

Biblia Arabica

An Update on the State of Research

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Abstract

The aim of this contribution is to review some of the major areas of current research on the Arabic Bible, along with the factors and trends contributing to them. Also we present some of the tools that are currently under development in the Biblia Arabica team, Munich.

We provide here a very condensed survey of the transmission of traditions, as well as ways that biblical manuscripts in Arabic have been analysed and classified, covering both Old Testament/ Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Overall, the lack of critical editions for Arabic biblical texts in general reflects not just the overwhelming number of versions and manuscripts, but also the fundamental challenge these translations present on the level of textuality. Standard paradigms of authorship and transmission break down in the face of the complex reuse, revision, and layering of paratexts seen in these texts. It is the careful study of manuscripts, not simply as texts but also as physical objects, which holds promise for reconstructing the practices of producers and consumers of the Arabic Bible. A union catalogue of Arabic Bible manuscripts will gather the paleographic and codicological information necessary for further research. Moreover, it will link manuscripts, translators, and scribes to the online *Bibliography of the Arabic Bible*, which is intended to be a comprehensive, classified, and searchable reference tool for secondary literature. In conclusion, scholarship of the Arabic Bible now has considerable momentum, but must continue to keep its fundamental resource – that of manuscripts – in the foreground of research.

Keywords

Arabic Bible, Bible translations, Jewish literature in Arabic, Christian literature in Arabic, arabicization

Introduction

We attempt to reflect on recent developments in the field of Arabic Bible studies in this contribution. It is a dynamic field. Several research projects, running at the time of writing, are currently revealing many new aspects of the available texts and their larger intellectual context. Much of this recent scholarship draws on understudied primary sources. Arabic translations of the Bible were traditionally shunned by biblical scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries for what they perceived to be a lack of value for textual

¹ This collective contribution emerged out of the Munich branch of the DFG-DIP funded project *Biblia Arabica—The Bible in Arabic*, co-directed by Camilla Adang (Tel Aviv University), Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv University), Andreas Kaplony (LMU, Munich) and Ronny Vollandt (LMU, Munich), as well as formerly Sabine Schmidtke (now IAS, Princeton). With great pleasure, we comply with the suggestion of the honorable addressee of the Festschrift, uttered at a meeting in Munich in September 2017, to put together a short piece on the current state of research.

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criticism.² In their view, primacy was given to age, and texts were put in stemmata, in the search for an elusive *Urtext*. In neither aspect did Arabic translations do particularly well. Not only did they lack the primacy of age, compared to earlier versions in Greek or Syriac, most versions were in fact of a tertiary rank, translated translations as it were. What is more, for this previous scholarship Arabic versions belonged to a “rival realm,” namely the realm of Islam. Unlike in the fields of philosophy or the natural sciences, the idea that Late Antique scriptural heritage in Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, Coptic or Latin could strive for or achieve an unprecedented moment of originality under Islamic hegemony and in Arabic, the literary *koine* of this hegemony, would have disrupted almost arbitrarily the preconceptions of the time, which imagined, at best, an intellectual stagnation or, at worse, a complete state of *tabula rasa* among the Jewish, Christian and Samaritan communities now under new rulers.

The history of research, both early modern and modern, is too long to survey here. It was in the form of early printings that European scholars first became aware of Arabic versions of the Bible on a large scale. Specimens of this achievement include Agostino Giustiniani’s (1470–1536) Polyglot Psalter, as well as the Paris (1628–45) and London (1653–57) Polyglots at a later stage. With minor exceptions, print editions remained the main source for scholarly work on Arabic biblical translations for most of the next two centuries. However a new approach was inaugurated by Guidi’s study of the Arabic and Ethiopian versions of the Gospels (1888).³ Guidi was the first to produce a comprehensive inventory of the available manuscripts. He also introduced a comparative method for examining textual evidence. After an initial classification according to their *Vorlagen*, he grouped the versions in subcategories based on different branches of transmission. Moreover, he drew attention to the fact that textual changes frequently occur within a given version over the course of time, whether as the product of secondary revisions, adaptations, or linguistic development. As a consequence, he stressed the necessity of introducing an additional distinction according to text types. As obvious as it may seem, this approach was unprecedented and had never been applied to biblical translations into Arabic.

Subsequently, Graf followed this method in his epochal *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*.⁴ This work, albeit in need of additions and corrections in the light of recent research, remains the major reference for Christian Arabic versions of the Bible.⁵ In the 1960s, microfilms of the Arabic manuscripts of St. Catherine’s Monastery became widely available, after Kenneth W. Clark led an expedition to the Middle East under the auspices of the Library of Congress and its partners in 1949 to microfilm old manuscripts in various libraries of the Middle East, the largest and most isolated of which was that at St. Catherine’s. Among these manuscripts were some early biblical codices that were unknown to Graf, and this created renewed scholarship in the field of Arabic Bible studies.⁶ When it comes to Jewish versions, the major factor that has impacted recent scholarship has been the hitherto unprecedented availability of new manuscript collections, such as the Cairo Genizah (from the 1980s onwards) and the Firkovitch collections (after the fall of the Iron Curtain). Polliack’s 1997 book on Qaraite translations not only offered a clear methodology for describing translation techniques, but also situated Arabic Bible translations in a larger exegetical context, in which they, together with running

² See, for example, VOLLANDT, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch*, 3–21, *id.*, “Some Historiographical Remarks,” and HJÄLM *Christian Arabic Versions of Daniel*, 23–49.

³ GUIDI, *Le traduzioni degli evangelii*.

⁴ *GCAL*, vol. 1, 85–195.

⁵ Constructive criticism and suggestions for improving the *GCAL* were offered by SAMIR, “Pour une nouvelle histoire.”

⁶ For example, see the four volumes of STAAL, *Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151*; KONINGSVELD, “An Arabic Manuscript” (MS Sinai, Ar. 589); LEEMHUIS, “The Arabic Version of the Apocalypse of Baruch”; *id.*, “The Mount Sinai Arabic Version”; LEEMHUIS, KLIJN and VAN GELDER, *The Arabic Text of the Apocalypse of Baruch*; DRINT, *The Mount Sinai Arabic Version of IV Ezra*; and *id.*, “Some Notes on the Arabic Versions.” Some photographs of manuscripts in Graf’s *Nachlass*, kept at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, indicate that he only had very limited access to manuscript collections in the Sinai, and then only at a late stage in his life. Graf seems to have derived his information on Sinaitic manuscripts mostly from the *Studia sinaitica* series. Apart from that, Graf was acquainted with a number of *membra disjecta* from Sinai that circulated in Europe, and especially in Germany, as for instance the Grote collection, on which see TARRAS, “Friedrich Grote.” Graf often drew on facsimiles reproduced in *Studia sinaitica* to determine the Sinaitic origin of these fragments.

commentaries and linguistic thought (grammars and dictionaries), form what can be called an exegetical triangle.⁷ Polliack moved the focus to arabicization in a larger perspective. Similarly, Griffith’s 2013 work saw translations as not only resulting from the fact that Arabic as a language replaced previous vernaculars, but also as responding to a culture in which Arabic had become the very grammar of intellectual history, shared by Jewish, Christians, and Muslims alike.⁸

The total number of manuscripts containing Arabic versions of the Bible – an estimate only because of the lack of a comprehensive *clavis* – amounts to about ten thousand items. This corpus, if we may call it so at all, is quite diverse. It encompasses books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, as well as those of the New Testament. In addition, there are also a prominent number of deuterocanonical books. Of these manuscripts, some have resisted time’s appetite as intact codices of up to around 500 folios, while a not insignificant portion only survive in a fragmentary state or as objects of reuse. Furthermore, some Arabic versions are of Jewish provenance, others are Christian or Samaritan. A translation may be shared by all three denominations at times. The larger part of the manuscripts is preserved today in European collections, including the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the British Library in London, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, and many others. There exist some clerical collections in the Near East, of which that of St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai is the most important. Only a very small number of these manuscripts have been subjected to in-depth study.

Scriptural Quotations

There is no manuscript evidence of complete translations of the Bible into Arabic during the Umayyad period. The first running translations are attested in the Abbasid period. However, the Bible makes its first appearance in Arabic in the writings of Christian apologists in the 8th century C.E./2nd century A.H, leaving aside its intricate interplay with the text of the Qur’ān.⁹ The fact that two early Christian Arabic texts of apologetical content date from around 750 C.E., as has been argued, might not be coincidental.¹⁰ The shift of political power from the Umayyad to the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate brought with it also a dramatic shift for the religious identity of its non-Muslim subject population.¹¹ The ‘Abbāsīd rulers started to promote conversion to Islam, which not only now became easier for non-Arabs but also more attractive for non-Muslims in the face of increasing marginalization and pressure to adapt. This political, social, and religious situation very likely ignited a theological project of defending the Christian faith in the Arabic

⁷ POLLIACK, *The Karaite Tradition*, 3–22.

⁸ GRIFFITH, *The Bible in Arabic*.

⁹ For a positive evaluation of the possibility of written pre-Islamic Arabic Bible translations, see BAUMSTARK, “Das Problem eines vor-islamischen christlich-kirchlichen Schrifttums” and *id.*, “Arabische Übersetzung eines altsyrischen Evangelientextes,” but also more recently KASHOUH, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels*; CORRIENTE, “The Psalter Fragment”; MACDONALD, “Literacy in an Oral Environment,” 100–102; *id.*, “Reflections on the Linguistic Map,” 50, 68 n. 62; and TOBI, “Translations of Personal Names.” However, the absence of any manuscript evidence still poses a serious challenge to such extrapolations. Following scholarly consensus, it is at least plausible to presume an oral tradition of Arabic Bible translation intimately connected to homiletical and interpretative contexts. For a recent assessment, see GRIFFITH, *The Bible in Arabic*, 7–53 and VOLLANDT, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch*, 40–45. See also the section on the New Testament below.

¹⁰ The first is an anonymous Melkite apology preserved in MS Sinai Arabic 154 (fol. 99r–139v), translated and edited by Margaret Dunlop Gibson in 1899 under the title *On the Triune Nature of God (Fi Tathlith Allāh Al-Wāhid)*; see M. D. GIBSON, *An Arabic Version*. SWANSON, “Fi Tathlith Allāh,” includes a comprehensive list of literature on this work. Recently, Alexander Treiger convincingly argued that the tract should be dated to 753/4 C.E.; see TREIGER, “New Works,” 9–12. Note further that Gibson’s edition lacks 13 folio pages (106r, 107r, 110v, 111v, 133v–139v); SWANSON, “Apologetics,” 92 n. 7, points out that due to the quality of the pictures, the Library of Congress microfilm remedies the lacunae only in a limited sense. The second text is a papyrus fragment (MS Heidelberg, Institut für Papyrologie, P. Heid. Inv. Arab. 438 a-d; formerly Papyrus Schott-Reinhart 438) of an apologetical dialogue, published by GRAF, “Christlich-arabische Texte,” who pointed to the similarity of the biblical quotes in this text and *On the Triune Nature of God*. See further SWANSON, “A Christian-Arabic Disputation”.

¹¹ See LEVY-RUBIN, *Non-Muslims*; RISSANEN, *Theological Encounter*.

language, “a clear language that ordinary people understand” (*kalām zhāhir yaʿrifuhū al-ʿamma*), as expressed by one anonymous Melkite apologist.¹²

The Melkites were among the first to adopt the Arabic language for all matters religious.¹³ Still, the early Arab Christian theologians could draw on a long tradition of apologetics, in which the Bible played a pivotal role. Their interpretation of scriptural quotations, in turn, was heavily shaped by the theological argumentation which they intended to buttress with these quotations. Now the apologists writing in Arabic had to put forth their arguments against allegations from Islam, and this left discernable marks on the ways in which they presented the text of the Bible in Arabic. In particular, the allegation of “falsification” (*tahrīf*) of Holy Writ had a lasting impact and was dealt with in different ways. This is what makes these apologetical texts so valuable for our understanding of the Arabic Bible in general. Echoes of the historical, intellectual, and social context can similarly be observed in running translations not only coming from Christians, but also in those of (Rabbanite and Qaraite) Jewish and Samaritan provenance.

In Christian Arabic apologetic literature, scriptural quotations are primarily employed as proof texts for foundational Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and Incarnation. These proof texts can be allusions of only one or two words or lengthy passages of several dozens of verses. The apologists’ intervention in how the text is reproduced is often clearly discernible. A striking example is Theodore Abū Qurra’s rendering of Genesis 1:26a as “Create with us human beings in our image and likeness!” (*ukhluqū binā insānan bi-ṣūratinā wa-timthālinā*).¹⁴ His use of the imperative has no basis in any of the ancient versions. Rather, the way in which he reproduces the verse clearly supports his claim that God is addressing someone besides Himself in the creation of humans. This, then, must be His Word and Spirit, or so Abū Qurra argues.

However Swanson has highlighted that the use of the Bible in apologetic texts has a rather complex structure that goes well beyond proof texting.¹⁵ It also assumes a catechetical and homiletical function, and might even be seen as depicting a whole Christian worldview, including a salvational understanding of historical events. This brings us to the question of the audience of these texts. It is commonly held that the audience consisted primarily of Christians. However, the peculiar situation of Christians in a Muslim-majority society is mirrored in the texts themselves, as well as in their use of the Bible. Another layer of complexity is added by inter- and intra-confessional polemics. Frequently, Jews were used as a substitute when the apologist was actually addressing Muslim opponents. But Christian communities could equally accuse each other of a “Jewish” understanding of Scripture.¹⁶

When it comes to 8th and 9th century Christian Arabic theological writing, research has focused on such works as the anonymous Melkite tracts *On the Triune Nature of God* (MS Sinai Arabic 154) and the so-called *Summa theologiae arabica* (MS London, British Library, Or. 4950), the *Book of Proof* (*Kitāb al-burhān*) of Buṭrus al-Bayt Raʿsī (fl. 9th c.), and the writings of Abū Qurra (d. ca. 830), as well as on the writings of the Syrian Orthodox (“Jacobite”) Abū Raʿīta al-Takrītī (d. After 830) and the East Syrian (“Nestorian”) ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d. ca. mid-9th c.), which all include substantial portions of biblical quotation as well as thorough vindications of their reliance upon them.¹⁷ This is not to say that these apologists already had Arabic translations of the Bible at hand. It is more likely that they knew the texts they were quoting in Greek or Syriac/Aramaic.¹⁸ One of the central questions therefore concerns the *Vorlagen* on which they might have relied. Yet, as was suggested by Arthur Tritton in 1933 with respect

¹² MS London, British Library, Or. 4950, fol. 5v. On the work, see SWANSON, “Al-Jāmi‘ Wujūh”.

¹³ See GRIFFITH, “From Aramaic to Arabic”; LEVY-RUBIN, “Arabization”.

¹⁴ BASHA, *Mayāmir*, 102.

¹⁵ SWANSON, “Beyond Proof-texting”.

¹⁶ Cf. GRIFFITH, “Jews and Muslims”, 66; TARRAS, “The Spirit Before the Letter”, 95.

¹⁷ See BEAUMONT, “ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī”; BERTAINA, “The Development of Testimony Collections”; ESKHULT, “Some Remarks”; MIHOC, “Der Schriftgebrauch”; RISSANEN, “Der richtige Sinn”; SAMIR, “Note sur le citations”; SWANSON, “Beyond Proof-texting”; *id.*, “Apologetics”; TARRAS, “The Spirit Before the Letter”; KEATING, “Refuting the Charge”; *ead.*, “The Use and Translation of Scripture”; TRITTON, “The Bible Text”.

¹⁸ TRITTON, *op. cit.*, for instance, compares some of Abū Qurra’s quotations to Targum Onqelos.

to Abū Qurra,¹⁹ the apologists apparently drew not so much on books but rather on their memory. Samir tried to argue this point by way of detailed philological analysis in a short paper in 1983.²⁰ But it also seems to find corroboration at the end of one of Abū Qurra’s tracts where he concedes that “this is what we had in mind to write down of the testimonies from the Holy Scriptures as far as we recalled them [...], however without having most of the books of the Old Testament at our disposal” (*hādā mā ra’aynā an naḍa‘a mim mā ḥaḍarnā min shahādāt al-kutub al-muqaddasa [...] wa-akthar kutub al-‘atīqa laysat ‘indanā*).²¹

More work needs to be done on the connection between proof texts in apologetical writings and the tradition of testimony collections, on the one hand, and the relationship of these to running translations from ensuing centuries, on the other. Crucial texts, like Chapters 12 and 13 of the *Summa theologiae arabica*, still await editing and further study. A detailed comparison of all scriptural quotations in early Christian Arabic literature would enable us to determine whether apologists relied on a shared stock of examples, to what extent they modified the biblical text, and how these quotations relate to later running translations.

The Old Testament

The 9th century is when manuscripts containing running translations of biblical books in Arabic begin to be attested on a larger scale. In the first stage, the communities that produced these texts concentrated on those books which were central or significant for the conduct of internal affairs. This applies first and foremost to texts used in a liturgical context, but also to certain books of popular appeal, such as the books of Wisdom. Translations of the Psalms and almost the entire corpus of the New Testament are attested from Christian provenance prior to the 9th century. Further, the books of Ben Sira and Job and some pseudo-epigraphic books are found in rather early Arabic versions. Only after that do we encounter translations of the Pentateuch and most other books of the Old Testament. Least appealing for translation, both in Christian and Jewish contexts, seem to be the historical books. The Arabic “canon” was, similar to other traditions, quite fluid.²² Most of the medieval versions dropped out of use in early modern times and replaced by either manuscript copies of the *Biblia Sacra Arabica* (1671–73) or lectionaries.

Until very recently only sketchy, and usually dismissive, surveys of Arabic versions of the Bible existed.²³ In introductions to biblical studies, Arabic translations are usually absent. The multivolume project *The Textual History of the Bible* (THB), under the general editorship of Armin Lange, is pioneering in the attempt to provide all available information regarding the textual history of the Bible, including its Arabic translations.

At present, Christian Arabic versions of the Old Testament lag behind in research when compared to those of Jewish provenance. There are some exceptions. The history of the Arabic book of Ruth has been mapped out more carefully than many other Arabic Bible translations, with the sources having been thoroughly studied by Bengtsson.²⁴ This biblical book is not represented by a large number of manuscripts, and appears to have been translated into Arabic at a relatively late stage, with the earliest

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁰ SAMIR, “Note sur les citations”.

²¹ BASHA, *Mayāmir*, 104.

²² HJÄLM “Arabic, The Canonical History.”

²³ For example, NESTLE, “Bibelübersetzungen, arabische,” in the *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, claimed that Arabic versions “are not worth much for biblical criticism and exegesis, because, with only minor exceptions, they are secondary translations.” Margoliouth, as quoted in JELICOE, *The Septuagint*, called them “of the slightest possible importance.” TREGELLES, “Arabic Versions,” added: “The Arabic versions existing in MS. exhibit very various forms: it appears as if alterations had been made in the different countries in which they had been used; hence it appears an endless task to discriminate amongst them precisely.” Writing in 1957, ROBERTS, “Orientalische Bibelübersetzungen, die arabischen Ü[bersetzungen],” had no doubt that biblical translations in Arabic are “at most of secondary value for the study of the biblical text.”

²⁴ BENGTTSSON, *Two Arabic Versions* and *id.*, *Translation Techniques*.

extant manuscripts found so far being dated to the 13th century. Comprehensive mappings of the manuscripts of Arabic versions of the Pentateuch and the book of Daniel have been furnished by Vollandt and Hjälms respectively.²⁵ Both attempt to locate and identify all surviving manuscripts, classifying them according to their *Vorlagen* and grouping each version into subcategories. Furthermore, both monographs present to the reader a comprehensive analysis of the translation technique that follows in many respects the methodology developed by Polliack (see Introduction above).

With regard to Judaeo-Arabic versions, it is now generally accepted that they divide into three periods: (1) the early, formative period (9th–11th centuries); (2) the classic period (10th–14th centuries), spearheaded by Saadiah Gaon’s (882–942 C.E.) translation, known as the *Tafsīr*, and other translations of Qaraite provenance; and (3) the later, early modern period (14th–19th centuries). The first two periods overlapped for a time, and it is generally accepted that the composition of the *Tafsīr* had a catalyzing impact on the evolving process of committing hitherto oral, locally-bound Judaeo-Arabic translations to writing.

Early “non-Saadianic” translations have increasingly attracted the attention of scholars during recent decades. The first fragment, Cambridge, CUL, T-S Ar. 53.8, an early fragment exhibiting a translation of the book of Proverbs, was published by Blau.²⁶ Extant translations from this period cover most of the Torah and, to a lesser degree, portions of the Prophets and Writings.²⁷ Several scholars have pointed out that a rudimentary, embryonic stage of translation can be identified in early glossaries (known in Arabic by the term *tafsīr alfāz*).²⁸ Several intermediary stages that lead towards running translations are found in the Genizah corpus.

Saadiah Gaon, born in Egypt and later Gaon of Sura, was the preeminent Rabbanite scholar of the 10th century. His Judaeo-Arabic Bible translation is one of the most influential texts produced in that language. His *Tafsīr* could be found everywhere throughout the Near East, north Africa and Muslim Spain, which attests to the fact that it acquired an authoritative, almost canonical, status among all Arabic-speaking Rabbanite communities. His translation forms the largest proportion of the Cairo Genizah, where it survives in a large number of copies, some of these notably early in date. Some recent research concentrates on the transmission of the *Tafsīr* among non-Jewish communities.²⁹ Despite his importance, there are no critical editions of any of Saadiah’s translations.³⁰ Saadiah’s *Tafsīr* left its trace on all subsequent Rabbanite translations.

The Qaraite movement created an independent tradition of Hebrew Bible translation, the specific expression of which in translating the Pentateuch has been analysed extensively by Polliack, who offered an in-depth analysis of Qaraite translation techniques.³¹ It has been shown that the Qaraite translators – who did not accept Saadiah’s *Tafsīr* – followed an approach similar to that of the early non-Saadianic Jewish translations, and refined this according to their needs. The first Karaite to have produced running translations on biblical books was Salmon ben Yerūhīm, a contemporary of Saadiah. In Salmon’s commentaries, we encounter for the first time a tripartite structure that contains the Hebrew of the biblical text (in full verses or as *incipits*) with a running Arabic translation and a lengthy Arabic commentary. This custom, however, reaches its zenith with Yefet ben ‘Elī. In a monumental enterprise, Yefet furnished a translation and commentary of the entire Hebrew Bible. Among recent editions, we find his commentary and translation on the books of Ruth, Jonah, Hosea, Obadiah, Esther, Jeremiah, and

²⁵ VOLLANDT, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch*; HJÄLM, *Christian Arabic Versions of Daniel*.

²⁶ BLAU, “On a Fragment.” The discovery of additional fragments has been announced; a study of their possible *Vorlage* was furnished by HOPKINS, “On the Vorlage.”

²⁷ See BLAU and HOPKINS, *Early Judaeo-Arabic*.

²⁸ BLAU and HOPKINS, “The Beginnings of Judaeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis”; *id.*, “Ancient Bible Translations to Judeo-Arabic”; POLLIACK, “Bible Translations and Word-Lists”; and *id.*, “Arabic Bible Translations.”

²⁹ For transmission among Christian communities, see VOLLANDT, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch*, 221-242; *id.*, “Medieval Coptic Hebraists?”; and *id.*, “An Unknown Medieval Coptic Hebraism?”. Among Samaritans, see ZEWI, *The Samaritan Version*.

³⁰ A critical edition has been announced by Eliezer Schlossberg (Bar-Ilan University). New sources towards this new edition have been presented by AVISHUR, “Some new sources” and BLAU, “Saadya Gaon’s Pentateuch Translation.”

³¹ POLLIACK, *The Karaite Tradition*.

Proverbs, and also passages from the book of Genesis.³² In the 11th century, other prominent Karaite scholars engaged in continuous Judaeo-Arabic translations and biblical commentaries, most notably Yeshu‘ah ben Yehudah (middle of the 11th century) and ‘Alī ben Sulaymān (Egypt, second half of the 11th century). Their translations are strikingly similar to Yefet’s, and evidently based on his.

Earlier research, in particular that of the school of Paul Kahle, regarded Samaritan translations into Arabic as a side branch of Saadiah’s *Tafsīr* and directly dependent on it.³³ However, Shehadeh has demonstrated that the Samaritan Arabic translations are preserved in two distinct manuscript groups, forming independent versions.³⁴ The first group, which he calls Old Arabic Translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch, consists of trilingual or bilingual codices in Samaritan letters, prepared before the second half of the 13th century. Although Shehadeh initially assigned this early version to Ishāq b. Faraj b. Mārūth al-Šūrī, known as Abū al-Ḥasan (or in Aramaic, Ab-Ḥisdā), who was active in the late 11th century, this attribution remains disputed and the origin of the version remains unknown.³⁵ This version, virtually unknown to earlier scholars, chronologically preceded a revised text by Abū Sa‘īd. The second group, Shehadeh’s revised Arabic Samaritan Version of the Pentateuch, represents the version of Abū Sa‘īd. He was active in 13th century Egypt, and did not translate the Samaritan Pentateuch anew, but rather revised the earlier version of the first group of manuscripts, and appended various *scholia* to his text. Both versions have been published by Shehadeh.³⁶

New traditions of translation emerged from the 14th century onwards, partly drawing on Saadiah’s *Tafsīr* and partly reviving, or continuing, modes of Judaeo-Arabic translation recognizable in the early non-Saadianic translation sources. These versions are usually designated with the term *shurūḥ* (singular *sharḥ*, “translation, lit. interpretation”), and are attested in the later corpus of the Cairo Genizah.³⁷ It is helpful to classify them according to their geographical provenance, i.e. as belonging to the north African, Egyptian, or eastern (Iraqī and Syrian) traditions.³⁸

The New Testament

In this section, we give a short summary of the different directions (old and new) that scholarship of New Testament translations into Arabic has taken since the turn of the new millennium. The Arabic New Testament has been studied in units, either units of an individual book (the Acts of the Apostles and the book of Revelation) or units of a homogeneous group of books (the four Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, and the seven Catholic Epistles). Studies have focused on some units more than others: while the Gospels

³² See BUTBUL, “The Commentary of Yefet ben ‘Eli” (the book of Ruth); ANDRUSS, *The Judaeo-Arabic Commentary* (Jonah); POLLIACK and SCHLOSSBERG, *Yefet ben ‘Eli’s Commentary* (Hosea); *id.*, “Yefet ben Eli’s Translation” (Obadiah); WECHSLER, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary* (Esther); SABIH, *Japheth ben Ali’s Book of Jeremiah* (Jeremiah); SASSON, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary* (Proverbs); BUTBUL and STROUMSA, *Yefet ben ‘Eli, Commentary on Genesis* (Genesis); and ZAWANOWSKA, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary* (Genesis). The second volume of Sasson’s work is to appear, as is a work by Sadan on Yefet’s book of Job.

³³ See, for example, KAHLE, *Die arabischen Bibelübersetzungen*, x-xi; *id.*, *The Cairo Genizah*, 54-55; KATTEN, *Untersuchungen zu Saadja’s arabischer Pentateuchübersetzung*; and ALGERMISSEN, *Die Pentateuchzitate*.

³⁴ SHEHADEH, *Ha-Targum Ha-‘aravi* and *id.*, “The Arabic Translation.”

³⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan’s son Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Faraj b. Mārūth lived in Damascus in the 11th and 12th centuries where he was a physician to Šalāḥ al-Dīn. Accordingly, Abū al-Ḥasan must have lived at the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century, most probably in Damascus. MACUCH, “On the Problems of the Arabic Translation,” conjectures that the translation was affiliated with Abū al-Ḥasan due to the outstanding reputation bestowed upon him by scholars of his generation; however concrete evidence of his authorship is lacking.

³⁶ SHEHADEH, *The Arabic Translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch*.

³⁷ HARY, “Bible Translations, Judeo-Arabic *Shurūḥ*.”

³⁸ For north African translations, see AVRAHAMI, “המקשה”; BAR-ASHER, “Le Sharḥ”; DORON, “From the ‘Tafsir’ of R. Saadya Gaon”; *id.*, “Haqdamato Shel Hay Diyyan”; *id.*, “On the Arabic Translation of the Torah,” and ZAFRANI, “Jewish Languages.” Egyptian translations are discussed in HARY, *Translating Religion*. Finally eastern translation traditions can be seen in AVISHUR, *Studies in Judaeo-Arabic Translations of the Bible*; *id.*, “How Translators of the Torah”; *id.*, “The Adaptations of R. Saadya Gaon’s Bible Translation”; *id.*, “Translations of the Old Testament”; and *id.*, “Modern Judeo-Arabic Translations of the Old Testament.”

followed by the Pauline Epistles were and still are the main concern of scholars, the Catholic Epistles, Acts, and Revelation are still to a large extent outside the scholarly purview.

A common approach since the 16th and 17th centuries, which has continued and become even more vibrant in the 21st century, has been to edit a single manuscript or a particular section from it.³⁹ Some of the most recent editions have been Andalusian versions: Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala has edited Revelation and the three Johannine Epistles of MS Madrid, El Escorial, Ar. 1625; Bonhome Pulido has edited Galatians from the same manuscript; and Potthast edited Romans from MS Madrid, BNE, Or. 4971.⁴⁰ Editions from Eastern manuscripts have included, for instance, Arbache’s edition of Luke from MS Sinai, Ar. 72, Monferrer-Sala’s edition of Philemon from MS Vatican, BAV, Ar. 13, and Schulthess’ edition of 1 Corinthians from the same manuscript a year later.⁴¹ These editions have usually been accompanied by studies of the *Vorlagen* as well as the linguistic features of the texts. Furthermore, additional studies of the New Testament in Arabic have been done on unedited manuscripts or existing editions. These, though, have focused on a few prominent manuscripts such as MSS Fez, Qarawiyyin Library, 730; Paris, BNF, Suppl. Gr. 911; Sinai, Ar. 72 and 151; St. Petersburg, NLR, Gr. 290; and Vatican, BAV, Ar. 13.⁴²

The above-mentioned editions, being transcriptions of single manuscripts, were not concerned with the transmission of the text and its occurrence in other manuscripts. The first critical edition was published recently by Samuel Moawad. His edition furnished Hibat Allāh ibn al-‘Assāl’s translation of the Gospels and was based on the oldest eight manuscripts.⁴³ What is more, Moawad studied the history of research on this version, collecting all the manuscripts on which previous scholars, not least Samir in his elaborate study of ibn al-‘Assāl’s Gospels, had depended.⁴⁴ A similar approach, which pays close attention to all available textual witnesses to a certain translation throughout the centuries, as well as the modifications that occur, has been followed by Hikmat Kashouh on two versions of the Gospels and Vevian Zaki on one version of the Pauline Epistles in Arabic.⁴⁵

Scholars have gathered and categorized manuscripts of the Arabic Gospels using different strategies. Kashouh benefited from the earlier studies that provided small-scale categorizations of the Arabic Gospels, such as those done by Guidi, Samir, and, a few years prior to his own study, by Valentin.⁴⁶ Kashouh expanded them to include 210 manuscripts that he divided into twenty-six families. Apart from his comprehensive approach to the manuscripts, Kashouh’s work revived an old controversy over the pre-Islamic existence of the Arabic Bible. He claimed a pre-Islamic date of the Gospel text in a particular manuscript, MS Vatican, Ar. 13. Griffith argued against this claim due to the lack of substantial evidence, and supported the idea that the Qur’an was the first Arabic book. Moreover, Schulthess contributed an inventory of 197 manuscripts of the Pauline Epistles in Arabic and Garshuni scripts, which followed *GCAL*’s identification of the versions.

³⁹ See, for example, SPEY, *Epistola Pauli ad Galatas*, published in 1583, the first printed book of the Arabic New Testament (Galatians), which is based on MS Vatican, BAV, Ar. 23 and includes the Pauline Epistles, the Catholic Epistles, and the Acts of the Apostles; and also ERPENIUS, *Pauli apostoli Ad Romanos epistola Arabice*; *id.*, *Novum D.N. Jesu Christi Testamentum Arabice*, an edition of the whole New Testament from MS Leiden, UL, Or. 217, published in 1615–16.

⁴⁰ MONFERRER-SALA, “Una versión árabe del ‘Apocalipsis’”; *id.*, “An Eastern Arabic Version”; BONHOME PULIDO, “A Fragmentary Arabic Version”; POTTHAST, “Die andalusische Übersetzung.”

⁴¹ ARBACHE, *L’Évangile arabe selon Luc*; MONFERRER-SALA, “The Pauline Epistle to Philemon”; SCHULTHESS, *Les manuscrits arabes des lettres de Paul*.

⁴² FÉGHALI, “Les épitres de saint Paul”; URBÁN, “An Unpublished Greek-Arabic MS”; MONFERRER-SALA, “Translating the Gospels into Arabic”; *id.*, “Tres interferencias hebreas”; *id.*, “Geographica neotestamentica”; MONFERRER-SALA and URBÁN, “A membrum disjectum.”

⁴³ Most of these Gospels represent Family (L^a) in Kashouh’s study, but the other two categories in Kashouh’s study have deviated from the older manuscripts, according to Moawad, and thus are not suitable for the edition. See KASHOUH, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, 258–274; MOAWAD, *Al-As‘ad Abū al-Faraġ Hibat Allāh ibn al-‘Assāl*, xxxix.

⁴⁴ SAMIR, “La version arabe des évangiles.”

⁴⁵ KASHOUH, “The Arabic Gospel Text”; ZAKI, “The Textual History.”

⁴⁶ KASHOUH, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels*; GUIDI, *Le traduzioni degli evangelii*; SAMIR, “La version arabe des évangiles.” VALENTIN, “Les évangéliques arabes de la bibliothèque du Monastère Ste-Catherine.”

In the 19th century, scholarship made little use of the New Testament in Arabic. However, 21st century scholarship has brought back the old line of thought that some Arabic versions share some of the oldest readings of the Greek manuscripts. In this regard, Kashouh has examined readings from Luke in MSS Sinai, Ar. NF. 8 and 28; and Schulthess has looked at 1 Corinthians in MS Vatican, BAV, Ar. 13.⁴⁷

The study of the Muslim reception of the Bible has made major steps when it comes to the Old Testament and the Gospels. However the other units of the New Testament in Arabic are almost absent from this line of research. This neglect continues, and the only works regarding in this area in the 21st century have once again examined Gospel quotations.⁴⁸

Despite steady progress in the field, enormous work still awaits. Several books remain only sporadically touched, such as the Catholic Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, and Revelation.⁴⁹ The manuscripts of these units need to be inventoried, the different versions categorized, and their textual transmission investigated. It should also be noted with regard to the examination of translation techniques that studies on the Old Testament in Arabic are quite advanced, whereas the Arabic New Testament still has room to grow.⁵⁰ The special importance of the New Testament in liturgy also calls for a systematic examination of related commentaries, lectionaries, and other liturgical books. The examination of paratextual features, such as liturgical marks and rubrics, also opens new horizons for studying its use in liturgical contexts.

Textuality

While some translations have a clear authorial voice – such as in the translations of Saadiah (882–942), al-Harith ibn Sinan (first half of the 10th century), or Bishr al-Sirri (9th century) to name just a few – for most of them, there was probably never a single translator who composed the translation at a single moment in time and appended it with an introduction that specifies its purpose and the techniques of conveying it from one language into another. A large majority of translations are anonymous and of a provenance that only further research will perhaps discern. In addition, their textuality is fluid. Sometimes differences between the extant manuscripts of a translation are so great that we are obliged to view them as representing separate versions or redactions. Occasionally these versions or recensions are so different that, even while showing clear textual affinities, it is impossible to imagine how they could go back to a single original. We have to see them as representing separate manifestations of an underlying (oral) tradition. What added to this variance is that Arabic never received the same liturgical status as Hebrew, Greek, Coptic, or Syriac.

This particular textuality moves the manuscripts, as physical objects, to the center again. They have come into being through a series of processes in which a (potentially large) number of people are involved, at particular times, in particular places, and for particular purposes, all of which are socially, economically, and intellectually determined. These factors influence the form the text takes and are thus also part of its meaning. Research therefore demands that we focus on the manuscript traditions, precisely for the reason that these traditions reflect the human motives and interactions with which the texts are involved at every stage of their production, transmission, and consumption. One may say these texts have grown through their producers and readers. Illumination, rubrics, liturgical marks, and other paratextual features, such as glosses and short commentaries, were added and can complement what we can deduce about the use and purpose of each translation through its translation techniques.

⁴⁷ KASHOUH, “Sinai Ar. N.F. Parchment 8 and 28”; SCHULTHESS, *Les manuscrits arabes des lettres de Paul*.

⁴⁸ The most comprehensive work on the Gospels was Accad’s dissertation, detailed in four articles; see ACCAD, “The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse”. See also MONFERRER-SALA, “A Gospel Quotation of Syriac Origin”; SCHMIDTKE, “The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials”; and MCCOY, “What Hath Rome to Do with Seville?”

⁴⁹ DAVIS, “Introducing an Arabic Commentary,” has investigated the Revelation commentary of ibn Kātib Qayṣar.

⁵⁰ See POLLIAK, *The Karaites Tradition*; VOLLANDT, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch*; and HJÄLM, *Christian Arabic Versions of Daniel*.

Paleography and Scribal Networks

We have mentioned some of the material features that are crucial for any historical understanding of the production and dissemination of Arabic translations of the Bible. Manuscripts have a life of their own, and quite often the different historical layers are discernible as codicological or paratextual features. A key to understanding the chronology of the different translation traditions is the study of scribality. Again, this requires us to position the manuscript sources as the center of attention. In particular, what is called for is a systematic inquiry into the paleography of the earliest strata of Arabic Bible translations. However, to date we lack important tools for this kind of analysis, such as detailed paleographical descriptions and paleographical charts. Conclusions are often drawn based on each scholar’s own experience with certain collections or text genres, rather than on comprehensive studies of a large number of manuscripts. Thus, *membra disjecta* located in different libraries may be dated a century or more apart by different scholars, despite their common origin. In addition, a large portion of early Christian Arabic texts are undated, which has initiated not a few debates regarding their age.

This is all the more lamentable as specimens of early Christian Arabic manuscript fragments caught scholarly attention as early as the 1850s, when Konstantin von Tischendorf (1815–74) brought them to Europe from one of his trips to Sinai. Heinrich Fleischer was the first to publish facsimiles of these fragments, and he noted that several of the parchment fragments were datable to the 8th or 9th centuries and exhibited particular paleographical features.⁵¹ Around half a century later, Gibson and Lewis not only published a catalogue of the Arabic findings at Sinai but also a work containing forty-one dated facsimiles.⁵² Many of these manuscripts are comparatively old and thus are of great interest for the Christian communities in which they were produced as well as for the general development of Arabic scripts. Indeed, in the 1980s Déroche noted that around one-third of all Arabic manuscripts dated to the 9th century are of Christian origin, whereas one-third are Qur’ān manuscripts, and the last third are non-Qur’ānic book hands.⁵³

Approaching this rich and diverse material in a comprehensive and quantitative manner is of utmost importance, although any categorization will always be open for refinements. Miriam Hjälms is currently working on a preliminary classification of what is commonly considered the earliest Christian Arabic corpus (8th–10th centuries). Around 90 manuscripts containing different literary genres have been subjected to the study. The corpus has been divided into four broader categories (Christian Arabic I–IV), based on distinct combinations of features largely defined according to the terminology established by Déroche. It is hoped that this classification may be of some value for future discussions on tentative dates and on the relation between Christian and Muslim manuscripts, as well as contributing to our understanding of Christian Arabic manuscript production itself and to tracing individual scribes.

In 1980, Samir was already calling for an inventory of scribes of Christian Arabic manuscripts.⁵⁴ The value of such an inventory is obvious. First and foremost, it would allow the dating of manuscripts copied by known scribes. Samir suggested that this inventory should also contain information derived from colophons, such as dates when the copyists were active, where they worked, what manuscripts they worked on, the persons for whom they copied the manuscripts, and those to whom they bequeathed them. The union catalogue of Arabic Bible manuscripts currently being developed by the Biblia Arabica team in Munich will begin to facilitate collecting and linking this data by including available codicological and paleographical information and describing paratextual elements.⁵⁵ Like paleographical and codicological data, this information tells us something about the *Sitz im Leben* of the Arabic translations of the Bible, and offers some glimpses into the social structures underlying their production. Most importantly, it

⁵¹ FLEISCHER, “Beschreibung der von Prof. Dr. Tischendorf.”

⁵² For the latter, see LEWIS and GIBSON, *Forty-One Facsimiles of Dated Christian Arabic Manuscripts*.

⁵³ DÉROCHE, “Les manuscrits arabes”; *id.*, *Abbasid Tradition*.

⁵⁴ SAMIR, “La tradition arabe chrétienne,” 46–7.

⁵⁵ See also the section on current and prospective tools below.

allows for the identification of centers of learning and scribal networks. Unfortunately, virtually no attempts have hitherto been made to systematically study such networks.

Thus far, exploratory studies focusing mostly on 9th and 10th century manuscripts have been undertaken, for instance by Sidney Griffith and, more recently, Alain George.⁵⁶ In his studies on Stephen of Ramla and Anthony David of Baghdad, Griffith was able to outline the “geographical networks” of the different centers of the Middle East – such as Damascus, Ramla, Tiberias, Askalon, or Fustāt – which these scholar-monks came from. George’s work has made important suggestions as to the existence of a scribal workshop at St. Catherine’s Monastery. The collection and broader study of paleographical, codicological, and paratextual data, together with the information gained from colophons, will hopefully reveal more about scribal networks and scribality in general and allow us to determine whether translations of the Bible were copied in workshops and whether and how their members interacted, and thus how their skills and traditions traveled.

Current and Prospective Tools

In 2016, at the XI International Congress of Christian Arabic Studies in Rome, Samir called for an update and translation of Graf’s monumental *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, along with digital infrastructure to support sharing and collaboration within the field of Christian Arabic.⁵⁷ A number of efforts are currently underway to support these and similar goals specifically with regard to the study of the Arabic Bible.

First, the Biblia Arabica project in Munich, together with partners in Tel Aviv and independent collaborators, has been preparing an online *Bibliography of the Arabic Bible: A Classified and Annotated History of Scholarship* (<http://biblia-arabica.com/bibl>). This not only updates the items cited by Graf relating to Christian Arabic translation, but also includes Jewish and Samaritan translations and the post-Quranic Muslim reception of the Bible. Each bibliographic item has an entry displaying a full reference, summary of the content, manuscripts mentioned, a digital identifier (Uniform Resource Identifier or URI), and links to open-access online versions of the item where available. Items have been classified by the biblical books, translators, communities that used the translations, and subjects to which they refer. One of Samir’s major contributions to the field has been to facilitate the connection of Arabic-speaking scholars with European scholars; it is hoped that this bibliography will help to continue that tradition. In addition, Samir has proposed a digital library that would make works on Christian Arabic accessible to scholars with under-resourced libraries. While this bibliography is not a space for hosting digital facsimiles, it will provide a hub linking users to the growing multitude of resources already available online.

Second, there are attempts to update tools for identifying and referring to core entities in the field of Arabic Bible studies, such as manuscripts, the biblical books and versions these manuscripts contain, and the people who translated or copied them (see the discussion in Paleography and Scribal Networks above). Even the best manuscript catalogues and Graf’s *GCAL* or other inventories refer to now outdated shelfmarks or misidentify manuscript contents, while many Arabic Bible manuscripts probably remain uncatalogued.⁵⁸ Huge strides in digitization and digital cataloguing have made manuscripts, including biblical manuscripts in Arabic, more accessible than ever before. For the Cairo Genizah and other Jewish collections this includes the Cambridge Digital Library and the Friedberg Project, while for Christian collections the Virtual Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, PAVONe (Platform of the Arabic Versions of the New Testament), and the Library of Congress digitized microfilms of the collection at St. Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai should be mentioned. The Sinai Palimpsests Project even promises to

⁵⁶ GRIFFITH, “Stephen of Ramla”; *id.*, “Anthony David of Baghdad”; GEORGE, “Le palimpseste Lewis-Mingana”.

⁵⁷ SAMIR, “Situation actuelle”; *GCAL*.

⁵⁸ See, for example, SAMIR, *Tables de concordance*, which updated the shelfmarks listed by GRAF, *Catalogue de manuscrits*, for the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate and the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

reveal new texts by using spectral imaging on palimpsests. In spite of all this, several major desiderata remain for the field as a whole: first, correcting lacking, outdated, or erroneous information from older catalogues, which continue to circulate; second, attending to the codicological features of manuscripts, which catalogues frequently overlook; and third, building infrastructure to query and reference manuscripts digitally.

What this means at the most basic level is that it is still inordinately difficult for a researcher to search, for example, for manuscripts of 11th century Arabic versions of the book of Exodus or the Gospel of Luke without having very specific expertise. Digital technologies can help to address this using the “linked open data” model, but this can only work to the extent that projects (1) provide openly accessible cataloguing information, including stable URIs for manuscripts to which other projects can link (for example, URIs such as <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10539962v>), and (2) implement widely used standards for manuscript description, such as those of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI, a variety of XML).⁵⁹ The Biblia Arabica team in Munich is currently developing a union catalogue of Arabic Bible manuscripts that will collect all available codicological and paleographical data and describe paratextual elements in great detail, enabling scholars to browse through the catalogue with various research questions. A digital catalogue such as this for Arabic Bible manuscripts would provide a single starting point for manuscript research and direct users to each of the repositories offering manuscript images or cataloguing information. A similar approach could be taken to identifying the people involved in the production of Bible translations and the specific works they produced.⁶⁰ In fact, libraries have established practices for doing just that; nevertheless, in a field as inaccessible as Arabic Bible, subject specialists must do much of the work. This effort is well worth the practical gain of being able to search biblical translations by manuscript or translator as well as having an infrastructure that can support the complexities of referring to these entities unambiguously in a digital environment.

Alongside the development of appropriate infrastructure, and in conjunction with it, one can expect further cutting-edge approaches in the areas of digital editions, computational linguistics, automatic transcription, material analysis, and network analysis. Already there are glimpses of a few of these, such as the HumaReC project (<https://humarec.org/>), which presents a trilingual Arabic-Latin-Greek manuscript (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Gr. Z. 11 [379]) using up-to-date standards and best practices for digital editions.⁶¹ An example of a computational linguistics approach is a dissertation in progress by Robert Turnbull, which seeks to inventory families of Gospel manuscripts on a new scale by programmatically comparing their transcriptions. Handwriting recognition software such as Transkribus (<http://transkribus.eu/>) is being tested on Arabic manuscripts, and optical character recognition (OCR) for printed Arabic texts is improving.⁶² Neither of these technologies will replace human editors of Arabic biblical texts, but they may change both the process and the rate of editions becoming digitally accessible. Finally, as noted in recent presentations at the EAJS Summer Laboratory on Genizah Studies in Munich and the Bible in Arabic International Conference in Tel Aviv, quantitative approaches may provide new means to measure and classify the codicological features of Arabic Bible manuscripts and the networks behind their production.⁶³ In order for these innovative tools and

⁵⁹ See an initial formulation on the concept of linked open data by BERNERS-LEE, “Linked Data,” and recommendations for digital identifiers by OPEN DATA INSTITUTE and THOMSON REUTERS, “Creating Value.” While manuscript images should ideally be openly accessible (without requiring a login), it is not always possible for digitization projects to get the necessary permissions for this. In such cases, making at least the manuscript description openly accessible still allows the data to be linked to collaborating projects.

⁶⁰ “Work” is meant in the abstract or conceptual sense (see N. GIBSON, MICHELSON, and SCHWARTZ, “From Manuscript Catalogues,” 3–7), and in this case could be as granular as a particular biblical book in a specific translation, for example, Exodus in the translation of Saadia Gaon.

⁶¹ See CLIVAZ, SCHULTHESS, and SANKAR, “Editing New Testament Arabic Manuscripts.”

⁶² HASENMÜLLER and MÜHLBERGER, “Automatisierte Texterkennung”; ROMANOV *et al.*, “Important New Developments in Arabographic Optical Character Recognition.”

⁶³ ARRANT, “The Features of ‘Popular’ Bible Codex Fragments”; COHEN, “Analysis on Writing Materials”; N. GIBSON, “Networks of Biblical Scholarship.”

procedures to become more than isolated efforts, they must be connected to reference materials for bibliographic items, manuscripts, persons, and works; yet, conversely, these new approaches may alter our understanding of these basic entities on a fundamental level.

Conclusion

As a prerequisite to any penetrating study of a particular biblical book in Arabic, modern scholars need to begin with the cumbersome and time-consuming task of sifting through the manuscript material, which demands a fair amount of detective work and archival skill. It is for that reason that the Munich team of the Biblia Arabica project is currently developing a union catalogue of Arabic Bible manuscripts. Such a *clavis* of all surviving textual testimonies should allow scholars easy navigation through the corpus and encourage them to take into consideration the full range of evidence. This is especially true for critical editions, given that an edition based on a single sample manuscript would disregard significant information and flatten complex histories of transmission into something rather one-dimensional. For most translations, the evidence of context is sketchy at best. Most manuscripts lack introductions that would identify the translator and date their work. In this genre, higher textual criticism is not really useful to establish such information.

Context must be gleaned, we argue, primarily from the manuscripts themselves. The codicological data for each surviving copy of each translation tradition must be collected meticulously. Not only must codices be identified and understood; the writing materials and techniques used for their preparation must also be studied, together with their shapes, their page and text layouts, the practices of the scribes who wrote them, the scripts and handwritings these scribes used, and the marks left by readers and users over the years, including annotations, ownership notes, and records of private library arrangements. Marginalia and notes can often illuminate the use of the manuscript; for example, liturgical marks might demonstrate their use in liturgy, or annotations by readers might be suggestive of a private study bible. The copyists of the manuscripts, their whereabouts and motivations, where and when their products circulated, and who owned these products – these are all valuable indications for establishing details of the emergence and transmission of the traditions they contain. So, in addition to a study of the content – the translation itself – close observation of material aspects may furnish data about the communities that used a given translation, its geographical and historical circulation, and its reception history.

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