Greek into Arabic

Philosophical Concepts and Linguistic Bridges
ERC *Ideas* Advanced Grant 249431 Workshop October 3-5, 2011

lunedì 3 ottobre 2011, ore 9
Santa Croce in Fossabanda - piazza Santa Croce in Fossabanda - Pisa

Saluto del Prorettore per la Ricerca
Roberto Barale, Università di Pisa
Life Sciences and Humanities: A False Divide

Alessandra Avanzini, Università di Pisa
DASI - Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions:
Objectives and Methodology

Gerhard Endress, Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Greek into Arabic: Transmission, Translation, Transformation -
Exploring the Sources of our Common Heritage

Andrea Bozzi,
Istituto di Linguistica Computazionale, CNR - Pisa
A Philological Computational System for Editing Graeco-Arabic Texts:
Methodology and Samples

Cristina D'Ancona, Università di Pisa
The workshop: An Introduction

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The Opening Session: the members of Greek into Arabic Emily Cottrell, Paul B. Fenton, Gerhard Endress, Andrea Bozzi, Cristina D'Ancona, Eugenio Picchi, Ouafae Nahli, Elisa Coda, Henri Hugonnard-Roche, and Cleophea Ferrari. Speakers: Prof. Alessandra Avanzini (P.I. ERC AG "DASI") and Prof. Roberto Barale (University of Pisa)

The ERC project *Ideas* "Greek into Arabic" (Advanced Grant 249431) meets at the end of the first reporting period, and a briefing of what has been done is in order. This involves an outline of the main features of such a challenging attempt at merging together three different fields: Arabic studies, Computational Linguistics, and History of Philosophy. Arabic studies, with all the skills necessarily involved – the knowledge of a highly sophisticated language, philology, and the historical background – have been presented by Prof. Gerhard Endress, *fons et origo* of the contemporary approach to the Graeco-Arabica.

The Director of the Istituto di Linguistica Computazionale of the Italian Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Dr. Andrea Bozzi, has highlighted what computer science can do, once put into the service of linguistics accompanied by philological awareness.

From left to right: Gerhard Endress, Andrea Bozzi, Marco Di Branco

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The task of the historian of philosophy is now to outline what is the issue at stake.

The text that lies at the core of our project has been falsely attributed to Aristotle in the Arabic-speaking world, and when it has been translated into Latin, in the Renaissance, it was as *Aristotelis mystica philosophia* that it has been appended to the corpus of the Latin Aristotle inherited from the Middle Ages. It took approximately a century to remove this "mystical philosophy" from Aristotle's *Opera omnia*, and one has to wait for the 19th century to see this work given back to its true author, Plotinus. But while Plotinus' *Enneads* earned in the 20th century a critical edition that counts as a masterpiece of classical philology, its Arabic version – our pseudo-*Theology* – still lacks anything comparable. This is even more regrettable if one keeps in mind that the oldest Greek manuscript of Plotinus' works dates back to the 13th century, whereas the Arabic translation has been done in the 9th century; hence, the conclusion imposes itself that the Greek model of the Arabic version – i.e., a Greek codex that reached Baghdad and is lost to us – antedated the earliest extant Greek manuscript. True, the Arabic version is a paraphrase; but once critically edited it can shed light on several passages of the Greek text that resist any attempt to remove their *cruces*.

But the fact that the pseudo-*Theology* has not yet been critically edited is regrettable also on another count. This text, as we saw before, has been attributed to Aristotle, and it was as the crowning part of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that it had been commented upon by no less a philosopher than Avicenna. However, we still read the pseudo-*Theology* in a poor edition, whose shortcomings

From Left to Right: Henri Hugonnard-Roche, Cecilia Martini

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can be taken instead of shortcomings of the translation itself, with a wide range of subsequent blurs potentially occurring in our evaluation as historians of the philosophical thought. Hence the necessity to provide a reliable edition. To this end, the old traditional method of *recensio* and *eliminatio codicum* counted for us as the first step; this means that our first endeavour was, and still is, to gather the reproductions of all the extant manuscripts of the pseudo-*Theology*. Most of them are housed in libraries of extra-European countries: Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Iran, India, Uzbekistan.

Gerhard Endress had prepared several years ago the list of the Arabic manuscripts known at that time, and he shared them with us even before the beginning of the project. I would like to express the deepest thanks of all of us to Meryem Sebti, Marc Geoffroy, and Marco Di Branco, who have been unsparing in their effort to study the available data, to prepare the missions, and to visit these libraries: they have discovered manuscripts still unknown, with

From Left to Right: Cleophea Ferrari, Cecilia Martini, Daniel De Smet, Meryem Sebti, Marc Geoffroy

the help of librarians who spent their time to unearth them.

We have discussed during the workshop the philological data that the study of these manuscripts brings out. Many months of collation of manuscripts often difficult to decipher lie in the background of this discussion: those who have participated in our virtual *scriptorium*, Cecilia Martini, Meryem Sebti, D a n i e l De Smet, Issam Marjani, Emily Cottrell, and myself, know how demanding is this task.

We have also secured the help of some of the leading scholars in the field, and the very fact that I must have recourse to the alphabetical order is telling : prof. Paul Fenton, prof. Henri Hugonnard-Roche, Father Samir Khalil Samir SJ. All together, the young researchers and the most experienced scholars, we have discussed in

From Left to Right: Marc Geoffroy, Father Samir Khalil Samir SJ, Issam Marjani

these days the first outcome of this part of the project: a reliable survey of the extant manuscripts, and an idea of where the problems lie. It would be daring of us to say that we

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already know how the textual tradition stands, but things are now less in the dark than they were before.

From Left to Right: Paul B. Fenton, Father Samir, Yury Arzhanov

Our heartfelt thanks go to all those who have made this possible: first and foremost the European Research Council, but also the University of Pisa as the Host Institution of this project, and its Department of Philosophy. As I said before, the nature of our aim implies that different skills must merge together. Without the scholarship taught and transmitted in Bochum by Gerhard Endress and the scholars who collaborate with him, Rüdiger Arnzen, Cleophea Ferrari, Yuri Arzhanov, we could not even conceive of our project of comparing word by word the Greek and Arabic Plotinus.

The same holds true as for the sophisticated skills in computational linguistics housed in the ILC - CNR, which have been enhanced for the specific aims of this project by its Director Andrea Bozzi, by Ouafae Nahli and Angelo Del Grosso, joined recently by Emiliano Giovannetti and Eugenio Picchi; we owe to them that spectacular possibility to compare the Greek and the Arabic Plotinus on the screen of a computer that we saw last Monday.

From Left to Right: Andrea Bozzi, Eugenio Picchi, Cristina D'Ancona

Nilda Ruimy and Silvia Piccini are at work on the domain lexicon in Greek and Arabic according to one of the most recent and performative models of "ontology", and it escapes to nobody how challenging is this task.

Marco Di Branco, Ouafae Nahli

I hope it does not sound parochial if I come to my conclusion by remarking that Pisa is an interesting place indeed, where it is still possible to read Plotinus in Greek with undergraduate students, and where it begins to be possible to read al-Kindi, Avicenna and Averroes in Arabic to a PhD audience.

What is even more intersting is that young people with the skills for scholarly reserch can devote their time and energy not only to a challenging PhD dissertation on the Hebrew version of Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle's *De Caelo*, but also to help so substantially a research project to go on. My heartfelt thanks go to Elisa Coda for this, and I am sure the

entire team joins me: without Elisa, our meeting would have been squarely impossible.

Prof. Endress, Ouafae, Elisa, Prof. Hugonnard-Roche, Cleo, Cecilia

The second step of the project begins right now. The best way to express my gratitude to the team and to all those who have made this possible, people and institutions, is to go back to work immediately.