editions. The Arabic text, which is unedited, can be found in the *Appendix* (§8) at

⁸⁹ Cf. *supra*.

⁹⁰ The comparison with π is not possible, as it summarizes the whole episode in a single sentence, cf. VENTURINI, *La versio syra minor*, p. 20, §19.

the end of this contribution. I examine here only the first half of the tale, going until the second vision of Peter (FESTUGIÈRE, 369.70), more an additional passage, coming from the conclusion (FESTUGIÈRE, 371.170-176).

Font styles' legenda:

α , β , and Arabic vs Greek

Greek and β vs Arabic and α

Greek, Arabic, and β vs α

Greek, Arabic, and α vs β

Greek text = FESTUGIÈRE, 368.1-29	Syriac 1 (β) = VENTURINI (2020), 60-62, §1	Syriac 2 (α) = BEDJAN, 340.5- 341.5	Arabic version = Vat. Syr. 202, f. 23r; DMMM 138, f. 112va
When I was in Africa, something like this happened. I was administrator — he affirms— of a tax collector, <i>extremely rich</i> and merciless. One day, thus, in winter, while some poor people were sitting in the sun and were warming up, <u>each one began to</u> praise the houses of the merciful men and to pray for each one of	My beloved, there was in Africa one of the noblemen, a tax collector, <i>whose name was Peter</i> , and he had absolutely no mercy towards anyone. And so one day it happened that, while the poor people were sitting in the winter days and were warming up in the sun, <u>each one of them began to</u> praise and bless the houses of	There was one of the noblemen, <i>and he was very rich, whose name was Peter</i> , and he never had compassion towards anyone. And one day of the poor people, while they were sitting in the sun, remembered <u>the merciful men</u> who gave them alms and prayed for them. And then they started to mention those who had no mercy for them	There was a noble man <i>named Peter, and he was very rich</i> and he had absolutely no mercy towards anyone. In some days, while the poor people were sitting in the sun, <u>each one of them began to</u> mention <u>the merciful men</u> and who gave them alms, and to pray for them, and to remember even those who had no

<p>them, and similarly to mock and revile the houses of the unmerciful men. So meanwhile came in the middle also the name of my master, the tax collector, and each one <u>began to</u> ask his neighbor: "In truth, brother, did you ever receive alms from that house?". And —I swear it as in front of the Lord— all asking each other, nobody was found who has ever received anything from that house. One of them says then: "What do you give me, and today I will take alms from him?". And, after making a deal with him, he goes and stands outside the door of the</p>	<p>the merciful men who gave them alms, praying for them. In the same way, therefore, they also blamed and cursed the houses of the unmerciful men, and among them they also put in the middle the name of <i>Peter, who had no mercy</i>, and each one <u>began to</u> ask his companion if he had ever received alms from his house. And after every one had asked his companion and no one was found who said that he had received something from him sometime, one of them spoke and said: "What do you give me, and I receive alms from him today?". And after making a</p>	<p>and to curse them, and they also remembered <i>Peter, since he was not merciful</i>. And they asked each other if he <u>had ever given</u> alms to someone of them, and none was found among them who had received anything from him. And one of them started talking and said, "What do you give me, and I will receive alms from him?". <u>And they promised to give him something.</u> And he immediately went and stood at Peter's door, and waited for him until he came at his house. And by God's determination he arrived, and with him a donkey, which brought</p>	<p>mercy and to curse them. And then they also mentioned <i>Peter, who had no mercy</i>, and <u>began to</u> ask each other if <u>he had given</u> alms to any of <u>them</u>, and they did not find any one of them who had received anything from him. So one of the poor men said: "What do you give me, if I go and receive alms from him?". <u>And they promised to give him something.</u> And that poor went and sat at his door, waiting for him until he came. And with God's help he came, and with him there was an animal that was bringing a loaf <u>from the bakery</u> for the meal. And when he saw that poor, <i>he</i></p>
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<p>tax collector's house, waiting for the moment when he comes back from the mass. Indeed, he, by determination of God, arrived at the same time as he, who was entering the door, and the beast of burden, loaded with loaves <u>from the bakery</u>, which was entering for his breakfast. So, after seeing the poor, he grabs out of anger, having not found a stone, a loaf <u>from the basket</u> of the beast and throws it <u>at his face</u>. That one then took it and left, swearing to his companions that — he says— "I received it from his own hands".</p>	<p>deal with him <i>on what they would have given him</i>, he immediately went and stood in front of the door of that rich man, and waited for him until he returned. And then, by God's determination, were entering at the same time he and his beast of burden, which was carrying the loaves <u>from the bakery</u> for his meal. And having seen that poor, <i>he got very angry</i>, and wanting <i>to throw</i> at him a stone and not finding it, he grabbed a loaf <u>from the basket</u> that was on the beast, and threw it angrily <u>at the poor's face</u>, and hit him. That one then immediately bent down a little and</p>	<p>loaves for him to eat. And when the poor saw him, began to implore him, asking him for alms. Peter then, when he saw that poor, <i>got very angry</i>, and he looked for a stone <i>to throw</i> at him, but he did not find it. And he grabbed a loaf of those which his donkey was carrying, and threw it at the poor with great anger. And the poor took it, and returned to his companions, and <u>began to swear</u> that he had received it from Peter's hand.</p>	<p><i>got very angry</i> and looked for a stone <i>to throw</i> at him, and he did not find it. And he took a loaf from those the animal was carrying, and threw it <u>at his face</u> with great anger, and hit him. And the poor took that loaf and brought it to his companions, and <u>began to swear</u> to them: "I received it from his hands".</p>
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	took the loaf, and ran and went to his companions, swearing to them: "From his hands I have received it now!".		
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Some observations:

- a) Syriac 2 (α) and Arabic omit many important details of the Greek, which are regularly mentioned by Syriac 1 (β): the geographical setting of the tale "in Africa"; the profession of Peter, "a tax collector"; the temporal setting "in winter"; the poor people "warming up"; the blessing on "the houses" of the merciful men; the literal reproduction of the Greek εἰς μέσον, "in the middle"; the question whether a poor "had ever received" from Peter (Syriac 2 and Arabic: "whether Peter had ever given"); the deal of the poor with his companions; the basket carried by the beast of burden.
- b) When the Arabic version preserves an original detail of the Greek which is omitted by Syriac 2 (α), it is always found also in Syriac 1 (β): the specular reproduction of the Greek ἕρξατο ἕκαστος, "each one began"; the loaves coming "from the bakery"; the throw of the loaf "at the face" of the poor. There are no original details of the Greek, which are preserved exclusively by the Arabic version.

- c) Syriac 1 (β) does not specify that Peter was “very rich”. The Arabic version retains this original detail but, here again, is not the only one, as Syriac 2 (α) retains it too.⁹¹
- d) Syriac 2 (α) and Arabic say that the poor’s companions “promised to give him something”, while the Greek text says that they made “a deal with him”. It is noteworthy that Syriac 1 (β) presents a halfway form of the sentence: “after making a deal with him | on what they would have given him”. The concept, which in Greek is not so explicit, has been clarified by the Syriac translator, who added the second part of the sentence. The first part of the sentence has been later simplified into “they promised” by the common ancestor to Arabic and Syriac 2 (α).

Greek text = FESTUGIÈRE, 368.30-369.55	Syriac 1 (β) = VENTURINI (2020), 62-66, §2-3	Syriac 2 (α) = BEDJAN, 341.6- 342.9	Arabic version = Vat. Syr. 202, f. 23v; DMMM 138, f. 113ra
Indeed, after two days, the tax collector fell ill with a fatal disease , and sees in his sleep himself,	And after two days, that rich man fell ill with a fatal disease . And he had a vision in his dream, as if he	And after two days it happened that the rich Peter fell ill. And he saw in his dream that he	And that rich man fell ill, and he saw in his dream as if he was standing in the day of Judg-

⁹¹ Some errors and omissions are to be expected in Syriac 1 (β), as it is not itself the original Syriac text (Σ), but just a copy of chapter 20 belonging to an independent branch of the manuscript tradition. I have found in Syriac 2 (α) other two original readings, cf. VENTURINI, *La leggenda di Pietro il Pubblicano*, p. 53, n. 57. Unfortunately, the Arabic version does not reproduce those passages literally.

<p>called to account [for his actions], and all his actions weighed on a scale. In a scale pan, thus, some bad-looking blacks (μαύροι) were gathering, the other belongs to others, clothed in white and fearsome in appearance, who, finding nothing good to counterbalance the wicked deeds gathered by the blacks in their scale pan, were very sad and gloomy and hesitating towards each other, and they said: <u>“Don’t we really have</u> anything here?”. Then one of them says: “Really we have nothing but a</p>	<p>was standing in a court and was being judged for his actions. And he saw that some black and bad-looking ones came, <i>and they gathered all his evil deeds and put them on a scale pan</i>, on one side; on the other side of the scale, instead, there were other men dressed in white and <i>good-looking</i>, and they <i>wanted to put something good on the scale pan</i> which was next to them, against the evil things that had been placed by those blacks, and they found none. And then they were sad and very gloomy, and hesitating they were saying to each other: “So, what have we got? <u>Don’t we</u></p>	<p>was standing in a courtroom, and he was judged for his evil deeds. And he saw some blacks, horrible looking, who <u>came towards him</u> and gathered his evil deeds and placed them on a scale pan. And near the other scale pan he saw some <i>good-looking</i> men, with white clothes, who were standing up <i>and wanted to put</i> some good deed against the evil ones which the blacks had placed. And they did not find it, and they were very sad, and said to each other: “Is there</p>	<p>ment to be judged for his deeds. And he saw a group of black men, ugly face, <u>coming towards him</u>, after <i>collecting all his evil deeds and putting them on a scale pan</i>. And there was also another group of men, and they were standing on the other side of the scale, and they were <i>good-looking</i>, in white clothes, <i>and they wanted to put something in the other scale pan</i> to counterbalance, but they found no good deeds against the evil deeds of those blacks, and they were sad about that. And</p>
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<p>single loaf that he gave two days ago to Christ, even this reluctantly". And when they put the loaf, the scale pan was balanced. And those clothed in white who had appeared to him, tell him: "Come on, add [something] to the loaf, because these blacks will catch you". When he woke up, thus, he acknowledged that what he had seen was <u>not false, but true</u>, since everything [experienced] from his youth, even what he had forgotten, he saw that those Ethiopians had gathered and</p>	<p><u>have</u> anything to <i>put</i> here?". So, one of them said: "We really have nothing but this loaf, which two days ago he gave to Christ unintentionally, for some reason". And then they hurried, and they brought it and placed it, and immediately that scale pan matched with his counterpart. And immediately those dressed in white spoke and said to him: "Peter, go and add to this loaf, and know that otherwise those blacks will catch you, and we will not help you at all". And when he woke up, he acknowledged that the things that had appeared to him were <u>not a lie</u></p>	<p>nothing here <i>to put</i> on this scale?". And one of them answered and said: "Actually we have nothing here but a loaf, that two days ago he gave to Christ unintentionally, for some reason". And they took the loaf and put it on the scale, and immediately he leaned over and was in balance with the other scale pan. And those dressed in white began to speak and said: "Oh Peter, go and add to this loaf! Otherwise, know that the blacks will catch you!". And after they said these things,</p>	<p>while they were in that situation, they said to each other: "So, <u>don't we have</u> anything here <i>to put</i> on the other scale pan?". And one of them answered, saying: "We have nothing except a bread that he had given to Christ two days ago unintentionally". And then they took it and put it on the scale pan, and it balanced it with the other scale pan. Then those who were clothed in white said: "Oh Peter, go and add something else good to this loaf! Otherwise, know that these blacks will catch you!".</p>
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<p>carried on the scale. And he said: “Alas (Βαβαῖ)! If a single loaf, which I <u>threw</u> with anger, benefited me so, how many damages avoids he who gives his goods with simplicity to those who need them!”. And from then on, he got so wise —he says— that <u>he</u> <u>became</u> extremely <u>merciful</u> to the point that he did not even spare his own body.</p>	<p><u>but reality</u>, since all he had done or said from his youth until then, including what he had forgotten, he had seen that those blacks had collected and placed on that scale pan. And he said <i>to himself</i>: “Alas (حز)! If a loaf, that with anger I <u>threw</u> against that poor <i>unintentionally</i>, has benefited so much and <i>was able to save me from the hands of those blacks</i>, from how many damages is released he who gives his goods to the needy people with simplicity and good effort!”. And from then on, <u>he</u> <u>became</u> so honest that he was eminent and excellent <u>in</u> <u>mercy</u> towards</p>	<p>Peter awoke from his sleep, and acknowledged that the dream he had seen was true, because everything he had done and said from his youth until that day, he had seen that those blacks had brought it and placed it on the scale. And he said <i>to himself</i>: “If a loaf, which I gave to that poor <i>unintentionally</i>, has thereby helped and <i>saved me from those blacks</i>, how more he who gives to the poor people with a good heart is preserved from the evil!”. And from that day on, he gave alms</p>	<p>And when Peter noticed that what he had seen <u>was truth and not a lie</u> — because he acknowledged that everything he had done, from his youth up to that time, he saw the blacks coming towards him and putting it on the scale pan, he said <i>to himself</i>, marveling: “If a loaf that I <u>threw</u> to that poor <i>unintentionally</i>, has benefited and <i>has saved me from those blacks</i>, from how many evils will be saved he who gives, with his good effort, what he owns to the poor people! <u>And from that</u></p>
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	<i>the poor people, to the point that he would not even spare his own body.</i>	<i>to the poor peo- ple.</i>	<i><u>day on, he be-</u> <u>came merciful</u> <i>to the poor peo- ple.</i></i>
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- a) Syriac 2 (α) and Arabic do not mention the “fatal disease” of Peter; they do not say that the white men were “gloomy and hesitating”, but simply “sad”; they suppress the interjection ܕܠܗ, which in Syriac 1 (β) accurately translates the Greek βαβαί; they do not specify that the loaf was thrown “with anger”; they do not reproduce the Greek expression ἐν ἀπλότητι (“with simplicity”), as Syriac 1 (β) does; they suppress the whole final sentence, corresponding to the Greek consecutive clause ὥστε μήτε τοῦ οἰκείου σώματος φείσασθαι (FESTUGIÈRE, 369.55).
- b) Right in the last sentence, the Arabic version shows a halfway textual stage between Syriac 1 (β) and Syriac 2 (α): it omits, as Syriac 2 (α) does, the consecutive clause, but it well reflects the Greek ἐγένετο ἄκρος ἐλεήμων, “he became merciful” (albeit it does not reproduce ἄκρος), while Syriac 2 (α) trivializes the concept (“he gave alms”).
- c) The expression “with simplicity” (ἐν ἀπλότητι) is reproduced only by Syriac 1 (β), which moreover presents the addition: “and good effort”. The Arabic version retains only the latter addition, having lost the first member, which is more difficult to understand. Syriac 2 (α) goes on in the deterioration process of the original, changing the expression in “with a good heart”.

Greek text = FESTUGIÈRE, 369.58-70	Syriac 1 (β) = VENTURINI (2020), 66-68, §4	Syriac 2 (α) = BEDJAN, 342.10- 343.1	Arabic version = Vat. Syr. 202, f. 24v; DMMM 138, f. 113rb
<p>Therefore, it happened once that he went after the night, as usual, to the customs office, and goes towards him a sailor (ναύτης), who came out of a shipwreck naked as he had been begotten, and fell at his feet, imploring him for a garment. Therefore [Peter], thinking that he was a poor, takes his own tunic off, which was expensive, and makes him swear with faith, saying: “By the Lord, brother, put it on and pray for me!”. After he left, ashamed to wear it, he gave it to a tailor to be sold.</p>	<p>Therefore, it happened once that, as <i>he was leaving the church</i> to go to the customs office —<i>since he was a tax collector</i>—, came across him a sailor (ܐܡܝܢܐ), who had saved himself from the fury of the sea and who was naked as at birth. And he bowed before him, asking to give him a garment for his body. Therefore, <i>after seeing him</i>, and after thinking that he was a poor, he took off the expensive garment that was on him and gave it to the poor, making him swear a lot and saying: “By</p>	<p>And <u>one day</u>, while <i>he was leaving the church</i> to go to the customs office —<i>since he was the chief tax collector</i>— came across him a sailor (ܐܡܝܢܐ), who had run away naked from the sea. And he fell to the ground before him, and implored him to give him a garment to wear. And when [Peter] <i>saw him</i>, he took off one of the sumptuous garments that he was wearing, and gave it to him and made him swear and said: “By our Lord, wear it and pray for me!”. And that poor, after walking</p>	<p>And <u>one day</u>, while <i>he was leaving the church</i> to go to his court, — <i>since he was the chief tax collector</i>— and there he found a sailor (ܐܡܝܢܐ), who was saved from drowning in the sea and who was naked. And he fell in front of him, imploring and asking to dress him. And when Peter <i>saw him</i>, he felt compassion for him and took off a good [om. VD] garment and gave it to him [VD: made him wear it] and made him swear [VD: asked him], saying: “By God, accept this garment and pray for me!”. And</p>

<p>And coming back the tax collector, sees it hung and became very sad. And after he returned to his home, he could not eat anything, but after closing the door of his room he sat down, crying and pondering thus: "I was not worthy —he says— that the poor man had a memory of me". While then he was discouraged, he fell asleep.</p>	<p>our Lord, wear it and pray for me!". The poor man then, having gone away, was ashamed to wear that garment because of its elegance, and immediately gave it away to be sold. And the rich Peter, after waiting a while, came back and saw that garment hung <i>in the market</i>, and he became sad and regretted a lot. And after he went to his home, he could not eat anything, but closed the door of his room in front of him and sat down, weeping and pondering and saying: "I was not worthy to leave a memory to that poor". And while he was regretting and moaning, <i>he</i></p>	<p>away from him, was ashamed to wear it because of his elegance, and gave it to the market to be sold. And when Peter came back and saw that garment hung <i>in the market</i> to be sold, became very sad. And after going to his house, he could not eat because of his sadness. And he closed his door and sat down, and started to weep and moan and to say: "I did not deserve to be remembered by that poor". And while he was crying and regretting, <i>he dozed off</i> and fell asleep.</p>	<p>when the sailor left and walked away, he was ashamed to wear it because it was elegant, and put it up for sale <i>in the market</i>. And the rich [om. VD] Peter, returning to his house, saw the garment hung [om. VD] in the market for sale, and he was very sad about it. [And when he arrived at his home, he could not eat anything for the great sadness, and closed his door and sat down, crying and sighing from the bottom of his heart, and saying: "I did not deserve to be remembered by that poor". And while he was regretting and crying [om. VD], <i>he dozed off</i> and</p>
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	<i>dozed off</i> and fell asleep.		fell asleep.
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- a) Syriac 1 (β) and Arabic still reflect some ancient features of the Syriac translation, like the calque ܕܠܡܐ, reproduced by the Arabic ١٥٥, and used to translate the Greek ναύτης. In the Syriac manuscript tradition, the calque has been trivialized not only by Syriac 2 (α), which substitutes it with the *facilior* ܕܠܡܐ, but also by one of the same manuscripts of β, which prefers the equivalent ܕܠܡܐ.⁹² The progressive corruption of the Syriac text did not affect the Syriac model of the Arabic version, which still preserved the reading ܕܠܡܐ.
- b) Nevertheless, the Syriac model of the Arabic version had already suffered some of the omissions that we find also in Syriac 2 (α): the loss of the main verb which introduces the episode (Gr.: Συνέβη, “it happened”); the sentence “after thinking that he was a poor”, which is essential for the comprehension of the whole passage (the sailor felt ashamed and refused the expensive garment, but Peter did not understand why, thinking that he was a poor asking for alms). Everything claims for a progressive corruption of the Syriac translation. The Arabic version reflects a precise stage of this corruption process, which is halfway between Syriac 1 (β) and Syriac 2 (α).

⁹² Cf. VENTURINI, La leggenda di Pietro il Pubblicano, p. 67, n. 146.

Greek text = FESTUGIÈRE, 371.170-176	Syriac 1 (β) = VENTURINI (2020), 80, §10	Syriac 2 (α) = BEDJAN, 347.3-9	Arabic version = Vat. Syr. 202, f. 27r; DMMM 138, f. 115ra
He who was cooking went out running. But be careful that he is not fleeing, for he is a great servant of God. For when he came out, he said to me: "I say to you in the name of the Lord", and immediately I saw <u>a flame</u> , which came out of his mouth and touched <i>my ears</i> : so immediately I heard, and I spoke.	The one who was serving in the kitchen came out running. But beware that he does not flee, because he is truly a servant of God! For when he went down, he said to me: "I tell you in the name of Christ: open!". And immediately I saw that came out of his mouth like <u>a flame</u> of fire, and it came and <i>reached my ears and my mouth</i> , and immediately my ears heard, and my mouth spoke".	"The man who was serving in the refectory went out in a rush. But beware that he does not flee, because he is a servant of God!". And he told them: "When he came to me, he said: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, open the door for me!', I saw going out of his mouth like <u>a tongue</u> of fire, and it touched <u>my mouth and my ears</u> , and immediately I spoke with my mouth, and I heard with my ears.	And he said to them: "The one who managed the kitchen came out running, fleeing. And he said to me: 'I tell you in the name of Christ, open to me'. And I saw coming out of his mouth like <u>a flame</u> of fire, which <i>reached my ears and my mouth</i> ".

In this last passage, coming from the conclusion of the tale, the Syriac translator readapted the Greek text, by adding the detail of the mouth touched by the flame. Here the Arabic text and Syriac 1 (β) are almost identical, while Syriac 2 (α) inverts the terms ("my mouth and my ears") and substitutes the substan-

tive ܠܚܡܠܬܐ, “flame” (surely original, cf. Gr.: φλόγα), with ܠܠܐ, “tongue”. The perfect concordance of the Arabic with Syriac 1 (β), against Syriac 2 (α) on one hand, and against the Greek on the other, shows once more that the model of the Arabic translator was not the Greek original, but a Syriac manuscript belonging to a high branch of the tradition.

To answer to the previous questions:

- 1) Syriac 1 (β) preserves original details of the Greek, which have disappeared in Syriac 2 (α), better than the Arabic version does. There is a first group of omissions and errors which is exclusive of Syriac 2 (α), whereas Arabic and Syriac 1 (β) faithfully reproduce the Greek. There is then a second group of variants, which are common to Syriac 2 (α) and Arabic, whereas only Syriac 1 (β) correctly reflects the Greek.
- 2) I did not find any passage which is correctly reproduced only by the Arabic version, against Syriac 1 (β) and Syriac 2 (α). Quite the opposite, the Arabic version usually agrees with Syriac 2 (α), against Syriac 1 (β) and the Greek. Finally, it also happens that Arabic agrees only with Syriac 1 (β), against the Greek.
- 3) It is sometimes possible to retrace the progressive development of the variants. The Greek text is often re-adapted by the Syriac translator, introducing some extensions and clarifications. Sometimes the Arabic version has lost the main features of the original, preserving only those extensions. Syriac 2 (α) often goes further on in this deterioration process.

None of these observations is compatible with a revision on the Greek original performed by the Arabic translator. It would be challenging to justify how the outcome of such a revision is often identical to Syriac 1 (β). If the Arabic translator

had consulted a Greek source, the improvements of the Arabic text would be different from those of Syriac 1 (β). To support the theory of a “re-translation” from Greek, it is not enough to find details of the Greek original or calques from Greek words, which the Arabic may have derived from a Syriac source of high quality.⁹³

THE LOSS OF THREE “PRO-CHALCEDONIAN CHAPTERS”:
ANOTHER SYRIAC-ARABIC CONNECTION

The absence in the Arabic version of chapters XXXIII, XXXVII, and XLIX, which are focused on the conflict between the patriarch and the Miaphysite sects of Alexandria, represents another direct reflection of the Syriac version.⁹⁴ Considering the epoch of the Arabic translation and its high stemmatic position,⁹⁵ we know that the three chapters disappeared before the 10th century. This confirms the opinion, expressed by André Binggeli, that the doctrinal chapters were not suppressed by the later Miaphysite compilers of the Syriac collections.⁹⁶ Nev-

⁹³ It would be necessary to discard the mediation of a Syriac source, like it is possible in the case of Ammonius' *Report on the Martyrdom of the Monks of Sinai and Raithu*, where it is evident that the Arabic translator read the Greek text, as he misunderstood the word *μερῶν*, cf. TREIGER, *The Earliest Dated Christian Arabic Translation*, p. 33.

⁹⁴ As informs the colophon of manuscript Sinai Ar. 428, the Arabic translation has been performed at Mar Saba: if the translator had known the Greek original, the “pro-Chalcedonian” chapters would have probably been reintegrated.

⁹⁵ Cf. *supra*.

⁹⁶ BINGGELI, *Writing in Syriac* [forthcoming]. Binggeli rightly highlights that some excerpts of the Syriac version have also been transmitted by the Melkite manuscript Sinai Syr. 24 (S). We do not know exactly which recension of the Syriac text was transmitted by S, since it reproduces only frag-

ertheless, there is no reason to ascribe, as Binggeli does, the suppression—which is common to Syriac, Latin, and Arabic—to the Greek model: as we have seen, the Greek text was unknown not only to the Arabic translator but also to the anonymous author of the Latin version BHL 4392, who translated from an Arabic source.

Between the Greek and the Syriac manuscript traditions, the *Life of John the Merciful* passed through two radical readaptations: 1) the translation from Greek into Syriac; 2) the rewriting which led from the “detailed form”, surviving in Syriac 1 (β), to the “abridged form”, which characterizes Syriac 2 (α) and the Arabic text. Probably in one of these two crucial moments, the *Life of John the Merciful* assumed the peculiar structure surviving in Syriac, Arabic, and Latin. The general reorganization of the chapters allowed the compiler to suppress the above-mentioned episodes.⁹⁷

CONCLUSIONS. THE CENTRAL POSITION OF THE ARABIC VERSION IN THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION OF THE LIFE OF JOHN THE MERCIFUL

To summarize:

- 1) The Syriac, Arabic and Latin (BHL 4392) versions of the *Life of John the Merciful* present the same structure

ments from chapters X and VII. However, its stemmatic position seems to be similar to that of the Arabic version, where the three chapters are lacking, cf. *supra*.

⁹⁷ It is noteworthy that some innovations seem to have been introduced for a simpler translation of the work. It is for example what happens with Peter's tale: in the Syriac version, the repositioning of its conclusion at the end of chapter XIX reinforces the internal cohesion of the story, cf. VENTURINI, *La leggenda di Pietro il Pubblicano*, p. 47.

and many common variants, which are absent in the Greek manuscripts.

- 2) The Latin version BHL 4392 has not been translated from Greek but from an Arabic model.
- 3) The Arabic version has been translated from a Syriac model.
- 4) The theory of a lost Greek *Vorlage* is not necessary to explain the features common to the three versions, as Latin depends on Arabic and Arabic depends on Syriac.
- 5) The Arabic version preserves many details of the Greek, which have disappeared in the Syriac manuscript tradition.
- 6) The Arabic version reflects a high branch of the Syriac tradition, halfway between the “abridged recension” (α) and the original Syriac translation (Σ), which survives only in excerpts (β) and indirect witnesses (π).
- 7) The Greek’s original details, reproduced by the Arabic version, are not the outcome of direct knowledge of the Greek text but of a high branch of the Syriac tradition.
- 8) The Syriac recension β reproduces the Greek text much better than the Arabic version.
- 9) The absence in Arabic (and in Latin) of the “doctrinal chapters” is the direct consequence of their earlier suppression in the Syriac version.

The position of the Arabic version in the manuscript tradition of the *Life of John the Merciful* is crucial, not only from the stemmatic point of view but more in general from that of the “transmission’s history”. The Arabic version unexpectedly performs the role of cultural mediator between the “oriental redaction” of the *Life* and the Latin West. From an ecdotic per-

spective, the Arabic version represents the “missing link” among the multiple recensions of the Syriac text. The study in parallel of both translations can not only clarify their mutual relationship but also provide new evidence for the research on the Syriac manuscript tradition. As a meeting point between the Syriac, Latin, and Georgian traditions, the Arabic version can help solve some problems that trouble the text’s history. The Arabic text can directly improve not only the edition of the Syriac version but also that of the Greek original. For example, it can help to choose between *adiaphora* in the Greek manuscripts, where the Syriac tradition does not reproduce a specific passage. For these reasons, a critical edition of this version represents, more than before, a *desideratum*. I hope that someone will be interested in working on this challenging task, which is expected to bring new knowledge about a manuscript tradition that never stops to surprise.

APPENDIX

The Arabic version of the *Story of Peter the Tax Collector*, as in manuscript Vatican Syr. 202, f. 23r-f. 27r (V); variants from Dayr Mar Mattay, ms. 138 (D), and Sinai Ar. 428 (A)

Vatican Syr. 202, f. 23r; DMMM 138, f. 112va = FESTUGIÈRE, 368.1-29

[1] ܟܪܝܣܬܘܣ ܬܝܢܘܫ ܡܫܠ ܠܗ ܕܗܝܬ 98 ܡܫܠ ܕܗܝܬ 99 ܕܗܝܬ: ܗܠܝܡ ܡܡ
ܠܗ ܕܡܫܠ ܕܗܝܬ 100 ܡܫܠ ܕܗܝܬ. ܗܝܬ ܕܗܝܬ ܕܗܝܬ ܕܗܝܬ

98 ܡܫܠ ܕܗܝܬ V D : om. A

99 ܡܫܠ ܕܗܝܬ D : ܗܝܬ V

100 ܡܫܠ ܕܗܝܬ V D : انسان A

[illegible]

115 **V محسم : D A محسم**

116, $\text{isr} \text{ V A} : \text{mir} \text{ D}$

¹¹⁷ നല്ല പക്ഷം VA : നല്ല പക്ഷം D

118 $D A : V$

¹¹⁹ ~~¶~~ om. V

120 മുക്കുവക...നല്ല om. D

¹²¹ *ചിന്തയ്ക്കു V A : ചിന്തയ്ക്കു D*

¹²² ཐུག...ར་ཁྱིའི་ཕུང་ om. D

$$^{123}V \text{ كالحصم} : D A \text{ كالحصم}$$

¹²⁴ ~~ⲓⲛ~~ om. D

¹²⁵ $\text{m}_{\text{K}} V A : \text{m}_{\text{K}} D$

¹²⁶ മല D A : ന V

¹²⁷ **ጠ.ጌጽጽ V A : ጠ.ጌጽጽ D**

Vatican Syr. 202, f. 24v; DMMM 138, f. 113rb = FESTUGIÈRE,
369, 58-70

[illegible]

Vatican Syr. 202, f. 27r; DMMM 138, f. 115ra = FESTUGIÈRE,
371.170-176

[4] פסל למסר אליו, כפי שפירש¹⁴⁰ ואלהבלי חזק אל ידו
 כי, אמת אמרו ממלא לוי אליו כחם אלמטה נפתח לו זיכרון
 אל חזקתו כח פתח פתחו למען אליו. ואלה אל אדם נפתח

128 A فوق بين يديه : VD فصله له

¹²⁹ A. ثوب جيد : VD داء حمى كحل

¹³⁰ A فدفعه اليه : VD و ككك ككك

¹³¹ A حلقه : VD കർമ്മ

¹³² ~~صم ك ح~~ V A : ~~صم ك ح~~ D

¹³³ Add. الرب A

¹³⁴ כחללך נ.מ. אמת V D : om. A

¹³⁵ പുറത്തു VA : പുറത്തു D

¹³⁶ Add. الغنى post **هـ** A

A معلق في السوق للبيع: VD مكد فر كالمصمم¹³⁷

¹³⁸A فلما اتا بيته : VD ككلم كل حذرله

¹³⁹ Post **مردم** add. **باکی** A

¹⁴⁰ A یدبر: VD محص

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