



ARABIST TRANSLATORS IN SOUTHERN FRANCE THE SECOND HALF OF THE 11TH TO THE 13TH CENTURY: COMPOSITION, FIELDS OF ACTIVITY, AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Otabek Makhmudov

Doctor of Philosophy in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor

Department of World History of Fergana State University

Doctoral student (DSc), Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies

Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan

ORCID: 0000-0001-9897-2796

Email: o.maxmudov@pf.fdu.uz

Abstract: this article offers a source-based reconstruction of the translators active in southern France from the second half of the eleventh century to the end of the thirteenth century. Drawing on narrative sources and manuscript evidence, it identifies eight translators and classifies them according to origin, geography of activity, and modes of participation in translation. The study demonstrates that southern France, especially Marseille and Montpellier, functioned as an important zone of intellectual mediation in the transmission of Arabic scientific learning to Latin Europe. Particular attention is given to the Ibn Tibbon family, Arnaldo de Villanova, and Armengaud Blaise, whose activities show that translation in this milieu involved not only the rendering of texts into new languages, but also commentary, adaptation, and pedagogical reformulation. The article argues that the southern French translation movement emerged within a multilingual and multicultural scholarly environment and made a substantial contribution to the dissemination of medicine, astronomy, and philosophy in medieval Europe. By clarifying the identities and roles of the translators active in this region, the study also corrects a number of historiographical confusions that have persisted in earlier scholarship.

Keywords: southern France, medieval translation movement, Arabic scientific heritage, transmission of knowledge, Marseille, Montpellier, Ibn Tibbon family, Arnaldo de Villanova, Armengaud Blaise, Arabic-Latin translation, medicine, astronomy, philosophy.

Existing scholarship on this subject has not yet produced a precise and comprehensive account of the translators active in southern France from the second half of the eleventh century through the thirteenth century. In some cases, translators who belonged to different periods have even been conflated and treated as a single individual. Establishing a detailed list of the translators who worked during this period, together with a source-based reconstruction of their lives and scholarly activities, is essential for avoiding the repetition of earlier scholarly errors. On the basis of the sources examined in this article, as well as the translation manuscripts



identified in the course of the research, it has been possible to determine that eight translators were active in southern France during this period.

From the standpoint of their ethnic origin and the geography of their activity, they may be classified as follows:

Spanish: Arnaldo de Villanova (ca. 1235–1313), Bernardo Honofredi (13th century);

French: Armengaud Blaise (1264–1312);

Jewish: Judah ibn Tibbon (1120–1190), Samuel ibn Tibbon (1150–1230), Moses ibn Tibbon (1195–1274), Jacob ibn Tibbon (1236–1304), Judah Profatiy (13th century).

The translators listed above should also be divided into several additional groups according to the nature of their participation in translation and the scope of their activity. These include:

Translators who worked individually and independently:

Judah ibn Tibbon, Samuel ibn Tibbon, Moses ibn Tibbon, Jacob ibn Tibbon, Arnaldo de Villanova, and Armengaud Blaise.

Translators who worked collaboratively:

Bernardo Honofredi and Judah Profatiy.

The following section examines the activities of several prominent translators:

The Ibn Tibbon Family

The establishment of translation activity in southern France during the period under study was, in many respects, connected with the highly productive work of a group of translators known in the history of science as the Ibn Tibbon family [4]. This family included Judah ibn Tibbon, Samuel ibn Tibbon, Moses ibn Tibbon, and Jacob ibn Tibbon. In our previous studies [6-8], we examined the translation activity of these scholars, on the basis of the available sources, in the course of analyzing the translation centres of Marseille and Montpellier. It should be noted that the scholarly activity and original works of these four translators have already been discussed quite extensively in medieval studies. For this reason, it appears more appropriate here to focus on translators whose scholarly activity has been studied to a lesser extent.

Arnaldo de Villanova (ca. 1235–1313)

The birthplace of the translator known in Latin-language sources as Arnaldus Villanovanus remains uncertain: some sources identify Montpellier as his native city, whereas others point to Valencia on the Iberian Peninsula. In the history of science, the translator is remembered as a scholar who conducted research in medicine, alchemy, astrology, and philosophy, and who authored more than twenty works in these fields.

Most of the information concerning his life and activity is preserved in the collection of his writings known as «*Opus aureum*» («The Great Collection») [1]. In the section devoted to the author in this collection, which was printed in Frankfurt am Main in 1604 and whose original copy is now preserved in the Dresden State and University Library under shelfmark 130CT.77, it is emphasized that Arnaldo had, from an early age, studied Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and theology in depth.

According to the source, in 1260 he arrived at the medical school of Montpellier, where he studied ancient Greek, philosophy, and medicine. It may be assumed that this course of study lasted five years, since the same source notes that between 1265 and 1275 he lived in Paris and pursued the liberal arts and medicine at the Sorbonne, where he obtained the degree of magister. However, since instruction at the Sorbonne at that time placed greater emphasis



on theory than on practical medicine, and since theology was regarded as the foremost discipline, Arnaldo returned to Montpellier in 1275 and began working at its renowned medical faculty.

As a result of Arnaldo de Villanova's activity at the University of Montpellier between 1275 and 1299, a number of important Arabic works on medicine, alchemy, and philosophy were translated into Latin, including rare texts by Galen, Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, Ibn Sīnā, and Abū al-Ṣalt. For this reason, although the famous scholar spent his life moving across Spain, Italy, Sicily, and Africa, he has been included in the dissertation among the translators of southern France. It should also be noted that the reason for his constant change of residence lay in his religious views concerning the reform of the Church.

As reported in «*Opus aureum*», when Arnaldo returned to Paris in 1301, he was tried and sentenced to imprisonment on account of his views [1]. In 1304, the use of his works at the Sorbonne was prohibited, and some of them were publicly burned. Yet his fame in medicine saved him from death: in 1305 he was appointed personal physician to the newly elected Pope Clement V (1305–1314). Making use of this position, Arnaldo succeeded in securing, on 8 September 1309, the promulgation of a papal bull establishing requirements for students studying medicine. Significantly, among the fifteen works made compulsory in that bull were treatises by al-Rāzī and Ibn Sīnā.

«*Opus aureum*» also contains information on textbooks prepared by the scholar for students of the University of Montpellier. Among them are «*Tractatus de intentione medicorum*» («Treatise on the Intentions of Physicians»), devoted to the philosophy of medicine; «*Aphorismi de gradibus*» («Aphorisms on Degrees»), written to explain al-Kindī's theories concerning medical degrees; and «*Tractatus de humido radicali*» («Treatise on Radical Moisture»), intended to elucidate Ibn Sīnā's philosophical views. However, an analysis of the treatise «*Tractatus de humido radicali*» included in the 1604 edition of «*Opus aureum*» shows that this work is actually devoted to combating the pathological condition that arises when the amount of water in the body falls below the physiological norm, that is, dehydration. This circumstance suggests that the publishers of «*Opus aureum*» were unfamiliar with the medical treatment known as «*Humidum radicale*» («Radical Moisture»), which became widespread in medieval Europe, especially in the thirteenth century, through the Latin translations of «*Al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb*» («Liber Canonis») and «*Kitāb ash-Shifā'*» («Sufficientia»), and that they had not directly engaged with the text of Ibn Sīnā's works.

Among the commentaries composed by Arnaldo de Villanova between 1275 and 1299 are «*Compendium regimenti acutorum*» (a commentary on Hippocrates' treatise «*On Acute Diseases*») and «*Commentum super De morbo et accidenti*» (a commentary on Galen's work «*On Disease and Adverse Conditions*»).

Among the scholar's writings on alchemy, the treatises «*Rosarius Philosophorum*», «*Novum Lumen*», and the literary work «*Flos Florum*» are regarded as the most famous. The first of these is a substantial work devoted to commenting upon the Latin translation «*Secretum secretorum*» of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's «*Kitāb sirr al-asrār*», and it was published in 1604 as part of «*Opus aureum*».

In addition to the foregoing, the scholar's medical treatise «*De venenis*» («On Poisons») and his didactic poem «*Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum*» («The Salernitan Regimen of Health») are also well known in the history of science. «*Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum*», which comprises more than 390 verses, contains information on the structure of the human



body, the number of bones, teeth, and blood vessels, and offers advice concerning hygiene. In addition, it discusses, from a therapeutic perspective, the properties of edible plants and animal products and their effects on health. The work was first published in 1480, and the dissertation made use of the edition printed in Venice in 1500.

Besides the works mentioned above, «*Opus aureum*» lists a number of other writings said to belong to the scholar. However, neither the original copies of these works nor information concerning their contents has been preserved in other sources relevant to the subject.

In brief, Arnaldo de Villanova was one of the translator-scholars of the thirteenth century who played an important role in translating the works of scholars of the medieval Muslim East into Latin and in producing manuals for European students on the basis of those translations. More detailed information on the translations produced by him will be presented in the following chapter.

Armengaud Blaise (1264–1312)

Another major representative of the group of translators associated with the University of Montpellier was Armengaud Blaise, who is referred to in the sources as Armengaldus Blasii Monspelienensis. In Jean Astruc's work «*Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Faculté de médecine de Montpellier*» [3], it is stated that Armengaud was a nephew of Arnaldo de Villanova, discussed above. However, no information concerning this issue is found in the sources relating to Arnaldo's activity, including «*Opus aureum*», the principal work on the subject.

Although Armengaud Blaise is well known in the history of science as a distinguished physician, translator, and writer, very little information about him has survived in the sources. If Jean Astruc's account is to be followed, Armengaud studied medicine at the University of Montpellier and began engaging in translation work already in his youth. In particular, in 1283–1284 he translated Ibn Sīnā's «*Manzūma fī al-Ṭibb*» («*Medical Poem*») into Latin. An analysis of the available evidence indicates that the translator mainly rendered works on medicine and astronomy into Latin. These include his 1290 translations of Jacob ibn Tibbon's «*רביע*» [Rvia] («*Quadrant*») and of astronomical tables concerning the positions of the stars, as well as his 1294 translation of Maimonides' treatise on the treatment of asthma under the title «*De asmate*» («*On Asthma*»).

Two works authored by the scholar himself have survived to the present day. The first is entitled «*Aphorismi Armengaldus*» («*The Aphorisms of Armengaud*») and contains recommendations on diet and methods of inducing urination. The second work, «*Tabula antidotarii*» («*Tables of Antidotes*»), consists of 68 tables and provides valuable information on the chemical and physical properties of medicines, their range of effects, and proper dosage. This work was later translated into Hebrew by Jacob ibn Tibbon, although the exact date of that translation remains unknown.

In their studies devoted specifically to the activity of Armengaud Blaise, L. Thorndike and M. McVaugh note that the translator resided in the city of Girona, in northeastern Spain, between 1296 and 1299. However, Jean Astruc's work, as well as the manuscript of the Latin translation of «*רביע*» [Rvia] produced by Armengaud under the title «*Quadrans circuli*», identifies Montpellier as the city in which the work was completed. As noted in the previous chapter, the original version of «*רביע*» [Rvia], together with its Latin translation, is today preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France under shelfmark 1054.



The above information indicates that Armengaud Blaise's translation activity was carried out primarily in Montpellier, more specifically at the university located there.

In 1301 the translator left Montpellier and moved to Barcelona, where he served as physician to Queen Blanche of Aragon (1295–1310). Two years later, King James II of Aragon (1291–1327) appointed Armengaud Blaise as his personal physician. In 1305, however, the scholar returned once again to Montpellier, and in 1307 he entered the service of Pope Clement V, mentioned above. He died in 1312.

It should be noted that the activity of the two translators discussed above – Arnaldo de Villanova and Armengaud Blaise – extended into the early fourteenth century. Nevertheless, since their translation work was carried out before 1300, the dissertation defines the conclusion of its research chronology as the end of the thirteenth century.

The evidence examined in this study demonstrates that southern France, especially Marseille and Montpellier, constituted a major zone of intellectual mediation in the transmission of Arabic scientific learning to Latin Europe from the second half of the eleventh through the thirteenth century. The translation activity that developed in this region was not a sporadic or purely derivative phenomenon, but a structured scholarly enterprise shaped by a multilingual and cross-cultural milieu in which Jewish and Christian intellectuals played complementary roles. In this respect, the Ibn Tibbon family appears as one of the principal forces behind the consolidation of translation practices in southern France, while later figures such as Arnaldo de Villanova and Armengaud Blaise extended this tradition by integrating Arabic medical, philosophical, and astronomical learning into the institutional and pedagogical framework of Montpellier.

The study further shows that translation in southern France functioned not merely as the linguistic transfer of texts from one language into another, but as a more complex process of selection, interpretation, adaptation, and scholarly recontextualization. Arabic works were not only translated, but also transformed into commentaries, teaching manuals, and other didactic instruments designed for use within the university environment. Seen from this perspective, southern France should be regarded not as a peripheral recipient of Eastern knowledge, but as one of the principal western Mediterranean settings in which Arabic medicine, philosophy, and the exact sciences were received, reformulated, and transmitted into the longer trajectory of Latin intellectual history. At the same time, the source-based reconstruction of the translators active in this milieu helps to eliminate longstanding historiographical confusions and provides a clearer picture of the internal structure, personnel, and scholarly significance of the southern French translation movement.

References:

1. *Arnaldi de Villa Nova. Opus aureum.* – Fractfurt am Mann: Duref Johann Gpicf, 1604. – 248 p.
2. *Arnaldus de Villanova. Scuola medica salernitana.* – Venetiis : Impressum per Bernardinum Venetum de Vitalibus, 1500. – 140 p.
3. *Astruc J. Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Faculté de médecine de Montpellier.* – Paris: P.G.Cavelier, 1767. – 432 p.
4. *Benjamin of Tudela. The Itinerary. / Critical text, translation and commentary by M.N.Adler.* – London: Oxford University Press, 1907. – 209 p.



5. Deciv C., Vaissette J. Histoire générale de Languedoc. Tome 3. – Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1790. – 978 p.
6. Makhmudov O.V. The Place of Southern French Cities in the System of Medieval European Translation Centres: Marseille and Montpellier. // Scientific Journal “ACTA NUUZ”. – Tashkent: National University of Uzbekistan, 2022. – No. 11/1. – pp. 23–27 (295 p.).
7. Makhmudov O.V. Arabic-Language Sources on the History of Medieval European Translation Centres and Their Comparative Analysis with Latin Sources. // Scientific Journal FerSU. – Fergana: Fergana State University, 2022. – No. 6. – pp. 47–52 (554 p.).
8. Makhmudov O.V. “Medieval Arabist Translation Centres”: The Concept and the Scholarly Basis for Its Introduction into Academic Discourse. // Scientific Journal FerSU. – Social Sciences Series. – Fergana: Fergana State University, 2025. – No. 4. – pp. 136–146 (245 p.).