



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

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Abstract: this article examines the role of Italian translation centres in the transmission of Eastern scientific knowledge to Latin Europe from the second half of the eleventh century to the thirteenth century. Based on a comparative analysis of narrative sources, bibliographical materials, and translation manuscripts, the study reconstructs the activities of translators who worked in Salerno, Sicily, and Naples and clarifies a number of historiographical confusions concerning their identities and contributions. The research establishes that the translators active in these centres were not limited to a single ethnic or confessional background; rather, they represented a multilingual and multicultural milieu that included Arab, Berber, Italian, Greek, and Jewish scholars. Particular attention is devoted to Constantine the African, Henry Aristippus, Eugenius of Palermo, Faraj ibn Salim, and Jacob Anatoli, whose activities illustrate different models of translation, mediation, and intellectual transfer. The study demonstrates that these translators not only rendered Arabic and Greek works into Latin, but also facilitated the circulation of manuscripts, interpreted technical terminology, adapted texts to new scholarly settings, and, in some cases, produced original works of their own. It concludes that the Italian translation centres constituted one of the principal channels through which medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy entered the intellectual world of Latin Europe and acquired a durable place within its scholarly tradition.

Keywords: Italian translation centres, Latin Europe, transmission of knowledge, Arabic-Latin and Greek-Latin translation, Salerno, Sicily, Naples, Constantine the African, Henry Aristippus, Eugenius of Palermo, Faraj ibn Salim, Jacob Anatoli, medieval medicine, medieval astronomy.

To date, studies devoted to the Italian translation centres have not provided a precise and comprehensive enumeration of the translators active there from the second half of the eleventh century to the thirteenth century. The compilation of a detailed list of translators



associated with the Italian translation centres, together with a source-based reconstruction of their lives and activities, helps prevent the repetition of the confusions found in earlier scholarship. An analysis of the sources used in this research, combined with the translation manuscripts identified in the course of the investigation, has made it possible to identify 22 translators who were active in the Italian translation centres between the second half of the eleventh century and the thirteenth century.

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

Arab: Salim ibn Ifriqi;

Berber: Constantine the African;

Italian: Giovanni Plateario, Giovanni Plateario the Younger, Matteo Plateario, Accursius of Pistoia, Nicola Deoprepio, Roger Frugardo, Federico Lorana, Roger Luchero, Antonio Fichchini, Gerard da Salerno, Gerard of Sabbioneta, Giacomo da Venezia, Riccardo Bonacosa;

Greek: Henry Aristippus, Eugenius of Palermo;

Jewish: Abraham da Murcia, Jacob Anatoli, Isaac da Palermo, Giovanni da Capua, Faraj ibn Salim .

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

Translators who worked individually and independently:

Constantine the African, Giovanni Plateario, Nicola Deoprepio, Roger Frugardo, Eugenius of Palermo, Accursius of Pistoia, Henry Aristippus, Gerard of Sabbioneta, Faraj ibn Salim, Jacob Anatoli, Giacomo da Venezia, Riccardo Bonacosa, and Giovanni da Capua.

Translators who worked collaboratively on translations:

Giovanni Plateario the Younger and Matteo Plateario.

Those who assisted in rendering works into an intermediary language:

This group includes individuals who participated in translating works intended for Latin translation into intermediary languages, namely Hebrew or Greek. However, they are not identified as authors in the translated texts themselves. This category includes Salim ibn Ifriqi, Abraham da Murcia, Isaac da Palermo, Federico Lorana, Roger Luchero, Antonio Fichchini, and Gerard da Salerno.

The following section examines the activities of several prominent translators:

Constantine the African (1010–1087)

Although Constantine the African (Latin: *Constantinus Africanus*) is well known in the history of science, especially in connection with medieval medical translation, very little reliable information about his life has survived. The extant data are based chiefly on brief notices contained in the “*Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*” [6]. In particular, that chronicle records that Constantine was of Berber origin, that he was born in Kairouan in Ifriqiya, and that before arriving in Italy he had travelled through Persia, Egypt, India, and Mesopotamia, during which time he studied medicine as well as Arabic, Greek, and Latin. It also notes separately that he was a skilled merchant.

According to the information transmitted by Peter the Deacon, who wrote the section of the chronicle devoted to Constantine, in 1077, when Constantine was received by Robert of Hauteville, Duke of Apulia, he presented the duke with nearly ten Arabic medical manuscripts.



Since the duke did not know Arabic, he asked Constantine himself to translate these works into Latin. The results of the present research indicate that in Salerno Constantine translated from Arabic into Latin works by some of the most renowned physicians of the East. These translations include Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq's "*Madkhal ilā Kitāb Jālīnūs*" ("Introduction to Galen's Book"), Ḥunayn ibn 'Imrān's treatise "*On Melancholy*", Iṣḥāq ibn Sulaymān's "*Kitāb al-Adwiyah al-Mufradah*" ("Book of Simple Drugs") and "*Kitāb al-Ustuqusāt*" ("Book of the Elements"), al-Rāzī's "*Kitāb al-Hāwī fī al-Ṭibb*" ("Comprehensive Book on Medicine"), and Ibn al-Jazzār's "*Zād al-Musāfir wa-Qūt al-Hādir*" ("Provisions for the Traveller and Nourishment for the Sedentary").

If one relies on the "*Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*", Constantine spent three years collecting Arabic books before arriving in Salerno [6]. In this respect, and taking into account notices that he had studied in Baghdad and Cairo in his youth, it may reasonably be concluded that he himself brought the above-mentioned Arabic works with him to Salerno. Thus, Constantine played an important role not only in translating Arabic works, but also in facilitating their transfer into Italy.

In addition to these translations, Constantine also rendered into Latin from Greek Hippocrates' "*On Airs*", "*Waters, and Places*" and Galen's "*On the Knowledge of the Pulse*" and "*On Muscular Movement*". Alongside his work as a translator, he composed a number of medical treatises of his own, which were used in the Middle Ages as important works in the field. Among these are the Latin treatises "*De stomach*" ("On the Stomach"), "*De melancholia*" ("On Melancholy"), "*De coitu*" ("On Intercourse"), "*De medicinis dissolutiuis*" ("On Dissolving Medicines"), and "*De oculis*" ("On the Eyes"), which are today preserved in Merton College Library, Oxford, in MS 219, items 10, 11, 12, 13, and 15 (fols. 195v–207v; 207v–212; 212–215; 215–217v; 224–234v). Analysis of these manuscripts indicates that they were composed on the basis of the aforementioned works of Eastern scholars translated into Latin by Constantine himself.

The translation enterprise initiated by Constantine the African played a major role in transforming the Salernitan medical school into one of the principal translation centres of the second half of the eleventh through the thirteenth century. The translation method he established also served as an important methodological foundation for the translators active in the Italian translation centres.

Henry Aristippus (1105–1162)

This translator is known in the sources by the Latin name Henricus Aristippus. He was originally from Santa Severina in Calabria, Italy. The "*Liber de Regno Sicilie*" [5] states that he was Greek by origin. In 1155 Henry Aristippus was appointed archdeacon of Catania, a city on the eastern coast of Sicily. In 1158 he moved to Constantinople, where he remained until 1160. During this stay he was present at the court of the Byzantine emperor Manuel I and received several Greek works as gifts. Hugh Falcandus, the author of the "*Liber de Regno Sicilie*", emphasizes that the most famous of these was Ptolemy's "*Megálē Mathēmatikē Sýntaxis*" [5].

The same source also lists among the works translated by Henry Aristippus from Greek into Latin Plato's "*Phaedo and Meno*", as well as Aristotle's "*Meteorologica*". As noted in the previous chapter, this translator worked under the patronage of William I of Sicily (1154–1166). In 1161 the king appointed him as an adviser. A year later, however, Aristippus was



accused of treason and imprisoned. According to Hugh Falcandus, he died of illness in the palace prison at Palermo in 1162.

Eugenius of Palermo (1130–1202)

In Latin sources this translator is referred to as Eugenius Siculus (Eugenius the Sicilian). He too was of Greek origin and was born in Palermo into a family of Greek military aristocrats. In his “*Cronica*”, Salimbene de Adam writes that Eugenius received an excellent education from an early age and in the process mastered Greek, Latin, and Arabic [7].

An analysis of the available evidence indicates that Eugenius combined translation with service in state administration. In particular, under William II of Sicily (1166–1189), the third king of Sicily, he was appointed in 1174 to the office of magister duane baronum, which was responsible for tax revenues and the demarcation of territorial boundaries. In 1190 he received the title of admiral in recognition of his participation in military campaigns. Eugenius continued to hold the office of magister duane baronum under the fourth king of Sicily, Tancred (1190–1194), and under Henry VI Hohenstaufen (1194–1197). However, the “*Cronica*” states that he was falsely accused of treason, imprisoned on Henry VI’s orders, and kept in confinement for a certain period.

Information concerning Eugenius of Palermo’s work as a translator derives mainly from the “*Liber de Regno Sicilie*” [5]. There he is characterized as the most eminent representative of trilingual Sicily, and his ability to translate works from Greek and Arabic into Latin is highly praised. As noted in the previous chapter, the earliest known translation produced by Eugenius was Ptolemy’s “*Optics*”, which he translated into Latin from its Arabic version, “*Kitāb al-Manāzīr*”. Notably, this work has survived only through Eugenius’s Latin translation, “*Opticus*”, and more than twenty manuscript copies of it are known from different periods.

In addition, the source notes that Eugenius translated several Christian sacred texts from Greek into Latin, though no specific work is identified. It may be suggested that this refers to a collection of prophecies concerning the fate of Jesus attributed to the Erythraean Sibyl, one of the sibyls recognized within Christian tradition. This suggestion is supported by the fact that during the course of the present research a thirteenth-century copy of precisely such a manuscript was identified in the Bodleian Library under the shelfmark MS. Lat. th. e. 59, and the text bears the signature Eugenius Siculus.

In the “*Liber de Regno Sicilie*”, Hugh Falcandus also describes Eugenius as a poet, noting that he composed verses in Greek [5]. It is worth emphasizing that a fourteenth-century copy of twenty-four poems attributed to Eugenius has survived and is preserved within the same manuscript, MS. Lat. th. e. 59. This circumstance suggests that the report that Eugenius translated the “*Panchatantra*” into Latin on the basis of Arabic and Greek versions is plausible. This must be stated with caution, however, since although the source hints at such a translation, no Latin version by Eugenius of Palermo has yet been identified.

Another important issue should also be noted here. In his “*Cronica*” [7], Salimbene de Adam states that Eugenius of Palermo wrote under the pseudonym Hugo Falcandus and authored the “*Liber de Regno Sicilie*” [5]. On the basis of this notice, Eugenius of Palermo and Hugh Falcandus were for many years regarded as one and the same person. Yet a comparative analysis of the sources shows that these names in fact belonged to different individuals who lived in nearly the same period and place. The dissertation provides the necessary source-critical discussion of Hugh Falcandus.

Faraj ibn Salim (second half of the 13th century)



This translator, referred to in the sources as Ferrarius and Franchinus, was in fact Jewish, though the precise dates of his life remain unknown. Only Salimbene de Adam, in his “*Cronica*” [5], records that he was born in 1230. Although the translator’s name is well known in the history of science, almost no biographical information about him has survived in the sources. The available evidence nonetheless indicates that he worked in Palermo under the patronage of Charles I, king of Sicily (1266–1282).

In the introduction to the 1279 Latin version of al-Rāzī’s “*Kitāb al-Hāwī fī al-Ṭibb*”, the translator notes that the work was completed at the order of his patron and protector, Charles, king of Sicily, and that because the king was greatly pleased with the gift, he ordered that the opening page of the manuscript portray the translator together with himself. This image is indeed preserved on the frontispiece of MS 6912 in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, where the artist is identified as an otherwise unknown cleric named Giovanni.

The present research has identified five works translated into Latin by Faraj ibn Salim. These works, authored by Galen, al-Rāzī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Buṭlān, and the Basran physician Masarjaway (10th century), are all medical in content. A detailed discussion of these translations is provided in the following chapter of the study. It should be stressed that the translations produced by Faraj were dedicated to the above-mentioned Charles I, and that their manuscripts are now preserved in the holdings of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Latin bio-bibliographical sources contain no information about Faraj ibn Salim’s own authored works. Nevertheless, in the 1279 manuscript of “*Continens*”, the Latin translation of “*Kitāb al-Hāwī fī al-Ṭibb*”, there is a separate section beginning on a new folio under the title “*De expositionibus vocabulorum*” (“On the Explanation of Terms”). This section was also included in the 1486 printed edition of the translation. For this reason, the distinguished orientalist M. Steinschneider regarded it as a continuation of “*Kitāb al-Hāwī fī al-Ṭibb*”. However, our analysis of the text of “*De expositionibus vocabulorum*” shows that the glossary contains not only terms found in al-Rāzī’s work, but also medical terminology used in the writings of Hippocrates, Galen, Hunayn ibn Ishāq, al-Rāzī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Buṭlān, and Masarjaway. In each case, the Greek term is given first, followed by the Arabic form, and finally the Latin equivalent. Particularly significant is the fact that the explanations do not simply reproduce the source texts verbatim, but instead attempt to clarify the terms in relation to medical practice. On these grounds, it is more appropriate to regard “*De expositionibus vocabulorum*” as an independent authorial work by Faraj ibn Salim.

In brief, Faraj ibn Salim’s activity made it possible for some of the rarest medical works of Eastern scholars to be translated into Latin and disseminated throughout Europe by way of Sicily.

Jacob Anatoli (1194–1256)

This translator, whose full name was Jacob ben Abba-Mari ben Samson Anatoli, is referred to in Latin sources as Jacobus Anatolius. Although he was born in southern France, probably in Marseille, and spent most of his life there, the principal phase of his translation activity took place at the University of Naples. For this reason, he is included in the dissertation among the translators active in Italy.

Latin sources preserve very little information about Anatoli’s life in Marseille. Brief but important information about his activity is found in his own work “*Malmad ha-Talmidim*” [3-4] (“Admonitions for Students”), completed around 1249. In this work, Anatoli explains that his departure from Marseille was caused by the religious-philosophical lectures he



delivered on Saturdays. His attempts to interpret religious texts allegorically, that is, figuratively, provoked strong opposition. For this reason, in 1226 he accepted the invitation of Emperor Frederick II and moved to Naples. Yet even there he encountered resistance because of his lectures; he therefore gave up public preaching and turned to translation in order to pursue a deeper study of religion and philosophy. The fact that he was invited to Naples personally by the emperor suggests that he had already become well known in the region as a scholar while still in Marseille. As noted in the previous chapter, Frederick II invited the most distinguished scholars of his age in order to establish the University of Naples.

In the introduction to *“Malmad ha-Talmidim”*, the author writes that, in order to understand correctly the creation and structure of the universe, he first sought to translate astronomical works and began doing so in the fourth year after his arrival in Naples. Elsewhere in the same work, however, he notes that in Naples he spent the daytime translating astronomical works into Hebrew and the nighttime translating philosophical texts, since the emperor was interested in both fields. In Salimbene de Adam’s *“Cronica”* [7] it is stated that, because of the financial difficulties involved in maintaining the University of Naples, the invited scholars were permitted to return to their homelands, and that Jacob the Jew was among the first to leave the city, doing so in 1235. On the basis of this information, it is most appropriate to date Jacob Anatoli’s translation activity to the years 1226–1235.

Nevertheless, in the historiographical section of the dissertation, the orientalist M. Steinschneider, whose name has already been mentioned, states that the translator rendered Ibn Rushd’s Arabic commentaries on Aristotle into Hebrew while still in Marseille. Yet the Ibn Rushd commentaries translated by Jacob were in fact those on the first five works of Aristotle’s logical corpus, the *“Organon”*, and the translation manuscripts themselves record 1231 as the date of completion. This indicates that these translations were completed only after Jacob had moved to Naples.

In addition to these works, Jacob Anatoli translated into Hebrew from Arabic some of the most celebrated texts in the history of astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy: Ptolemy’s *“al-Majisfī”*, al-Farġānī’s *“Kitāb fī Uṣūl ‘Ilm al-Nujūm”*, and al-Fārābī’s *“Kitāb al-Qiyās”*. Importantly, later Latin versions of these works were based precisely on Jacob Anatoli’s Hebrew translations. This clearly indicates the high quality of his work by the standards of his own age. Given the crucial role of these works in the development of astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy, it may be argued that Jacob Anatoli’s activity at the University of Naples was one of the factors that transformed the city into one of Europe’s centres of translation.

Jacob Anatoli’s only authored work, *“Malmad ha-Talmidim”*, is, in stylistic terms, a treatise devoted to synthesizing Greek, Jewish, and Muslim philosophical traditions and to harmonizing astronomical concepts with theology, thereby demonstrating that the translator was himself a scholar of high intellectual maturity. The work was first published in Hebrew in 1866, in Italian in 2004 [3-4], and in an English critical edition in 2017. The present study has made use of the English edition.

The findings of this study demonstrate that, from the second half of the eleventh century to the thirteenth century, the translation centres of Italy played a decisive role in the transmission of the scientific heritage of the East to Latin Europe. Translators active in such centres as Salerno, Sicily, and Naples not only rendered Arabic and Greek works into Latin, but also contributed directly to this process by bringing manuscripts into the Italian peninsula, explaining technical terminology, revising texts, and, in some cases, composing original



scholarly treatises. In particular, the activity of Constantine the African laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Salernitan medical school as a major centre of translation, while translators such as Henry Aristippus and Eugenius of Palermo served as important intermediaries in the transmission of Greek and Arabic scientific traditions into the Latin intellectual milieu of Sicily. Faraj ibn Salim facilitated the dissemination of rare medical works of Eastern scholars across Europe through their translation into Latin, whereas Jacob Anatoli, through his Hebrew translations, influenced the subsequent Latin reception of Arabic scientific learning.

Accordingly, the study confirms that the Italian translation centres were not the product of a single ethnic or confessional milieu; rather, they constituted a multilingual and multicultural scholarly space shaped through the collaboration of Arab, Berber, Italian, Greek, and Jewish intellectuals. In these centres, translation functioned not merely as a philological transfer of texts, but as a process of selecting, adapting, interpreting, and integrating knowledge into a new intellectual environment. As a result, the translations produced in this period and within this milieu provided a firm foundation for the development of medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy in Latin Europe.

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