

3.18. Pseudo-Avicenna's *De anima*. The Latin translation of a lost Arabic original (SM)

When editing and translating texts, scholars sometimes encounter texts written in a given language A, however with features of another given language B and/or linguistic peculiarities typical of translations; or, they encounter texts that have been written in language A, however are attributed to authors who are known to have written in language B. In these cases, one of the main questions is to determine whether the text represents a translation from language B into language A, or whether it was originally written in language A. Indeed, the way in which to edit a text varies precisely according to this fact (whether or not it is a translation), especially when the original is no longer extant.

Typical examples can be observed in the alchemical texts wrongly attributed to Avicenna, especially the alchemical *De anima* (Moureau 2010a, 2010b, 2013a, 2013b, forthcoming). This treatise is the compilation and Latin translation of three lost Arabic treatises, composed between the mid-eleventh and the mid-thirteenth centuries in Andalusia, and erroneously ascribed to Avicenna. It may have been translated around 1226 or 1235, according to a colophon in three witnesses. This translation is to be situated within the impetus of translations from Arabic into Latin that arose at the end of the eleventh century and flourished during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Italy (especially Sicily) and Spain. During this period, an important transfer of Arabic knowledge enriched the Latin west and brought new elements to most fields of knowledge; among these, many Greek texts which were translated into Arabic, often through Syriac intermediaries, from the sixth century onwards, and mainly during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Identifying a Latin translation of a lost Arabic treatise

When a Latin text is suspected to be a translation from Arabic, the first step to be taken in order to corroborate or invalidate this hypothesis is bibliographical research. If no Arabic original can be found, the researcher must look for indirect traces of the text in Arabic literature, searching for one of the following: (1) its title, conjecturing possible titles in Arabic by back translation—however, titles often change; (2) the author's name—however, attributions often change, and the text can be attributed to an author of another language tradition or even to the translator (for example, the case of the *Pantegni*, the Latin translation made by Constantine the African of the *Kāmil al-ṣināʾa al-tibbiyya* of ʿAlī ibn al-ʿAbbās al-Maḡūsī, which is not presented as a translation but as a Latin composition, Burnett – Jacquart 1994); or, (3) typical content. As far as the *De anima* is concerned, no mention of it can be traced in Avicenna's genuine work or in other Arabic treatises: the text seems to have been unknown to Arabic scholars. It is, however, often referred to in Latin texts. This lack of Arabic traces is important for the history of the text, but this argument *a silentio* alone does not prove that *De anima* is a later forgery.

Philological research is a more accurate way to identify a translation. Mediaeval translations from Arabic into Latin were made according to two different translation methods that correspond, to some extent, to two stages. The first method implies a greater distance between the translation and the original text: translators do not hesitate to rewrite the whole work, and sometimes even attribute it to themselves, and they tend to use a more 'classical' Latin. They also often write a prologue in which they explain their work. The second method is concerned to provide a Latin version that is as close as possible to the Arabic text, which has been called by translators *de verbo ad verbum* or *verbum de verbo*, i.e. 'word by word'.

Here I am summarizing and simplifying this question for the sake of clarity; in reality the periods are not so clear-cut, nor are the methods. The first method is generally said to be more commonly used in the early translations from Arabic, namely around the first half of the twelfth century, whereas the second is usually attributed to the later period, namely from the second half of the twelfth to the end of the thirteenth century. However, both methods were used in both periods, with only the number of translators who were using one or the other method varying. Moreover, some translators combined both approaches (Burnett 1997; Mandosio 2010).

It may be difficult or even impossible to identify a translation made according to the first method, i.e. if it is not clearly described as a translation in its prologue. The content may provide a clue, especially if the author—real or fake—is known, but this is clearly not significant since, indeed, the text could be an apocryphon written in Arabic or in Latin. For example, the fact that the genuine Avicenna denied the possibility of transmutation of species, and therefore alchemical transmutation, is not sufficient to claim that the *De anima* is not a translation (*Kitāb al-maʿādin wa ʾl-āṭār al-ʿulwiyya* (Book of metals and celestial phenomena), the fifth part of the *ṭabīʿiyyāt* (physics) of the *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* (Book of healing),

translated under the title *De mineralibus*, but better known by historians under the title *De congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum*, Mandosio – Di Martino 2006). A more trustworthy indicator is the presence of Latin transcriptions of Arabic words. However, these are not sufficient either: some transcriptions were used in compositions originally written in Latin, even for proper names and place names. The Arabic word *alembic*, for instance, is found even in later Latin texts. We can also mention the special case of the Latin translation of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-ma'ādin wa 'l-āṭār al-'ulwiyya*, in which the translator, Alfred of Sareshel, attempted to erase all Arabic traces and inserted fake Greek ones (Mandosio – Di Martino 2006, 414–416). However, a large number of transcriptions, as well as transcriptions of rare words (*hapax legomena* or words with few occurrences), can indicate a translation. But a frequent occurrence of transcriptions is rare when a translator employs the first method. As a consequence, we can only hypothesize concerning this kind of translation and it remains impossible to make firm assertions if we do not have an extant original. When the text is a translation made according to the second method, the problem is less difficult to solve. As in the case of translations made with the first method, the content may provide the addition of some information. But it is the language itself—the transcriptions, the morphology, the syntax, and the style—that bears evidence to the fact that we are dealing with a translation. As already mentioned, transcriptions, which are usually more frequent in literal translations, can betray an Arabic origin. In the *De anima*, common words are found such as *alcofol* for *al-kuhl* (the kohl) (*De anima*, 154 (= DA, quoted according to the pagination in Celsi 1572)) as well as more rare terms such as *azer* for the Arabic *al-zīr* (the highest-pitched string of the Arabic lute) or *acercon* for *al-zarqūn* (minium) (DA, 118–119). The word 'in' is sometimes used in the sense of 'about', corresponding to the Arabic *fī*. We also encounter Spanish words such as *plata* for *argentum* (silver) (DA, 45, 47, 99), or *raton* for *mus* (mouse) (DA, 50), and even a specifically Andalusian word, *morabetini* for *al-murābiṭūn*, the Almoravid, which in this case designates a coin (the *maravedis*) (it occurs thirty-four times in the treatise and as a consequence it does not appear to be a later interpolation), but this does not further aid the identification, as will be made clear. The morphology can bear traces that point towards a translation as well: in the *De anima* we come across many infinitives ending in *-ar* instead of the Latin *-are*, which is a Spanish feature. Syntax is also a good indication: in the *De anima* the presence of many concessive formulas is a trace of Arabic syntax; the text abounds in *nisi*, much more than a typical Latin text. The specific construction of the Arabic word *bayna*, which means 'between', is notable as well: the phrase *inter laminam et laminam* ('between the slices') sounds like an Arabic construction; Latin would normally prefer *inter laminas*. The style of a text is sometimes interesting to observe, however it is never conclusive: the tendency to use supposed objections, such as 'if somebody asks us... we will answer...', is characteristic of Arabic style. However, these results need to be interpreted: in the *De anima* the presence of Spanish words does not simply indicate that the treatise was translated from Spanish into Latin, so far as other elements need to be taken into account: the Spanish characteristics are not as numerous as the Arabic features, and the historical background—i.e. the context of the translation from Arabic into Latin—leaves us with the impression that the *De anima* is a translation from Arabic (specifically, Andalusian Arabic) made in Spain. Moreover, we must pay attention to interpolations: the *De anima*, for example, contains an Italian word, *scorza* (which means 'the bark') (DA, 295), but this sole term is not sufficient to assume an Italian origin; its presence in the *De anima* is likely due to a later gloss.

Even if these observations help to put forward hypotheses, they cannot be considered indisputable proofs. The best indication that a text really is a translation is the presence of translation errors. In the *De anima*, the translator uses the Latin word *porta*, which means 'door', to designate a chapter (the word is used nine times in this sense), which seems to be due, at first glance, to a confusion: in Arabic, the word *bāb* means 'door' but also 'chapter', so the translator could have made a mistake. However, this error could also be intentional, following from the *verbum de verbo* method; the word *porta* also occurs in the treatise with the meaning 'door', so the translator may have used the same word *porta* to translate all the occurrences of *bāb*. Some passages of the *De anima* are so obscure that the only possible explanation seems to be a lack of understanding on the part of the translator. However, one indisputable error is found in two passages of the *De anima* (DA, 78, 116, the mistake is the same in both): speaking about the human sperm, which is used in pseudo-Avicenna's alchemy, the texts read, 'tempta inter digitos si se peccat aut non', literally 'test with your fingers if it makes a mistake or not' which does not make sense. The word *se peccat* is actually a bad reading of an Arabic word: the translator read *ḡaliṭa*, which means 'to make a mistake', 'to be wrong', and translated it into *se peccat*, instead of *galuza*, which signifies 'to be thick' (I

thank Charles Burnett for helping me to find this translation error). This last proof is the only conclusive one.

If we find only indications that a text is a translation but no indisputable evidence, the text may have been written directly in Latin but with Arabic features or/and with an Arabic attribution. This question is much more difficult to solve than the previous one.

The first step is, once more, bibliographical research. In searching for an original, references to the text, fragments, or other translations may be found, i.e. evidence that the text is a translation, and not a text written directly in Latin. But one must pay attention to the fact that proving that a Latin text attributed to an Arabic author is not authentic produces an argument, but no evidence (it could be an apocryphon written in Arabic). Concerning the philological research, we can observe the same traces, in the content and in the language, as explained above. First, if some of the linguistic elements described above are found, i.e. indications of Arabic origin in vocabulary, morphology, syntax, or style, three hypotheses can be put forward. (1) The text may be a translation, as mentioned before. (2) The text could also be a revision of a translation, joined to other revisions of texts that are also translations, or Latin texts, or even to original compositions of the compiler. For example, the *Declaratio lapidis physici Avicennae filio suo Aboali*, another alchemical treatise attributed to Avicenna, is clearly a pseudepigraphical treatise directly written in Latin but it contains some Arabic linguistic features (Ruska 1934, 45–48). This can be explained by the fact that the *Declaratio lapidis* is actually a compilation of two texts: the beginning is a rewriting of quotations from the *De anima*, the second part is composed of quotations from the *Turba Philosophorum*, another Latin translation of an Arabic alchemical treatise. In this case, the *verbum de verbo* method brings with it ambiguity: differences stemming from the Arabic are also found in the Latin translation, which makes it difficult to say whether the compilation was made in Arabic or in Latin. (3) The text may also be a Latin treatise written in the style of a translation; for example, the *Summa perfectionis*, wrongly attributed to the Arabic author Ġābir ibn Ḥayyān, is actually a Latin composition written as a translation (Newman [William] 1991). Second, if we do not find any (or enough) Arabic elements in the language, two hypotheses can be put forward: either (1) the text is a translation made according to the first method, i.e. a translation in classical Latin, or (2) it is a text written directly in Latin.

With regard to texts written directly in Latin, we may not find evidence that the text is a pseudepigraph, but only that it *could be* a pseudepigraph. There are only hypotheses. If a text shows no evidence of Arabic origin, although it is attributed to an Arabic author, we can never assert that it has been written directly in Latin without further external evidence (even if the content is not compatible with the doctrine of the Arabic author to whom the text is attributed, the pseudepigraph could have been written in Arabic and then translated), such as another translation of the same treatise, or quotations from a Latin treatise posterior to the composition/translation: the *Tractatulus Avicennae*, for example, is an apocryphal alchemical Latin treatise attributed to Avicenna, in which we find quotations from a commentary on the *Tabula Smaragdina* by Hortulanus, which was written in Latin around the middle of the fourteenth century (Ruska 1934, 48–50). However, even this kind of quotation can be dubious because of possible later interpolations.

Edition of a Latin translation of a lost Arabic treatise

A critical edition of a translation differs from an edition of an original text, and, in the case of a translation of a lost original, the differences are even more significant. The principles of this kind of edition are closer to those used to edit a *textus receptus* (i.e. the text representing the most diffused version of the text in a certain period) than to those used for a reconstructive edition intending to represent an archetype, even if the edition of the translation is reconstructive. Indeed, the editor must keep in mind that he should correct the text as little as possible, as any mistake could be a translation error: he is editing the translation and not the lost original. For example, some passages in the *De anima* are completely unintelligible, however, it is nonetheless important not to correct them so as to try to give them a meaning which was maybe not understood by the translator and was therefore not present in the translation. The same must be said about glosses: many Latin translators of Arabic texts used glosses to explain transcriptions or complex sentences, which means that they belong to the text and should not be deleted by the editor.

References

Burnett 1994, 1997; Celsi 1572; Mandosio 2010; Mandosio – Di Martino 2006; Moureau 2010a, 2010b, 2013a, 2013b, forthcoming; Newman [William] 1991; Ruska 1934.