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Another scattered pearl: I. A. I Barṣoum's *risālah fī uṣūl al ta'rīb 'an al siriānīah*

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Abstract: Well into the *nahḍa* movement, that is the 'Cultural Renaissance' that spread from Egypt and Greater Syria to the rest of the Arabic-speaking world, a voice from the Middle East sounded a different note on the need for translation and the way(s) it should be undertaken.

In 1909, Ignatius Aphram I Barṣoum (1887–1957), the would-be 120th Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, wrote a treatise in Arabic on the principles that should inform translation, which he titled *risālah fī uṣūl al ta'rīb 'an al siriānīah* [Epistle on translation principles from Syriac into Arabic]. The treatise was published posthumously twice (1969 and 2011) but received little attention despite providing a genuine insight into the translation activity during a crucial period for the Syriac Orthodox community and a unique case of contemplation on the challenges of translation addressed to a domestic readership that had lost command of its native language.

The present study is an attempt to bridge this gap by providing a discussion of the author's main foci and underlying theoretical precepts. Through an analysis of key passages, the paper delineates the sociolinguistic conditions framing Barṣoum's writing of this document and explores some key foci in his narrative: a) his dichotomy between the content to be translated and the linguistic form through which that content is conveyed; b) his handling of the concepts of fidelity and freedom; and c) translation procedures. The study concludes by assessing the contribution this text brings to the investigation of the translation tradition in the Levant.

Keywords: Translation history, translation as preservation, Syriac-Arabic translation, Barṣoum

1. Introduction

Son of Stephan Barṣoum and Susan Abdunur, Ayoub Barṣoum was born in 1887 in Mosul, Iraq. He started his education in a private Dominican school and quickly mastered many languages, including Syriac, Arabic, French, and Turkish (Moosa, 2003). At the age of seventeen, he opted for a life of abstinence and in 1908 he was ordained as a priest and given the name Aphram. He was named bishop in 1918 and one year later he attended the Paris Peace Conference following the end of WWI as one of the representatives of the Assyrian Diaspora community (Aprim, 2006). In 1933, he was elected Patriarch of Antioch and assumed the ecclesiastical name of Mar Ignatius Aphram I Barṣoum (Moosa, 2003, p. ix).

Patriarch Aphram I Barṣoum was a man of learning as well as a man of religion (Moosa, 2003). A prolific writer, he had an acute interest in the Syriac church's history, producing, among other works, a compendium of its history and an index of Syriac manuscripts titled *al lu'lu' al manṭūr fī tāriḥ al 'ulūm*

wal ādāb al siriāniah, an English translation of which was first published in 2000 under the title *Scattered Pearls: A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*. Being proficient in both Syriac and Arabic, he used both languages in his writings and translations, which also include a Syriac-Arabic lexicon (Moosa, 2003).

Among the texts he authored was an Arabic treatise titled *risālah fi uṣūl al ta'rīb 'an al siriānīah* [Epistle on the principles of translation from Syriac into Arabic]. This is a document Barṣoum initially wrote in 1909 and further edited in 1938. The manuscript was discovered in Aleppo in 1969 by the scholar George Saliba, who had it published in Beirut on the same year. The work was republished by Gorgias Press in 2011 as *Treatise on the Principals* [sic] of *Translation Techniques from Arabic into Syriac* - a reasonably close rendering of the Arabic title, save a couple of peculiarities¹.

Unlike others of Barṣoum's works – such as *Scattered Pearls*, which has, since the 1950s, enjoyed some renown among Syriac Studies scholars throughout its multiple Arabic editions, reprints, and a translation that was published in 2000 – his *Treatise* remained until 1969 in its original manuscript form, unknown to the general public, and, as can be surmised from the editor's foreword, even to the clergy. Saliba's intent with the publication of this work was to disseminate what he thought was a work that could contribute to the revival of the Syriac cultural legacy. Nevertheless, the two editions of the *Treatise* (1969 and 2011) have failed to meet this objective as the work did not reach outside the narrow circle of its editors and publishers.

In an attempt to introduce this text into mainstream translation historiography, the present study investigates the narrative section of the document in which the author expounds his views and principles on translation. This section runs from the Introduction to the middle of Chapter Six.² The proposed analysis focuses on the two related motives which the author clearly identifies in his Introduction as the triggers that impelled the writing of his work. The first one was the need the author felt to translate Syriac texts into Arabic and thus make them accessible to a Syriac audience that had lost its original language. The second reason was his dissatisfaction with the quality of many of the translations that had already been undertaken. The examination of the work proceeds with a focus on the main translation theoretical precepts that transpire through the author's narrative and concludes with an evaluation of the contribution(s) of the text to the translation historiography of the Middle East.

2. The sociolinguistic context

Barṣoum's *Treatise* was initially written on the eve of the 20th century, a period marked in the Middle East by the influential cultural and intellectual *nahḍa* (renaissance) movement that spread from Egypt and Greater Syria to the rest of the Arabic-speaking world from the mid-1800s up until the early 1900s. The *nahḍa* movement was spurred by a number of political and intellectual factors that affected the region but remained characteristically cultural in nature. The translation of world literary classics represented one of the movement's salient

¹ It is this edition that the present study is based on. It is to be noted that this is a publication of the Arabic text. Only the book cover, with the title, is in English. The inversion of the source and target languages in the English title is curious, and would strongly suggest an oversight on the part of the publisher; likewise the confusion of "principals" and "principles".

² The second part runs from the middle of the sixth chapter until Chapter thirteen and involves a contrastive analysis of a series of Syriac and Arabic linguistic and structural features, which, to the contemporary academic, are reminiscent of Vinay and Darbelnet's comparative work on French and English (1958). Two more chapters were added by the editor in the 1969 edition and were equally reproduced in the 2011 edition. They consist of a selection of extracts from other of the author's works.

features as it contributed to the re-shaping of Arabic literary canons through the introduction of novel literary genres (Starkey, 1998; Zaitouni, 1994).

Despite being contemporaneous with the *nahḍa* movement, Barṣoum does not display in his *Treatise* any of the cultural or intellectual concerns that characterised the movement's engagement with translation. Rather, he remains exclusively focused on the sociolinguistics of his Syriac community and their cultural bearings.

Linguistically, minority Christian communities in the Middle East have always been characterised by diglossia, using a liturgical language that is distinct from the language used outside the Church (Baarda, 2016); there is also Arabic, which progressively replaced the spoken vernacular of these communities (Baarda, 2016). With a focus on the latter aspect, the mainstream narrative maintains that the shift for Arabic took place “within a century after the Islamic conquest of the Middle East” (Griffith, 2018, p. 33). More specifically, Ostler points out, the linguistic shift in the region began with the gradual establishment of Arabic as the language of administration in the Caliphate in 697-700 CE following the decision of the 5th Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik (2010, p. 162).

It is this loss of (liturgical) language which Barṣoum identifies and addresses in his *Treatise*. An analysis of his introduction brings out his immense pride of the Syriac linguistic and cultural legacy³:

هذه اللغة عريقة في القدم غنية بالمصنّفات الجليلة في فنون و صنوف المعارف، حافلة بثمرات عقول طبقة
صالحة من أهل العبقورية ورجال النبوغ. (p. 9)

[This language is well-established, abounding with great works on various categories of knowledge, produced by a righteous number of ingenious and distinguished minds.]⁴

This pride heightens his concern for the future of this legacy as he observes an alarming degree of degradation in the mastery of the Syriac language within his community:

ورأيت لُغتنا الشريفة مظلومة بل غريبة في صميم أهلها. (p. 13)

[Our noble language has been wronged, estranged amongst its own people.]

Accounting for this decline, Barṣoum adopts an argumentation germane to the mainstream historical narrative as he maintains that Syriac lost currency as the vernacular of the local Syriac populations and was progressively displaced by Arabic (see also Barṣoum, 2003, pp. 3-4):

ولما فشا استعمال العربية في أمتنا. وكلما تباعد الزمان تباعدت عن لغتها الأصلية فأمسست لا تفقه معنى
للصلوات السريانية الطقسية إلا الاكليروس وفئة صغيرة من العاميين. (p. 11)

[As the use of Arabic became rife in our nation, and with the passing of time, our people turned further and further away from their original language and [soon] became unable to make sense of Syriac liturgical prayers, save for the clergy and a small circle of the common people.]

Subsequently, the statement he makes elsewhere in his narrative, attributing the decline of Syriac to the much later disintegration of the Abbasid dynasty following the 13th century Mongol invasion, sounds at odds with the established historical argument which he himself embraces.

³ The same tone is equally apparent in *Scattered Pearls*. In this respect, the translator of this work argues in his introduction that “this pride often leads to undue exaggeration, particularly of the antiquity of the Syrians' language and the greatness of their literature” (Moosa, 2003, p. xiv).

⁴ All translations are ours unless otherwise indicated.

وقد ابتلى الدهر بنبيها بجهل محاسنها الفتانة وإهمال دراستها منذ عهد بعيد - أي منذ سقوط الدولة العباسية واستيلاء الملوك الأعاجم على هذا الشرق العزيز، فانصرف أهلها عنها وهجروا مواطن بلاغتها إلا من عصم الله. (pp. 9-10)

[Our kinsmen have been afflicted by their unawareness of [the Syriac language's] charming beauties, and by their aversion to its study for a long time now, i.e. since the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate, when this dear Levant fell into the hands of foreign monarchs. Save for those spared by God, speakers of Syriac turned their backs on their language and its eloquence.]

This controversial statement by Barṣoum should be read against the backdrop of the critical juncture in the history of the Syriac community, which was trying to arise from its ashes, having endured the hardships of a persecution that verged on extermination, especially at the beginning of the 20th century (Karim, 2003). From this perspective, one cannot but sense in this statement an underlying attempt to anchor the vulnerable Syriac community under the tutelage of the local Arab rule and so secure the protection that may ensue from this latent pledge for allegiance.

This specific motivation in Barṣoum's narrative extends beyond his account of the historical roots of the situation the Syriac language was in to tinge the solution he suggests. In similar contexts of weakening minority languages, translation often figures on the list of remedial actions as it represents a way for these languages to "retain their viability and relevance" (Cronin, 1995, p. 89). Typically operating from the majority language into the minority one, translation serves thus "as a means for both [the] actual preservation and development" of the target language as well as a way for it to "resist displacement" by the source language (Tourey, 1985, p. 7). Barṣoum equally adopts translation as the instrument to tackle the problem of linguistic degradation within the Syriac community and the ensuing problem of accessibility of Syriac texts, and adheres in so doing to the standard remedy proffered in comparable contexts. Where Barṣoum's project breaks from similar ones is the adoption of a reverse, Syriac into Arabic, translation direction.

اقتضى صرف الهمم إلى ترجمة بعض كتب علمائها إلى اللغة العربية الجليبة التي عم استعمالها بني السريان على وجه التقريب. (p. 10)

[[I]t has become necessary to mobilize efforts in support of the translation of some of the works of Syriac scholars into the venerable Arabic language that has become commonly used by nearly all Syriac people.]

Yet, this move, though seemingly against the grain, is understandable given the sensitive period that the weakened Syriac community was going through, and the author's priority as a leader of his community not to disrupt its (linguistic) integration into the wider Arabic-speaking context. Beyond its concern for the weakening of the Syriac language, Barṣoum's call is presented as serving a higher purpose of securing through translation the continuance of the Syriac cultural legacy and contributing to "the resurrection of [its] cultural heritage" (Moosa, 2003, p. xii). This is revealed in his plea to those willing to answer his call:

وإن من ينصرف إلى خوض هذا الميدان فيحسن نقل بعض المؤلفات السريانية إلى العربية الفصحى يُقَدِّد كنيسته وأمه مئة عظيمة [...] وهو بعمله هذا النافع يتَّصَمُّ إلى صفوف أولئك المجاهدين إن لم أقل إنه يُتَمِّم عملهم بتسليمه تلك الودائع والبدائع إلى أبناء العصر الحالي. (p. 16)

[Whoever ventures down this path and successfully translates some Syriac works into *fushā* [Classical] Arabic does his church and his people a great favour [...]. Through this beneficial undertaking, this translator joins the ranks of those militant authors [he translates], if not to say completes their labour, by delivering

to the present generation these exquisite works, with which they have been entrusted.]

This urge to escape perceived cultural extinction through migrating a textual heritage into another language is not an isolated case. It has been investigated within the framework of the sociology of translation (Wolf & Fukari, 2007; Wolf, 2010), which, inspired by Bourdieusian work (Bourdieu 1999; 2008), looks into the social conditions of the translation act and involves “the plurality of implicated agents, as well as the effective functions that translations might fulfil, both for the translator and various mediators, as well as for the readerships in their historical and social spaces of reception” (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007, p. 94). The transfer dynamics of this type of translation, which is meant as an act of preservation of the works being translated, relate to contexts where the contemporary historical, political or cultural circumstances can no longer guarantee the works’ survival, making their transposition into a more dominant language/culture the only option left to ensure that they will escape oblivion.

Two major configurations emerge from the translation-as-preservation transfer dynamics (Jamoussi, 2015). First there is import translation, the most typical of the two, as it involves cases where the translation project is conceived and implemented by agents belonging to the TL context, who, through their action, have texts translated (in other words imported) into their own language/culture. This was arguably the case for instance when, following the shelling of the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, the British academic and poetry translator Francis R. Jones decided to translate from Bosnian into English the highly regarded collection of Mak Dizdar’s poems *Stone Sleeper* in order to secure, as he pointed out, “the survival of the complex, multi-patterned web of civilization against the simplistic barbarity of fascism” (2000, p. 68). Conversely, the second configuration is export translation, the expression of projects conceived and (at least partially) implemented from an exporting perspective. Initially investigated as the manifestation of national policies that rope in agents from the source language to actively promote the translation of national works within projects that could be commercial, political, or cultural in nature (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2018; Sapiro, 2003; 2008), export translation has equally been investigated as another manifestation of translation as preservation (Jamoussi, 2015), as is the case with the late Iraqi scholar Saadi Simawe, who decided to translate poetry from his country and publish it in English as a “desperate effort to save what remains of Iraqi humanity and culture” (2003, p. 5).

Despite being a manifest case of translation-as-preservation, Barşoum’s call for the translation of the Syriac heritage represents an interesting variation on its two configurations, import and export, as it does not involve a cross-national transfer of the translated texts. Rather, it aims to secure the texts’ survival by making them available to the descendants of an audience that used to access them in their original formulation. In this case, the language migration of the texts, which translation intends to facilitate, is meant to counterbalance an earlier language migration, namely the one that the target audience of these texts underwent.

In light of the above analysis, Barşoum’s *Treatise* clearly represents a response to specific circumstances, both cultural and linguistic, that affected the Syriac community at the beginning of the 20th century. The marked dissociation from the *nahḍa* movement shapes the features of this translation project. Hence, in terms of domain, the corpus Barşoum wishes Syriac translators to revisit comprises not only literary and philosophical texts, but also scientific and (Christian) liturgical texts, which were not part of the contemporary mainstream *nahḍa* translation drive. Equally significant is the fact that although Arabic

remains the translation target language, the target audience is not native (and predominately Muslim) speakers of Arabic, but the Christian Syriac population.

3. Aspects of Barṣoum's approach to translation

Barṣoum's reliance on translation as an answer to linguistic degradation builds on a tradition of Arabic translation of Syriac works which he traces back to the beginning of the 16th century.

انصرف بعضهم إلى تعريب كتاب الصلوات الأسبوعية المعروف بالاشحيم في غرة القرن السادس عشر و ترجمه ثانية يوحنا ابن غرير اسقف دمشق في أواسط القرن التالي، ومضى بعض الإكليروس في القرنين الثامن عشر والتاسع عشر فنقلوا كتب صلوات الإستغفار المعروفة ب(الحسايات) على مدار السنة وبعض النوافير (الليتورجيات) وطقوس العماد والاكليل والمسحة والجناز والمعدعان. (p. 11)

[[B]y the eve of the 16th century, some [individuals] applied themselves to the Arabization of the book of routine prayers, known as *shimo*⁵. A second translation of this book was carried out by Bishop John Ghurayr of Damascus in the middle of the next century. [Likewise,] in the 18th and 19th centuries, some of the members of the clergy undertook the translation of the book of supplication (prayers) performed around the year, known as the book of *husoyos*. [Also translated were] some liturgies (anaphorae) and rites for baptism, matrimony, penance, funeral⁶, and the book of principal feasts.]

However, though he acclaims these endeavours, he clearly expresses his disappointment with the quality of a good number of them.

ومن دواعي الأسف أن الذين انتبهوا إلى سد هذا الخلل لم يكونوا يملكون من العربية سوى معرفة ضئيلة أو متوسطة لا تكفي لتأدية أمانة النقل والمحافظة على أساليب فصاحته. (p. 10)

[It is regrettable that those who attended to the need to remedy this anomaly had only a limited or average command of Arabic that did not suffice to serve the duty of translation and preserve its rules of eloquence.]

For Barṣoum, the problem is not only that these translations had “a corrupt and unbearably awkward Arabic”⁷ (p. 11), but also, and perhaps more importantly, that this awkwardness frequently leads to “ambiguity and the inability to comprehend some terms”⁸ (pp. 12-13), making the texts unusable. It is this perceived lack of quality in translation which Barṣoum declares that he sets out to remedy with his treatise:

أحببت أن أنهج لفتية السريان مناهج نافعة في طريق الترجمة والتعريب بأخذ بإشارات المجتهد اللبيب قتهديه إلى محبة الصواب. (p. 13)

[I intend to outline for Syriac youths useful translation and Arabization methods that would guide the most diligent among them down the right path.]

The dissatisfaction Barṣoum expresses regarding many earlier translation projects stems from his general concern for quality. Since he takes these works in high esteem, their translation can tolerate no compromise. Only a good translation will make “the misguided, who forsake [their language], mock it, or feel embarrassed to be associated with it, realise that they have been blindly deceived”⁹ (p. 16).

⁵ This book of regular weekday prayer is equally referred to in English as the “*shimo*” (Barṣoum, 2003).

⁶ This is also known as *al-jinnaz*.

⁷ عربية فاسدة بركاكة لا تحتمل

⁸ الإبهام والعجز عن فهم بعض الألفاظ

⁹ ليتأكد الأغرار الذين يُهملونها أو يهزأون بها أو يستحون بالانتساب إليها انهم كانوا في خطأ يعمهون

Barṣoum's discourse is interspersed with references to *ṣiḥat al naql* [translation correctness] or *iḥkām al tarḡamah* [the production of accurate translation] that appear as the ultimate objectives of a practitioner. Working towards this goal, the author sets out to expound his views on translation. The sections below discuss the major tenets of his approach.

3.1 Translator's profile and training

In Chapter Two of the *Treatise, fī mā yaḥtāḡu ileih al mutarḡim* [On translator requirements], Barṣoum sketches an initial expression of the prerequisites for a successful translator, focusing on linguistic proficiency in both the source and target languages as well as knowledge of the subject field.

يحتاج المترجم عن السريانية لصحة النقل إلى شينين أحدهما: التضلع بأصول اللسان السرياني واللسان العربي وآدابهما. والثاني: التبحر في أصول العلم الذي ينقله إلى العربية، والإطلاع التام على اصطلاحاته مع تدقيق النظر في منهاج المؤلف الذي يعرّب كلامه وحسن سبكه في قالب من اللفظ يؤدي حق معانيه ويستبطن مبهمات ألفاظه ومشكلات تعابيره. (p. 17)

[To achieve an accurate translation, a translator from Syriac should satisfy two requirements. The first is being versed in Syriac and Arabic languages and literatures. The second is scholarship in the fundamentals of the discipline he is translating (into Arabic) and access to the full breadth of its terminology. The translator should likewise carefully consider the diction of the author he is translating and appropriately cast his text in an idiom that does justice to its meaning and clarifies its obscure terms and problematic locutions.]

The author equally addresses training, which he considers a necessary stage in the preparation of the translator.

على أن يتوفّر للمعرّب التخرّج في طرق هذا الفن على كاتب يبلغ حافل الذاكرة بقيود اللغة ومرادفاتها ممثلىء
الذهن من صور التراكيب الجزلة وأساليب التعبير المستحبة ومناهجه المستطرفة. (p. 17)

[Still, the translator has to undertake his apprenticeship in this art alongside an able master, who is knowledgeable in the linguistic constraints and lexical breadth of language, an expert with a total command of eloquent diction and engaging style.]

Referring to the apprentice translator as a *ṭālib* [student], Barṣoum equally establishes categories of translators based on their profile and training:

فإن لم يتيسر للطالب هذه الشروط وكان متمكنا من الشروط الأولى بنوع كافٍ فلا بأس عليه من نقل الكتب
المتوسطة الإنشاء وتجنب عاليها وغامضها. (p. 18)

[Should the student not satisfy [all] these conditions, yet have a satisfactory command of the primary ones, there is no harm in him translating books of average composition while avoiding the more sophisticated and abstruse ones.]

The fact that Barṣoum tackles translation from a pragmatic rather than a theoretical point of view is arguably evidenced by both his insistence on the skills the translator needs to possess in order to achieve accuracy and his reliance on a Syriac lineage of references that are characterised by a similar line of thought. The whole of Chapter Two is in fact an elaboration on the section on translation in Louis Cheikho's *Ilm al Adab* [Literary Essay] (1886, pp. 250-251), a reference Barṣoum will return to in Chapter Six of his *Treatise* to elaborate on translation styles (see below).

3.2 Focus on terminology

Terms, which Barṣoum variably refers to in his narrative as *mufradāt*, *alfāz*, and *iṣṭilāḥāt*, represent another of the recurrent foci in the *Treatise*. For him, terminological knowledge lies at the heart of the translator's efforts to convey meaning. In Chapter Four, titled *fī fā'idat al muḥakam wal mutarādif* [On the benefits of validated terms and synonyms], he thus argues that:

إن جودة الترجمة موقوفة على معرفة الألفاظ المحكمة [...] فلا غنى للمترجم السرياني عن أن يخزن في حافظته شيئاً كثيراً من مفردات العربية وأنماط تعابيرها وصور تراكيبها... ولا غرو أن للألفاظ المحكمة في أصيل الكلام وترجمته فوائد، ومنها الإختصار وترصيع التراكيب بفرائد اللغة. (pp. 19-20)

[Translation quality depends on knowledge of validated terms [...] It is indispensable for the Syriac translator to memorise a large number of Arabic terms together with their collocations and usages [...] Needless to emphasise that dedicated terms are beneficial to authentic writing and its translation. Among these advantages are conciseness and structures inlaid with linguistic gems.]

In Chapter Five, he further elaborates on the necessity for translators to be knowledgeable in the domain they are translating by recognising that terminology defines a field of knowledge.¹⁰

لكل علم وفن اصطلاحات معروفة عند أهله، وهي لغة عُرفيّة لا يعدل عنها إلا في ما يفسّر لفائدة العامة من كتب الطب وغيرها، إذ لا علم للعامة في تلك الاصطلاحات الفنية. (p. 22)

[Every science or art has a dedicated terminology that is current among its practitioners. This is a conventional jargon that shall only be renounced when glossing medical or other texts for the non-expert who has no knowledge of these technical terms.]

3.3 On fidelity and freedom

According to Walter Benjamin, the notions of fidelity and freedom in translation are “perpetually caught up in an irresolvable conflict” that promotes the idea of the translator having to render “in accord” and “in the service” either of meaning, to which the notion of freedom is assigned, or of the word, which is served by fidelity (1997, p. 160). This seemingly irresolvable binary has dominated much of the discussions on translation since Cicero (see for instance Weissbort & Eysternsson, 2006).

For Barṣoum, however, fidelity and freedom take on different meanings. Within his view of translation and language, Barṣoum applies a dichotomy distinguishing the ideas expressed by the SL text author, i.e. the work’s content, from the linguistic form that this content assumes through the vehicle of language. This dichotomy is manifested in the garb metaphor¹¹, which Barṣoum employs repeatedly in his narrative, as when he describes the mission of the translator as “delivering these exquisite works [...] adorned in the best attire”¹² (p. 16), or when he portrays unsuccessful translations as “ragged clothes” that are not “worthy of the figures of those precious books”¹³ (p. 13). This dichotomy is expanded upon in Chapter Three *fī atturuq al muttaba ‘ah fī al tarḡamah* [On translation practices], which is an extended quote from an unidentified source titled *kitāb al mu ‘īn* [the guide book]¹⁴.

Building on this dichotomy, Barṣoum derives two fundamental translation requirements, that can be taken to represent the matrix of the author’s take on translation theory; a) the need to convey the author’s ideas without omission or distortion, which he places under the concept of *amānah* [fidelity or

¹⁰ Barṣoum’s instinctive conception of terminology is surprisingly accurate by present-day Terminology Studies standards and is echoed by major voices in the field, such as Gouadec who similarly defines it as “un ensemble de termes [...] appartenant à un même champ” [a set of terms [...] belonging to the same field] (1990, p.19).

¹¹ See Brock 1982 for a thorough investigation of this metaphor in the Syriac tradition.

¹² ... بتسليمه تلك [...] البدائع [...] رافلة بأحسن الخلال

¹³ هذه الثياب الرثة أو الأظمار العتيقة البالية لا تليق بأجسام تلك الكتب النفيسة

¹⁴ This is certainly an abbreviation of the full title. Since Barṣoum does not provide the author, and since Arabic literature is rife with books bearing this qualifier, it becomes difficult to identify the source of this passage. Also to note is the fact that the concluding sentences in this chapter have been copied almost verbatim from Cheikho (1886). The phenomenon is typical of a period when the circulation of ideas was not subject to strict referencing principles, contrary to what is the case today (see for instance Finnegan, 2011).

faithfulness], and b) the translator's mindfulness of the TL structural and idiomatic features when rendering these ideas, which he attaches to the concept of *ḥorriyah* [freedom].

The way these two concepts are expounded by Barṣoum marks a definite departure from the classical bipolar division of faithfulness vs freedom. Rather than being mutually exclusive, fidelity and freedom are to be taken in Barṣoum's framework as concurrent features of the translation process, each aimed at addressing a particular side of the form/content dichotomy. As Barṣoum argues:

فإحكام الترجمة معقود باجتماع الأمانة والحريّة ففي الأولى ينقل معاني المؤلف ومذاهب تصوّره ووجه تعابيره، وفي الثانية يطبّق ما يترجمه على مناهج العربية. (p. 19)

[The production of a flawless translation is thus dependent upon satisfying both faithfulness and freedom. With the former the translator transfers the author's meanings, conceptions, and style while with the latter he remodels what he translates to suit the moulds of Arabic.]

The few references that appear in the text do not show any awareness of the classical corpus on translation and the conceptualisation of fidelity and freedom therein. Consequently, Barṣoum's take on fidelity and freedom is to be read in its own terms and as the spontaneous cogitation of a practitioner rather than a self-aware scholarly challenge.

3.4 Barṣoum's typology of translation styles

In chapters Five and Six, Barṣoum provides an exploration of translation styles. To this effect, he draws on a 14th century passage from *al-ḡaith al-musajjam* [Pouring Rain] by the scholar Ṣalāh Al Din as-Ṣafadī (1296-1363 CE)¹⁵ where two translation *modi operandi* used during the Abbasid dynasty are outlined. The first makes use of the word as a translation unit. For as-Ṣafadī, this option is inadequate due to the structural discrepancies and the lack of one-to-one terminological correspondence that may exist between the source and target language. The second method is based on the processing of a larger linguistic unit, usually a sentence. This latter method, which is clearly preferable by as-Ṣafadī, is typically ascribed to a specific group of translators within the Abbasid period, with the celebrated Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (809-873 CE) representing one of its prominent exponents.

Building on the authority of this text, Barṣoum distinguishes between two translation styles. With regard to the first method presented in as-Ṣafadī's account, Barṣoum uses a number of synonymous qualifiers, namely *ḥarfī* [to the letter], *alā lafẓihi* [word-for-word], and *alā ṣūratihī* [verbatim/as is] (p. 21), before he finally settles for *tarḡamah ḥarfīyah* (p. 26), which translates as *translation to-the-letter*. To the second method described in as-Ṣafadī's account corresponds Barṣoum's *tarḡamah ma'nawīyah*, i.e. meaning-based translation (p. 26). For Barṣoum, word-for-word translation is to be ruled out when source and target language structures show significant dissimilarities. Its use in such cases can only be interpreted as a sign of linguistic incompetence:

أعلم أن كثيراً من التراكيب السريانية ما يوافق العربية ومنها ما يخالفها. فمنه يظهر معناه بترجمته على لفظه، ومنه ما لا يظهر المراد منه إن تُرجم حرفياً فيقتضي العُدول في الترجمة عن الصورة الأصلية بيانا للمعنى. وهذا الأمر الأكثر إهمالاً عند الذين ترجموا الكتب عن السريانية في الأزمنة المتأخرة فإنهم توهموا أن جميع التراكيب الأعجمية توافق الذوق العربي وهذا ناشئ عن جهلهم آداب اللغة العربية والسريانية أيضاً. (p. 21)

[Many Syriac language structures are analogous to Arabic just as many [others] are not. Therefore, some of these structures preserve their meaning when

¹⁵ The passage is provided by Barṣoum as an indirect abridged quotation from Cheikho (1886, p. 251-252). See for instance Rosenthal (1975, p. 17) for a full translation.

translated to the letter while others [do not and] rather require abandoning the original shape of the sentence to bring meaning out. This [lack of syntactic analogy] was the most neglected aspect among later time translators from Syriac as these falsely assumed that all foreign [language] constructions were compatible with Arabic [syntactic] preferences, a misconception that arose from their ignorance of Arabic, as well as Syriac, literature.]

Although he leaves it to the translator to decide on the appropriateness of either method, his own preference is clear:

أما في السريانية، فيستحسن استعمال احدهما حسب موافقة الموضوع، والأرجح الترجمة المعنوية.
(pp. 25-26)

[As for [translation from] the Syriac language, either [method] can be used depending on its suitability for the topic, *though meaning-based translation is to be preferred.*] (emphasis added)

Having said that, Barṣoum nonetheless makes an interesting exception:

على أن الترجمة الحرفية تُستعمل في الغالب في ترجمة الكتب المقدسة والكتب الدينية التوقية. (p. 26)

[However, for sacred texts and religious and devotional ones, the common translation method has mostly been literal.]

Religious texts were not included in the translation efforts during the Abbasid dynasty (Fakhry, 1970, pp. 5-8; Vagelpohl, 2008, pp. 26, 29). Therefore, by reporting on this exception in which literal translation is favoured, Barṣoum distances himself from the mainstream 8th and 9th century translation paradigm, which represents the matrix of his earlier argument, to embrace a different one that is more indigenous to the Syriac translation tradition.

Translation within the Syriac community has a longer history, which precedes the Abbasid translation movement by many centuries. Within the Syriac tradition, translation practices underwent a gradual shift from a predominant use of free translation in the 4th and 5th centuries to a more literal approach in the 6th century, which was characterised by an increased philological focus on bringing the reader closer to the source text. By the 7th century, literal translation had become the established norm for Syriac translation (Brock, 1983; 1979).

One of the reasons that led to the increased reliance on this particular approach was the translation of religious texts, whose perceived holy nature was believed to elude full interpretation. This seems to be a universal attitude towards the translation of sacred texts. St Jerome, for instance, adopts a similar stand in his well-known statement “I admit and confess most freely that I have not translated word for word in my translations of Greek texts, but sense for sense, except in the case of the scriptures in which even the order of the words is a mystery” (quoted in Lefevere, 1992, p. 47). Literalism was considered a safe strategy or a “double safeguard”, as Brock puts it, for “the reader, against the introduction of false or heretical views by the translator, and for the translator, against accusations by the reader of falsification of the thought of the original” (1979, p. 78).

It is arguably the awareness, and presumably appreciation, of the linguistic dexterity required for the translation of sacred texts (Brock, 1979, p. 80, 82) that allows Barṣoum to single out this particular text type. By the same token, it enables him to ignore in this case both the use advocated by as-Ṣafadī of a sense-for-sense rendering approach and his own earlier denouncement of literal translation as indicative of a translator’s linguistic ineptness.

Finally, in an isolated reference, Barṣoum mentions an additional translation method, namely *tarḡamah taḥṣīliyah*, which may translate literally as *inferred translation*. Although he does not expand on this, the fact that in

Scattered Pearls he opts for using the term *talhīs*, which translates as *summary* or *abridged* (2003, p. 185, 199), to describe certain translations into Syriac allows for the possibility of a third method being at work in addition to literal and meaning-based (2003, pp. 196-197). However, this prospect remains obscure for lack of any further elaboration by the author.

4. Conclusions

It would be erroneous to consider Barṣoum's cogitations on translation as a comprehensive theoretical framework or to try to accommodate them into one. Barṣoum's use of concepts such as *fidelity* and *freedom* or *word-based* and *meaning-based* translation should be regarded as the fruit of practical wisdom at a time when translation theory, as we know it today, had not yet emerged as an independent field of inquiry.

Nevertheless, Barṣoum's narrative is not devoid of 'theoretical' influences. Interestingly, these are to be found in earlier texts and traditions to the exclusion of voices from the powerful and translation active *nahḍa* movement with which Barṣoum was contemporaneous.

Ignatius Aphram I Barṣoum's work offers a significant contribution to the historical investigation of translation traditions in the Levant. Seeking to provide translators working from Syriac into Arabic with a comprehensive account of best practices, Barṣoum addresses an audience which enjoys a unique relationship both with the source and the target languages. The historical circumstances surrounding the establishment of Arab rule and the consequences this had on the sociolinguistic scene in the region meant that the Syriac community was gradually alienated from its linguistic and thereby also its cultural heritage. By calling for the translation of Syriac texts for Syriac readers, Barṣoum does not seek to introduce works to his target audience, but rather to forward them to the language this audience now speaks, thus closing the circle of the linguistic shift the Syriac community underwent.

Seen from a translation historiography perspective, Barṣoum's *Treatise* is characterised by a number of interesting insights. He depicts technical texts as being defined by their terminological features, whose mastery is a fundamental requirement among the translator's attributes – a surprisingly modern perspective. Similarly, his treatment of fidelity and freedom, as two distinct but inseparable standards that need to be simultaneously met in translation, brings insight into the age-old debate that has routinely treated them as mutually exclusive alternatives.

Finally, Barṣoum's work is a welcome, if not necessary, addition to the relatively limited number of historical Arabic sources seeking to comment on the processes and products of translation. Furthermore, by including the references that informed his theoretical precepts, Barṣoum offers leads to further texts that could contribute to the formation of a less fragmentary account of translators' voices in the region. The pursuit of such inquiries also paves the way for further research paths into the evolution of the Syriac translation tradition within and in relation to the Arabic one.

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