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Alexander Treiger, *The Church Fathers in Arabic Translations*, Receptio Patristica: Studies in the Afterlife of Early Christian Texts and Writers, Leiden: Brill, 2025. 435 pp. ISBN: 9789004713703.

Alexander Treiger's book *The Church Fathers in Arabic Translations* represents a major contribution to the study of Patristic literature in Arabic. The book examines Graeco-Arabic ecclesiastical translation as a counterpart to the translation movement centered in Baghdad, demonstrating that the history of the transmission of Greek texts into Arabic remains fundamentally incomplete. Treiger shows that scholarship of translations of Patristic heritage into Arabic can not only contribute to the study of the history of the Church and Arabic speaking Christianity, but also shed light on the broader processes of the transmission of Greek and Syriac texts into Arabic. The study reveals the considerable neglect of Arabic translations of Christian literature in scholarship to be a significant blind spot, rendering many developments in medieval Islamic and Jewish thought incomprehensible.

The first, introductory, part provides a historical overview, spanning from the eighth century CE to modern times—with a particular focus on the early and medieval periods—of the most important translation centers, leading translators, and Arabic translations of Patristic works. Special attention is given to the monasteries of Palestine and Sinai—the earliest centers of Christian translation activity—as well as to Byzantine Antioch, the most prolific center of Christian Graeco-Arabica. Treiger also surveys the Arabic translations of Greek Christian literature by genre, including biblical translations, hagiographies, Patristic and Byzantine literature, liturgy and hymnography. An important question concerns the Arabic Christian reception of these translations, as well as their influence on Islamic philosophy and theology.

Treiger further raises the issue of a possible relationship between Palestinian translation activity and the 'Abbasid Graeco-Arabic translation movement, in which Christian translators played a prominent role and which developed contemporaneously. He suggests that the two enterprises likely exerted reciprocal influence and that certain translators may have participated in both translation projects (pp. 65–66). In contrast to the 'Abbasid translation movement,¹ which was primarily concerned with philosophical, scientific, and medical texts, ecclesiastical Graeco-Arabic translation activity (also involving Syriac and Coptic) focused on Christian materials, and it was both commissioned by and intended for Christian audiences. However, some Patristic texts were rendered into Arabic as part of the Baghdad translation movement (18–20).

While the 'Abbasid Graeco-Arabic translation movement has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention, Palestinian and Sinaitic translation activity remains dramatically understudied (48). The reconstruction of the history of Arabic Christian ecclesiastical translation is complex, owing to the lack of primary historical sources documenting this process. Treiger carefully examines the translation methods, aiming to identify distinctive features and vocabulary in order to attribute translations to specific

¹ Studied by Dimitri Gutas in his pioneering work, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)*, London: Routledge, 1998.

centers and, where possible, to individual translators, thus seeking to construct a historical account of Christian Graeco-Arabic translation.

The second part of the book focuses on the earliest Arabic translations of Christian texts, produced in the monastic milieu of Palestine and Sinai. Treiger begins with the earliest securely dated Arabic translation of a Christian source: the Arabic version of Ammonius' *Report on the Martyrdom of the Monks of Sinai and Raithu*, completed in 772, most likely at Mount Sinai. He convincingly uncovers the complexity of the translation process, in which the translator appears to have relied primarily on the Syriac version, likewise produced at Mount Sinai, but then revised it to align with the Greek original. The high degree of sophistication evident in this method suggests that it reflects a stage at which the translation of Christian texts into Arabic was already well established. On this basis, Treiger dates the beginnings of Christian translation activity to around 750, or possibly even earlier.

Treiger moves on to a piece of significant evidence for the activity of Palestinian and Sinaitic translation centers in the 'Abbasid period—a manuscript (MS Sinai ar. 549) produced at Mar Saba, the most prominent among the ancient monasteries scattered across the wilderness of the Judaean Desert. This was a multilingual translation center where translations were undertaken between several languages—Greek, Syriac, Arabic, and Georgian. Translations of the writings of Isaac of Nineveh from Syriac into Greek, and then into Arabic and Georgian, were prepared there, as well as translations of works of other Church Fathers. The manuscript analyzed by Treiger constitutes a tenth-century anthology that contains translations of Greek Church Fathers and Syriac mystical authors, thus shedding light on the monastic curriculum of Palestinian monasteries (106). Treiger also provides a full table of contents, which makes the chapter a useful resource for future research.

Treiger presents an edition of the Arabic version of John of Apamea's *Letter on Stillness*, included in the manuscript, accompanied by a philological commentary analyzing the terminology and translation techniques, as well as an Arabic-Syriac glossary of key technical terms. John of Apamea can thus be counted among the central figures of Syriac spirituality, alongside Isaac the Syrian and John of Dalyatha, who not only profoundly shaped the spiritual tradition of Eastern Syriac Christianity, but whose writings were also made accessible in Arabic. This is particularly significant, as Arabic translations of Syriac mystical literature suggest possible connections between Syriac mystical discourse and the Sufi tradition.²

The third part of the book focuses on translation activity in Byzantine Antioch and its surrounding monasteries, the most important center of Christian Graeco-Arabica. Flourishing under Byzantine rule (969–1048), its origins can be traced to the early ninth century. Translators there, bilingual in Greek and Arabic, produced an extensive corpus of Arabic translations of Patristic texts. Treiger surveys the principal figures of this Melkite Graeco-Syro-Arabic translation movement and examines, in particular, an eleventh-century Arabic manuscript of the Homilies of Ephrem the Syrian, offering a reconstruction of the history of the *Corpus Ephremianum Arabicum*.

Another chapter is devoted to the most significant Antiochene translator, 'Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī (mid-eleventh century), an important Arab Christian theologian,

² For studies on possible connections between Syriac authors and Sufism, see 107 n. 20.

and to his *Book of the Garden* (*Kitāb al-rawḍa*). This work constitutes a translation—accompanied by ‘Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl’s own commentaries—of the Byzantine sacro-profane florilegium *Loci Communes*. The text combines citations from the Church Fathers and Greek philosophers to provide a guide to ethical life. Treiger presents a critical edition and English translation of a chapter from this work, namely a compilation of sayings devoted to the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν (‘Know thyself’). *The Book of the Garden* thus represents an attempt to translate elements of Greek philosophy into Arabic independently of the Baghdad translation movement.

Of particular significance is the role of Arabic translations of Greek Patristic texts in preserving otherwise lost works from the Greek tradition. Treiger turns to one such text: an anonymous eighth-century Patristic treatise entitled *The Noetic Paradise* (*al-Firdaws al-‘aqli*). While the original Greek version is lost, an eleventh-century Arabic translation, produced in Byzantine Antioch (circa 1000), survives. Treiger offers excerpts from various sections of the treatise, translated into English. This work on the spiritual life is framed allegorically within the story of the Fall. The term *noetic paradise* refers to the spiritual realm from which the human intellect was cast out, analogous to the expulsion of the human body from the bodily paradise. Through the cultivation of virtues and purification from the passions, the human *nous* can restore its original connection with God and unite with divine light. The treatise presents a complex exegetical approach, offering a comprehensive ethical perspective through a detailed exploration of the biblical narrative, infused with philosophical concepts and ascetic dimensions.

The Antiochene translation movement thus emerges as deserving of scholarly attention comparable to that devoted to the ‘Abbasid translations. Contemporaneous with the translation activity in Antioch, in 1009 in Damascus—then under Fatimid rule—the Melkite translator Ibn Saḥqūn of Emesa produced a translation of the entire *Corpus Dionysiacum*. The extent to which Pseudo-Dionysius’ writings were accessible in the Arabic Middle Ages is demonstrated by Treiger in the fourth and the sixth parts of the book.³ Beyond the complete Arabic translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, separate translations of parts of the corpus also exist.⁴ Treiger presents a critical edition of Ibn Saḥqūn’s Arabic translation of the first chapter of Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology* and offers a superb analysis of the technical terminology and translation techniques, accompanied by a Graeco-Arabic glossary. He establishes that this early eleventh-century translation was rendered directly from the Greek original (273), yet exhibits notable divergences. Treiger demonstrates that, beyond linguistic factors or misunderstandings, some modifications reflect the translator’s effort to temper the mystical doctrines of Pseudo-Dionysius. Union with the transcendent Divinity is transformed here into a more restrained notion of contemplation; the rhetoric of mystical ignorance is blurred (297–98). Ibn Saḥqūn’s Arabic version of Pseudo-Dionysius thus illustrates how translators adapted Patristic texts to align with their own worldview.

Addressing the question of the Islamic reception of Patristic material, Treiger determines that an Arabic paraphrase of Pseudo-Dionysius, which he suggests may have been produced as early as the ninth century, appears to have been accessible to al-

³ Treiger presents an inventory of Arabic versions of Pseudo-Dionysius at 275–7.

⁴ See 253 n. 2 for further important studies on the Arabic Pseudo-Dionysius.

Ghazālī. Treiger masterfully reconstructs the text of this Arabic Dionysian paraphrase. Through a meticulous analysis of paraphrasing techniques, he establishes a relationship between the paraphrase and the *Doxography of Pseudo-Ammonius*, which shares an additional significant feature with the Dionysian paraphrase: it is likewise grounded in a Patristic source, namely Hippolytus of Rome's *Refutatio omnium haeresium*.⁵ Following Daniel De Smet's hypothesis that the extant *Doxography of Pseudo-Ammonius* is an abridged version,⁶ Treiger proposes that the Arabic paraphrase of Pseudo-Dionysius could have formed part of the original, more extensive version of the *Doxography of Pseudo-Ammonius* (346–47).

Given the accessibility of Pseudo-Dionysius in multiple Arabic translations, it is reasonable to assume that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* also held significance in the Islamic Middle Ages, even though its reception history has traditionally been associated primarily with its profound impact on Christian thinkers. With Pseudo-Dionysius, a major Greek Neoplatonic author enters the body of Neoplatonic writings accessible in Arabic. This fact ought to significantly transform our understanding of the landscape of Arabic Neoplatonism, whose contours have traditionally been viewed in the context of *Plotiniana* and *Procliana Arabica*. While certain mystical doctrines in the translation of the *Mystical Theology* analyzed by Treiger are attenuated, fundamental elements that allow us to view Pseudo-Dionysius as a possible source for Islamic and Jewish thinkers were preserved. Moreover, other translations and paraphrases of Pseudo-Dionysius were also available. The distinctive features of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought—such as the radical *via negativa* and its integration with Christian theology—could shed light on certain traits in medieval Islamic and Jewish thinkers. This is particularly relevant for the radical negative theology found in the writings of prominent Ismā'īlī thinkers such as Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 360/971) and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 412/1021), as well as in Maimonides, all of whom should be viewed in this broader context. Dionysius' merging of negative discourse and worship likewise offers a valuable precedent for philosophical and devotional sensibilities in the Islamicate milieu. Similarly, the accessibility of seminal Syriac concepts in Arabic may open a broader perspective on their historical relationship to schools of thought in the Islamicate world, including Judaeo-Arabic literature.⁷ Against the background of the novel findings presented in Treiger's research, the history of Islamic and Judaeo-Arabic thought may thus require significant reconsideration, particularly with regard to the role of Christian intellectual heritage in shaping patterns of thought in the Islamicate world (82–83, 363).

In this outstanding study Alexander Treiger provides us with invaluable insights into the Arabic translations of Christian literature, offering a comprehensive and illuminating historical framework paired with philological analysis of the highest caliber. Though most of the chapters were published previously, as noted by the author in the preface,

⁵ U. Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des Pseudo-Ammonios: Ein Beitrag zur neuplatonischen Überlieferung im Islam*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989.

⁶ D. De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus: Une lecture néoplatonicienne tardive*, Brussels: KAWLSK, 1998, at 31.

⁷ See further T. Werthmann, "'Silence Is Praise to Thee': *Via Negativa* as Spiritual Practice in Maimonides", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 116 (2026), 169–208.

they appear in this volume thoroughly revised, updated, and enriched with substantial additions. The careful arrangement of the precious material into a cohesive volume produces a truly pioneering work on Christian Graeco-Arabica. The study expertly guides the reader through the pivotal stages of the Arabic translations of the Church Fathers, making it an indispensable resource for scholars. Marking avenues for further research, the book convincingly demonstrates that the study of ecclesiastical translations has the potential to open new pathways for a historiographical recovery of the connections between the Greek and Syriac Patristic works and developments in Arabic Christian, Islamic, and Jewish thought in the Middle Ages.

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Vered Lev Kenaan and Patricia A. Rosenmeyer (eds.), *Classics Transformed in Jewish, Israeli, and Palestinian Receptions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. 448 pp. ISBN: 9780198878964.

The world thinks us pedants but the truth is we classicists are free spirits: nothing human is alien to us—art and literature, history and philosophy—we roam them all. Reception studies are to our liking, because they open up even more wings of the library. This sense of joyous open-endedness is repaid in this collection. It ranges widely across languages (not only Hebrew but also Yiddish—Shalev—and Arabic: Kenaan and Nubani, Aslah and Dorchin, and Behar). It studies professional classicists (Rosenmeyer, with an intriguing touch of the family memoir), quite a few translators (Kenaan, Shalev and Kenaan and Nubani, as already mentioned, and Dykman), editors (Cohen) and mid-20th-century literary and critical theorists (Porter), including the usual suspects such as the Frankfurt school and their peers (Shahar) as well as Hannah Arendt (Leonard). Some constraints are necessary and the choice in this volume was to focus on literature. This study has ‘Israeli and Palestinian Receptions’ in its title, but it does not engage with the uses of classical archeology in Eretz Israel / Palestine. There will be time, and volumes, for that, too.

This handsomely produced book is indeed a pleasure to hold and to read. Readers will find striking new facts and observations—I personally gained most from the notes on Arabic reception, with which I was less familiar. One should be impressed by the success of Lev Kenaan and Rosenmeyer, who assembled this lively, richly argued collection. It came out in 2025, and it represents a genuine Israeli-Palestinian collaboration, one that does not shy away from the deep questions of identity of Jews and Arabs. This, in and of itself, is an astonishing achievement. Among the many thought-provoking articles I recommend in particular the one by Goldhill. ‘Resisting Reception: The Treachery of the Self’ is a brilliant contribution, putting side by side Moses Finley and Pierre Vidal-Naquet via their respective introductions to Josephus. Within this comparative pair of monads, Goldhill reflects a broad of sweep modern Jewish cultural history with its politics of memory and assimilation.

Goldhill’s article begins with some observations on the nature of reception studies, and they provoke me to add, now, a few observations of my own. I mentioned the joy of