

‘Abd al-Masīḥ Ibn Nā‘ima al-Ḥimṣī

Little is known on the 9th century Christian translator ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Nā‘ima al-Ḥimṣī, but one of his translations proved to be decisive, that of Plotinus’ *Enneads* IV–VI, which forms the basis of one of the most important works in Arabic philosophical literature: the so-called *Uthūlūjiyā* (*Theology*) by “Aristotle”. The full name, that informs about his Christian allegiance (‘Abd al-Masīḥ) and his Syriac origins (al-Ḥimṣī, from Emesa) is given by Ibn al-Nadīm in the list of translators (see below), and is reproduced also by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, I, 204.15 Müller (Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, I, p. 222; Supplementband, I, 364–5; Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, II, 228, lists him among the Jacobites, meaning the West-Syrian Church). In the bio-bibliographical works from the 10th century onwards Ibn Nā‘ima is mentioned apropos other translations: that of Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations*, and of Philoponus’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*.

Ibn Nā‘ima al-Ḥimṣī as the translator of the *Enneads*

The manuscripts of the *Uthūlūjiyā* known to date are ca. 100, and in most of them Ibn Nā‘ima is mentioned as the translator into Arabic of the *Uthūlūjiyā*, meaning “a discourse (*qawl*) on divine sovereignty by Aristotle, the Greek philosopher”, while al-Kindī (d. 256/870 ca.) is mentioned as its “corrector” (ps.–*Theology of Aristotle*, ed. Badawī, 3.4–9). This piece of information locates Ibn Nā‘ima within the “circle of al-Kindī” (Endress, “The Circle of al-Kindī”). Also the *terminus ante quem* of the translation is given: we are told that al-Kindī “corrected” the translation for Aḥmad, son of the caliph al-Mu‘taṣim (r. 833–842). The presence of traces of Syriac phraseology (Endress, *Proclus Arabus*, 69) made some scholars surmise that Ibn Nā‘ima translated not from the Greek *Enneads*, but from some unknown Syriac reworking of them (Baumstark, “Zur Vorgeschichte”), an opinion that has been subsequently challenged (Zimmermann, “The Origins of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*”, Brock, “A Syriac Intermediary”). The translation is heavily adapted, hence the question whether Ibn Nā‘ima limited himself to translating, or was his role more active. There is no scholarly consensus on this issue: for some he was the adaptor, who transformed Plotinus’ *Enneads* into the *Theology* by “Aristotle” (Zimmermann, “The Origins of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*”; Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*), while others maintain that the real creator of the *Uthūlūjiyā* was al-Kindī (D’Ancona, “Pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, Chapter I”; “La *Teologia* neoplatonica di ‘Aristotele”). What is sure is that intentional changes, e.g. the transformation of Plotinus’ One into God Almighty, are interwoven with literal translations, a fact that points to a deliberate adaptation also on the part of the translator: detailed analysis of this procedure in Hugonnard-Roche, “Dans l’atelier d’Ibn Nā‘ima al-Ḥimṣī”.

Mentions of Ibn Nā‘ima as the translator of other works

In the *K. al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990) Ibn Nā‘ima features first in the list of the translators that opens Chapter Seven (p. 244.5 Flügel = p. 304.26 Tajaddud, English trans. Dodge, p. 587); then, he is mentioned twice in the entry on Aristotle. Ibn al-Nadīm credits him with a translation of the *Sophistical Refutations* into Syriac (p. 249.26–28 Flügel = p. 309.9–10

Tajaddud, p. 601 Dodge), and this piece of information is reproduced also in Ibn al-Qiftī's *Tā'riḥ al-ḥukamā'* (p. 37.16 Müller-Lippert). A well-known manuscript of Aristotle's logical corpus in Arabic (see Hugonnard-Roche, "Une ancienne 'édition' arabe de l'*Organon* d'Aristote") tentatively attributes to him one of the three Arabic versions of the *Sophistical Refutations* that are contained in it, but the lexical comparison of this text with that of the pseudo-*Theology* has persuaded Hugonnard-Roche, "Dans l'atelier d'Ibn Nā'ima al-Ḥimṣī", that it is hardly the case that one and the same translator authored both works, the Arabic Plotinus and that version of the *Sophistical Refutations*. Finally, Ibn Nā'ima is credited with the translation of the "last half" of John Philoponus' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* (p. 250.18 Flügel = p. 311.1 Tajaddud, p. 603 Dodge), cf. Ibn al-Qiftī's *Tā'riḥ al-ḥukamā'* (p. 39.3–4 Müller-Lippert).

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