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The Tradition of the Life of Abraham of Qidun an his Niece Mary: Project and Problems

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► **To cite this version:**

Laurent Capron. The Tradition of the Life of Abraham of Qidun an his Niece Mary: Project and Problems. Approaches To The Editing of texts with a Multilingual Tradition, Dec 2013, London, United Kingdom. pp.161-178. halshs-03506080

HAL Id: halshs-03506080

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ORIENTALIA LOVANIENSIA
ANALECTA
————— 276 —————

BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE *BYZANTION*

19

EDITING MEDIAEVAL TEXTS FROM
A DIFFERENT ANGLE: SLAVONIC AND
MULTILINGUAL TRADITIONS
TOGETHER WITH FRANCIS J. THOMSON'S
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CHECKLIST OF
SLAVONIC TRANSLATIONS

*To Honour Francis J. Thomson on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday
Together with
Proceedings of the ATTEMT Workshop held at King's College, London,
19-20 December 2013
and
the ATTEST Workshop held at the University of Regensburg,
11-12 December 2015*

edited by

LARA SELS,
JÜRGEN FUCHSBAUER, VITTORIO TOMELLERI and ILSE DE VOS



PEETERS
LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT
2018

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THE TRADITION OF THE
LIFE OF ABRAHAM OF QIDUN AND HIS NIECE MARY
PROJECT AND PROBLEMS

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THE TEXT AND ITS TRADITION

The *Life of Abraham of Qidun and his niece Mary*¹ (hereafter *Life of Abraham*) was written, as it seems, in Syriac² at the end of the 4th or at the very beginning of the 5th century, few years after the supposed date of death of Abraham in 367. The text clearly comprises two parts, probably composed by two different authors.³ However, early on these two parts were combined in one single text. The first part contains the early episodes of the *Life of Abraham* – how he left his wife on the first night of their marriage to become a monk; how he converted a pagan village to the Christian faith; how he resisted the assaults of the Devil in his hermitage. The second part of the *Life of Abraham* gives the story of the saint once he had adopted his orphan niece Mary; how she committed the sins of the flesh with a so-called monk and became a harlot; how Abraham, disguised as a soldier, found her in a tavern and brought her back to their hermitage.

The *Life of Abraham* was translated in many languages: in Greek,⁴ in Latin,⁵ in Christian-Palestinian Aramaic, in Slavonic, in Arabic, in Georgian.⁶ We may reconstruct the “genealogy” of the different translations as follows: first the Syriac version; then the translation in Greek, which has given birth, on one hand, to the main tradition and, on the other, to several isolated Greek versions; then the Arabic translation, which was also made from Syriac. The Greek main version was used as a basis for some Latin, Slavonic and Christian Palestinian Aramaic versions, and probably also – but this has not yet been verified – for the Georgian *Life of Abraham*. Some of the isolated Greek versions seem to have been translated into other Christian-Palestinian Aramaic versions, and

¹ For further details about these saints and the text tradition, cf. CAPRON, *Codex hagiographiques*, pp. 53-69.

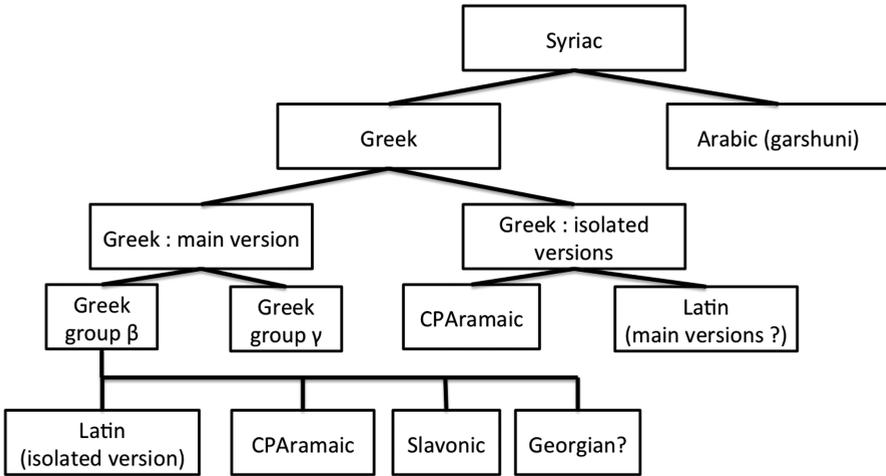
² Cf. *BHO* 16-17.

³ The authors are not known, although the whole text has long been attributed to Ephraem. For this erroneous author attribution, see CAPRON, *Codex hagiographiques*, pp. 56-62.

⁴ *BHG* 5-7.

⁵ *BHL* 12-13.

⁶ For these translations, cf. *CPG* 3938 (under *Ephraem graecus*) and *BHBS*, p. 276.

Table 1: Translations of the *Life of Abraham*

possibly also into some Latin variants. The Arabic translation is late and written in Garshuni. It is known through one manuscript, today in Jerusalem,⁷ which is a translation of an identified Syriac manuscript, today in Damascus.⁸

A PROJECT

Except for the Arabic/Garshuni version, for which we know the Syriac manuscript on which it is based, we do not know when and how the text of the *Life of Abraham* was translated from one language into another. This deserves further exploration, ideally within the frame of a large encompassing project aimed at the preparation of text editions of the various versions of the *Life of Abraham*, to enable a reconstruction of the text's history, through its copies as well as through its translations.

Such an endeavour can be described as a work in three stages: 1) the making of the individual text editions; 2) the establishment of the relationships between the different versions; and 3) the assessment of the obtained and prospective results and identification of new research questions. In actual practice stage 1) and 2) interact and cannot be separated from each other.

The focus of the present article will be on the Syriac, the Greek, the Christian-Palestinian Aramaic and the Latin versions.

⁷ *Codex Hierosolymitanus, Monasterii S. Marci*, 38.

⁸ *Codex Damascenus, Bibliothecae Patriarchalis Ecclesiae Orthodoxae Syriacae*, 12/17.

RE-EDITING THE DIFFERENT VERSIONS

The *Life of Abraham* has already been published in each of the four mentioned languages, which might raise the question of the usefulness of new editions. However, for each of these versions there are particular and solid arguments to justify a re-edition. There are some common points: first, many more manuscript witnesses of the Syriac, Greek and Latin *Life of Abraham* have become known since the time of their edition. Secondly, not a single editor has approached these texts as translations, which they all are, with the exception of the Syriac.

The Syriac version

The earliest known witness of the *Life of Abraham* in Syriac is the *Codex Londinensis Bibliothecae Britannicae* Add. 14644, written in the 5th or 6th century, viz. some century after the composition of the text. It is almost entirely preserved: only the very last (two or perhaps three) lines are missing. The second earliest manuscript containing the Abraham text is the *Londinensis Bibliothecae Britannicae* Add. 12160, dated from the end of the 6th century. The text in this witness is much more defective: at least fifteen pages are missing at the beginning, together with four pages in the rest of the text – only eighteen pages are still extant. All the other manuscripts have been written after the 11th century.

Joseph Lamy has edited the Syriac text of the *Life of Abraham* a first time in 1891, and then again in 1902,⁹ with the addition of his own Latin translation alongside the Syriac text. Although Lamy gives a very detailed introduction to the text, his edition presents many problems. First of all, Lamy used four manuscripts – the two ancient *Londinenses* and two more recent witnesses preserved in Paris in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*.¹⁰ In his introduction Lamy noted that he used the text of the earliest manuscript (i.e. *Londinensis* Add. 14644) as the basis of his edition. However, in many places he gave preference to another version, without indicating that he was using another manuscript variant and without motivating his decision. The apparatus, moreover, is incomplete, illegible and full of mistakes. For instance, up to five times Lamy attributes a variant to the *Londinensis* Add. 12160 in chapters that are actually missing in that manuscript; in other places, he forgets to indicate certain variants, and so on. A clear indication of Lamy's lack of attention to the text is his not respecting the division of the text as found in the earliest manuscript: in most of the cases, Lamy attributes to the end of a chapter what the manuscript presents as the beginning of the next.

⁹ Cf. LAMY, *Acta Beati Abrahae Kidunaiaae*, 1891 and 1902.

¹⁰ *Codex Parisinus syr.* 234 and *Parisinus syr.* 235, both from the 12th-13th century.

Today, we have access to three additional manuscripts: 1) *Codex Parisinus syr.* 326; 2) *Codex Mardin CFM*, 256; 3) *Codex Mardin CFM*, 271. Although they are late copies – viz. from the 17th to the 20th c. – they are of interest as they are probably copies of much older manuscripts.

The Greek version

We know 35¹¹ mediaeval manuscripts that contain the *Life of Abraham* in Greek. Until now, I had access to 20 of them and was able to divide them, on the one hand, in a main group, which can be divided in two big families (groups β and γ), and on the other, in a group of three manuscripts that apparently contain isolated versions. These three manuscripts present many textual differences and it proves impossible to link them to any of the other manuscripts in a direct line. Occasionally, they are closer to the Syriac than the main version manuscripts. To these 35 mediaeval manuscripts we have to add a papyrus codex kept in Paris, in the Louvre. This papyrus preserves no more than 18 fragmentary pages of the 80 original ones, that is, around 20% of the text. It can be dated to the middle of the 7th century, which makes it our earliest Greek witness.¹²

Three manuscripts have been edited: 1) *Codex Vaticanus gr.* 797;¹³ 2) *Codex Oxoniensis Baroccianus* 148,¹⁴ and 3) *Codex Oxoniensis Laudianus* 84.¹⁵ These existing editions pose two problems: first, *Vaticanus gr.* 797 and *Baroccianus* 148 are witnesses that belong to a very peculiar branch of the main Greek tradition, and in many places their text differs considerably from the Syriac; secondly, *Laudianus* 84 gives one of the isolated Greek versions and contains only the second part of the *Life of Abraham*. A comparison of the text of the papyrus with the other Greek manuscripts and the Syriac versions has made it quite clear that the papyrus text is closer to the Syriac original. Unfortunately, the papyrus is in a fragmentary state, which means that no full version of the Greek text close to the Syriac has been published up till now.

The Latin version

Anton Koberger printed a Latin version of the Abraham text in 1478 in Nuremberg¹⁶ as part of the *Vitae Patrum*, but he did not give any detail about

¹¹ In CAPRON, *Codex hagiographiques*, pp. 65-66, twenty-nine manuscripts are listed. Since 2013, six more manuscripts are added to the *Pinakes* database (<http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/>).

¹² For a full edition of this papyrus, see CAPRON, *Codex hagiographiques*.

¹³ AA.SS. *Mart. II*, pp. 932-937 (= BHG 5).

¹⁴ THWAITES, *Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου* (1709), pp. σκ'-σλδ' and ASSEMANI, *Ephraem Syri opera* (1743), pp. 1-20 (= BHG 6).

¹⁵ THWAITES, *Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου*, pp. υν'-υνδ' (= BHG 7).

¹⁶ See KOBERGER, *Vitae patrum sanctorum aegyptiorum* (1478), ff. 54-57.

the manuscripts that were used to establish it.¹⁷ This text was reproduced several times, notably in the edition of Loher printed in Cologne in 1548 by Gennepaeus,¹⁸ and in Rosweyde's edition of 1615.¹⁹ The text published in volume 73 of the *Patrologia Latina* is the reproduction of the text edited by Rosweyde. In all these editions, the *Life of Abraham* belongs to the *Vitae Patrum*, Book 1. The second part of the text, viz. the *Life of Mary, niece of Abraham*, is sometimes published separately in the same book. In 1553, Aloysius Lippomano reproduced the text edited by Loher in his edition of *Vitae sanctorum priscorum patrum*.²⁰ He mentioned that he used that text rather than the text of a manuscript from San Nazaro in Verona, copied in the 13th century.²¹ Unfortunately, the manuscript has not been traced.

Dom André Wilmart has done meticulous work on the Latin version of the Abraham text.²² He noticed that the whole Latin tradition that came down to us can be divided in two main families: the first group – which he considered more conservative and less corrupt – comprises few manuscripts; the second group is represented by a vast majority of over 50 manuscripts. One of the main differences between the two versions lies in the suppression of the last chapters of the *Life of Mary* in the revised version. Rosweyde and earlier editors of the text have printed this revised version of the text. However, following Loher, Rosweyde added the missing chapters of the older version, as if they were part of the revised version. As Wilmart noticed, “il en résulte finalement que son texte, comme celui de Cologne, est une sorte de monstre littéraire”.²³ Of special interest in the article by Wilmart is the presentation of a completely different Latin version of the *Life of Abraham*, identified in a Vatican lectionary.²⁴ The publication of several chapters from this new version was meant to illustrate

¹⁷ The only mention of the manuscripts is given at the end of the book: “Anno Christi natiuitatis 1478, Nonas uero Maii, ob beatorum Patrum profectum Vitam eremitarum degentium, gesta quorum haud immerito memoriter sunt commendanda, opus (Vitas Patrum appellatum) insigne a quamplurimis excerptum codicibus, per sacrarum Scripturarum uiros admodum peritissimos ornatum, in oppido Nornbergensi per Antonium Coburger oppidi praefati incolam, quam compe impressum, finit feliciter.”

¹⁸ Cf. LOHER, *Vitae sanctorum patrum* (1548), alph. 17 a.3 – alph. 18 b.2. A previous version was printed in 1547, but, as Loher said, “*Vitas sanctorum patrum* [...] quas modo a plus mille erroribus, qui passim occurrebant, ad uetustissima pariter ac diuersa exemplaria repurgauimus” (*Epistola dedicatoria*).

¹⁹ Rosweyde gives a full list of the previous eighteen editions of the *Vitae Patrum* in his *Prologomenon XVII* (cf. Rosweyde, *Vitae Patrum* [1615], pp. li-lii = *PL* 73, coll. 63-64).

²⁰ Cf. LIPPOMANO, *Sanctorum priscorum patrum uitae* (1553), ff. 391^v-398^v.

²¹ In the margin, at the beginning of the *Life of Abraham*, f. 391^v, Lippomano wrote: “Habetur in libro uitarum sanctorum apud Coloniam nouissimo impresso, necnon in libro Monachorum sancti Nazarii Veronensis in pergamenno iam 300. annis scripto.”

²² WILMART, *Rédactions latines* (1938).

²³ WILMART, *Rédactions latines*, p. 241, n. 1.

²⁴ *Codex Vaticanus Arch.Cap.S. Pietro A.2* (see http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Arch.Cap.S.Pietro.A.2).

differences and similarities in the known versions of the Latin text. Unfortunately, the entire text has not yet been published.

The Christian-Palestinian Aramaic version

In Christian-Palestinian Aramaic, we have only three fragments left, dating from the 7th-9th centuries. They all have been edited one century ago,²⁵ and one of them has recently been re-edited.²⁶ The two other fragments are still waiting to be re-edited, as the palimpsests were read under daylight, while the use of UV-light is necessary, and as the existing editions contain many misreadings and the editors did no attempt to fill in lacunae, etc. It seems that two of these texts were translated from Greek texts close to the isolated versions, and one from a text of the main group. However, these witnesses are fragmentary and have several interpolations. We may have to accept that it is impossible to determine with certainty which Greek versions underlie these translations, even after an accurate study of the fragments.

METHODOLOGY

A conditio sine qua non for further research into the *Life of Abraham* is the making of a new critical edition of the original text, that is, the Syriac. As already mentioned, two early manuscripts of high quality are known, both kept in the *British Library*, viz. *Londinensis Bibliothecae Britannicae* Add. 14644, the earliest, and Add. 12160, written about a century later. When compared to Add. 14644, Add. 12160 has many minor variants and it lacks the first third of the *Life of Abraham*. As a consequence, codex *BL* Add. 14644 will naturally be chosen as a reference text. Since we have access to five later manuscripts as well, viz. three preserved in Paris and two in Mardin,²⁷ it is possible to draw up a critical apparatus. Although, unfortunately, two more manuscripts were lost in fire at the end of the 19th century²⁸ and two others remain inaccessible, viz. one in Damascus and another in Diyarbakır, the establishment of a critical text should not pose a problem.

²⁵ *Vaticanus sir.* 623: DUENSING, *Christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Texte* (1906), pp. 7-12; *Vaticanus sir.* 628: SCHULTHESS, *Christlich-palästinische Fragmente* (1902), pp. 254-257; *Codex Cantabrigiensis, Bibliothecae Universitatis*, coll. Taylor-Schechter 12746: SMITH-LEWIS – DUNLOP-GIBSON, *Palestinian Syriac Texts* (1900), pp. 77-80.

²⁶ *Codex Cantabrigiensis*, Taylor-Schechter 12746: CAPRON, *Fragment araméen christo-palestinien* (2010).

²⁷ The Mardin manuscripts have been digitized by the *Hill Museum and Manuscript Library* (<http://www.hmml.org>) and the images are accessible on demand.

²⁸ *Urmia, Missionary College* 179 and 186. The Urmia Missionary College (Iran) was destroyed in 1918-1919.

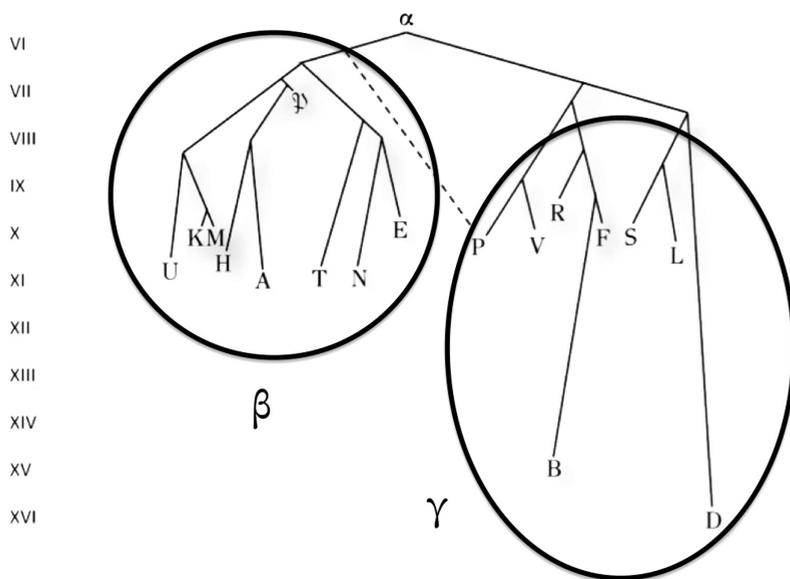


Table 2: Provisory *stemma* of the Greek “main version”

For the Greek text different problems arise. The aim would be to edit the Greek text that best reflects the early Greek translation from Syriac. However, to avoid creating some kind of “philological monster”, i.e. a completely hypothetical reconstruction, it is of utmost importance to respect the manuscript evidence and the way it has come down to us. Up till now, the 17 manuscripts that give the main version and to which I had access can be divided into two main families, viz. β and γ , both in their turn divided in two sub-groups.

On the basis of the manuscript study, three manuscripts can be selected as principal witnesses: the 7th-century Louvre papyrus (Φ), which is the earliest witness available, the *Codex Scorialensis* Ω .IV.32 (U), and *Vaticanus gr.* 866 (A). In some instances, the papyrus gives a text that does not fully correspond to the Syriac version while other Greek manuscripts are closer to the Syriac text. For the most part, however, papyrus is of excellent quality from a genealogical point of view. Unfortunately, only few pages have survived and most of them are only partially preserved. In some instances a few letters are all that is left. As for *Scorialensis* Ω .IV.32, it offers a text that is very close to the Syriac, sometimes even closer than the papyrus. The few problems posed by minor divergences and corrupted passages can easily be solved with the help of other manuscripts.²⁹ The main defect of this witness is its incomplete text,

²⁹ It is interesting to note that the Slavonic *Life of Abraham* is very close to the text version in this manuscript.

as it contains only the second part of the *Life of Abraham*. A third witness helps to fill this gap: *Vaticanus gr.* 866 offers a text very close to the papyrus, especially in the first part of the *Life of Abraham*, where it hardly shows differences. It can thus be considered a reliable witness to an old version of the Greek text. For the establishment of the text, the manuscripts have been used as follows:

- 1st Part of the *Life*: A + β when preserved.
 2nd Part of the *Life*: U + β when preserved or A when considered better than U or closer to the Syriac text.

In the few cases where neither β , nor U or A give a satisfying text when compared to the Syriac and the other Greek versions, recourse may be had to another manuscript.

As the other Greek versions are concerned, an edition of the text of group γ is, in my opinion, of little interest. First, *Vaticanus gr.* 797 as well as *Baroccianus* 148 have already been edited. The text of *Vaticanus gr.* 797 is easily accessible as it was published in the *Acta Sanctorum* and the two versions are quite close. Furthermore, it is hard to establish which version best represents group γ . Possibly of interest is a list of passages where the witnesses of the second family give a substantially different text than the first family, viz. the places where they are further removed from the Syriac text. However, this is an analytic rather than a synthetic work, and as long as the group cannot be shown to have given rise to another translation, it will fall outside the main scope of the project.

The following examples are sufficient to show that, in places, these manuscripts give a very different text than the manuscripts of the first family. However, indicating all these variants in a critical apparatus would burden it to little avail.

β (group β)	<i>Vaticanus gr.</i> 797 (group γ)
§26. Ἠγάλλετο δὲ ὁ θεῖος αὐτῆς βλέπων ἐν αὐτῇ τὴν καλὴν προθυμίαν καὶ τὰ δάκρυα καὶ τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην τὴν τε ἡσυχίαν καὶ πραότητα καὶ τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν ἀγάπην. Εἴκοσι δὲ ἔτη ἤσκησε μετὰ αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀμνάς ἀγνή καὶ περιστερὰ ἄσπιλος.	§26. Ἠγαλλιᾶτο δὲ ὁ μακάριος βλέπων αὐτῆς τὴν καλὴν πολιτείαν, καὶ πραότητα, καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀγάπην.
§32. Ἐνεκρατεύσατο δὲ σφοδρῶς ἵνα μὴ νοήση καὶ ἀποφύγη.	§32. Ἀλλὰ τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ καὶ ἐγκρατείᾳ, ὥσπερ ἐν ἀδύτοις κατέστειλεν ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ νοῆσαι αὐτὸν καὶ ἀποφυγεῖν.
§35. Πῶς προθύμως καὶ ἀδιακρίτως ἤσθιεν καὶ ἐπινεν, ἵνα ἐκ τοῦ βορβόρου ἐκσπάσῃ τὴν ἐμπεπηγμένην ψυχὴν.	§35. Πῶς προθύμως καὶ ἀδιακρίτως ἤσθιεν καὶ ἐπινεν, ἐπιλέγων καὶ αὐτὸς τὸ ἐν Εὐαγγελίῳ εἰρημένον· Σήμερον

This account appears in none of the preserved Greek or Latin manuscripts. It is probable then that there was only one Greek archetype, which has given birth to several branches, rather than that a Syriac tradition without this short passage (which is not attested) was translated several times, or that all translators decided to drop this chapter. If these three isolated manuscript versions derive from the same archetype, they have been separated from the main group early on, and may have been rewritten. Whether it would be useful to provide a full edition rather than just point out the significant differences with the mainstream version can remain a matter of debate here.

In Christian-Palestinian Aramaic there is not much to choose, as only three fragments of the *Life of Abraham* are known: the *Cantabrigiensis*, Taylor-Schechter 12746 gives the end of the first part of the *Life* and the beginning of the second part; the *Vaticanus sir.* 623 contains the very end of the first part of the *Life*, the beginning of the second part, and a later chapter, when Abraham decides to rescue his niece; the *Vaticanus sir.* 628 provides a later part of the episode of Abraham and Mary in the tavern. By coincidence the Aramaic fragments together cover the same episodes as does the papyrus. They can be dated from the 7th to the 9th century. For these fragments no selection needs to be made: except for a short part of the text – the end of the first part and the beginning of the second part of the *Life of Abraham* – they are all necessary to reconstruct the text of the *Life* in Aramaic. It is interesting to note that in the common part of the Taylor-Schechter fragment and the *Vaticanus sir.* 623 the text is not the same, even though it is close in its meaning. It is clear that these two witnesses are based on different Greek versions.

Vaticanus sir. 623

גבית חנות דה דגלונת לנס' חספ
 לנס' אסברית גבית סתצבונת
 חת' דגבר גסברית כסגלסלת
 למלג' ג' דתפלדונת' סתצבונת
 בוסמת נח' ססעס' תצבת
 חת' סג' לתצבונת סתללת
 חנות דגוסס' ג' חת' אסברית
 תפלתונת תצלסת לתלצת
 דגבר' תפל חסמת דה לגסברית
 חת' ב' כסונת סתסמת לת ב'ית
 גנרלת

Cantabrigiensis, T.-S. 12746

גבית חנות דה דגלונת לנס' חספ
 אסברית תצבונת דגבר
 כסגלסלת למלג' ג'
 דתצבונת סתפלדונת' בוסמת
 ת' ססעס' תצבת תפל חס
 אסברית סתללת חנות אסברית
 דה חת' חסמת לגסברית חת' ב'
 כסונת סתסמת לת ב'ית

In some instances the Aramaic text differs slightly from the Greek. The Aramaic fragments are of considerable importance for our knowledge of the Greek text: translations from Greek to Aramaic are, in most cases, made *ad verbum*, which means that every Greek word is translated in (almost) the same order. A proper study of these fragments allows us a glance on the state of the Greek text at the moment of their translations. The translations were made

between the 6th and the 8th century, the period at which the Greek papyrus was copied. This means that we have three additional early witnesses, which gives us an idea of the shape of the Greek text at that period, viz. few centuries after its translation from the Syriac.

The Latin versions of the text have not yet been studied in great depth and the following is still a work in progress that cannot be considered conclusive. According to the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina online*, 54 manuscripts of the text are known. Several old editions of the text exist, from the end of the 15th to the 17th century. To my knowledge, no research has been conducted on the Latin version since the study by Wilmart. Even though Wilmart's article is precise and well documented, it has opened doors to further research that, unfortunately, nobody has yet tried to enter. It will suffice here to summarize his conclusions. Wilmart has accurately compared nine manuscripts and was able to propose the following stemma.

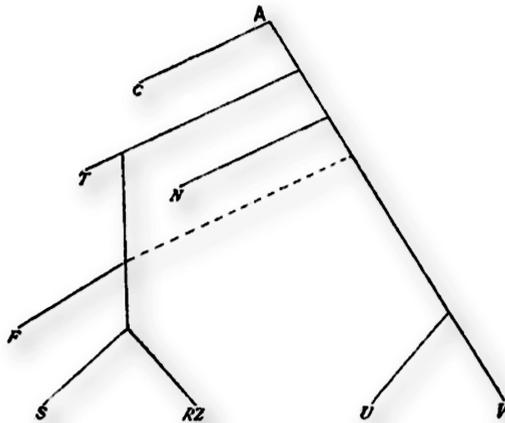


Table 3: *Stemma* of the Latin versions according to A. Wilmart

According to him, the manuscript N (= Roma, *Codex Valicellianus*, XII; 11th c., copied in Norcia) seems to be the best complete text, especially when compared to the 7th-c. fragments of C (= *Codex Vaticanus Reginus* 329; copied in the abbey of Corbie). It is important to note that Wilmart did not compare the Latin text to the Greek or Syriac versions. His conclusions are based solely on the fact that N is close to C and that C is very early. In the same article Wilmart published a partial edition of the text of N (chap. 6-12), except for the part preserved in C, for which that latter witness was used. With this example, he was able to prove that the text edited by Rosweyde in 1615 (R) was based on the revised Latin version, viz. with insertion of missing chapters from the old version. At the end of the article Wilmart gives a part of the text found in a

lectionary manuscript copied in the 11th century (*Codex Vaticanus, Archivio di San Pietro, A.2*). This text seems to be based on an early Latin version, although it is quite different from the rest of the Latin tradition. Clearly, new research is needed for the Latin *Life of Abraham* as well.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY

I will argue that it is of key importance to study these four traditions together. The Syriac text was, as it seems, composed around the beginning of the 5th century. Shortly after that, perhaps in the second part of the 5th century, it was translated in Greek. The story was so successful that it was translated in Aramaic and in Latin in the 6th century already. Usually, this period is poor in witnesses and it is a real challenge for scholars to reconstruct archetypes when the earliest witnesses date from the 10th or 11th century.

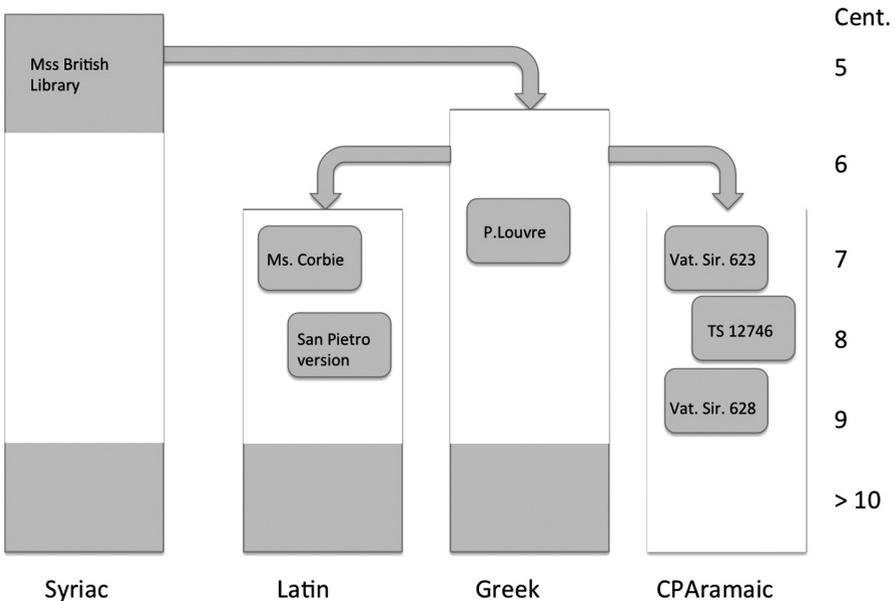


Table 4: Early witnesses of the *Life of Abraham*
Marked in grey are the time spans for which witnesses are available.

Fortunately early witnesses are available for each of these traditions, even if they are sometimes fragmentary. These witnesses can help to see how the text evolved in its first centuries. It is a rare opportunity for us to see the spread of a text in its earliest stages, which makes the reconstruction of the evolution of the *Life of Abraham* in its different translations all the more important.

A first comparison between the Syriac text and the Greek versions points to the use of a Syriac model closer to *Codex Londinensis Bibliothecae Britannicae* Add. 12160 rather than to Add. 14644, which is older. Obviously, this does not mean that codex Add. 12160 is of better quality, but it does show that a modified version was already widespread and used to translate the Syriac into Greek. However, a substantial loss of folios at the beginning of the text of codex Add. 12160 poses limits to the comparison with the Greek versions, which for these parts will have to be compared to codex Add. 14644.

The reconstruction of the Greek archetype is the core of my present study. As the Greek tradition constitutes the basis for the subsequent translations, this is a major step that should enable us to write the overarching story of the multilingual tradition of the *Life of Abraham*. Central here is the study of the Greek papyrus, which is the earliest Greek witness and, as explained before, proves to be the best manuscripts for the reconstruction of the archetype. I intend to use two other manuscripts for the establishment of the text, but occasionally it will be necessary to use variants of the isolated Greek versions, especially when they have a text closer to the Syriac.

The study of the Aramaic fragments has already shown that at least one fragment depends more on *Codex Vaticanus Ottobonianus* gr. 1 and another one shows more affinities with the manuscript *Codex Atheniensis Bibliothecae Nationalis* gr. 2096. This proves that the versions found in these two Greek manuscripts are old ones (between the 6th and the 7th century) and that they preserve old variants that may belong to the Greek archetype.

The old Latin versions must be collated in full with the Greek texts. The first impression after a preliminary exploration is that the manuscript of San Pietro is very close to the conservative Greek text – almost a translation *ad verbum*. The following example shows that there is almost no difference between the San Pietro manuscript and *Codex Oxoniensis Laudianus* 68, belonging to the group β.

<i>Vaticanus, Arch. di S. Pietro A.2</i>	<i>Oxon. Laud. 68</i> (<...> : variants from Vatican, gr. 866)
Continuo autem cognoscens <i>Habramius</i> inuidias diaboli, eleuans uocem suam inquit: “Obscuritas tua tecum sit in perditione, o plenae doloris et seductionis. Ego enim homo sum peccator, habens quidem gratiam Dei mei, spem et adiutorium, non te timeo, neque formidant me multae tuae fantasiae. Murus enim mihi est fortissimum nomen Domini saluatoris nostri Iesu Christi quem dilexi, et in nomine eius praecipio tibi, canis immun- dissime <i>ut exeas et recedas.</i> ”	Εὐθέως δὲ ἔγνω ὁ μακάριος τὸν δόλον τοῦ διαβόλου, καὶ ὑψώσας τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ εἶπεν: “Τὸ σκότος σου σὺν σοὶ <εἶη> εἰς ἀπώλειαν, ὃ πλήρης δολοῦ καὶ ἀπάτης. Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἄνθρωπός εἰμι ἀμαρτωλός, ἔχων δὲ τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, ἐλπίδα καὶ βοήθειαν, οὐ φοβοῦμαι σε, οὐδὲ πτωοῦσίν με αἱ πολλαὶ τὰς φαντασίας σου. Τεῖχος γὰρ ὀχυρόν μοι ἐστὶν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου μου καὶ Σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὃν ἠγάπησα, καὶ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἐπιτιμῶ σοι, κύων <ἀκάθαρτε> καὶ τρισάθλιε”

I have marked the differences in Latin and have put in brackets the equivalent of the Latin words missing in *Laudianus* 68 but found in *Vaticanus gr.* 866. The Latin version is so close to the Greek text that the translator has written: “*murus ... fortissimum*” instead of “*murus ... fortissimus*” under the influence of the neutral Greek “*τεῖχος... ὀχυρόν*”. However, most part of the comparison still has to be done, and at this point we cannot be sure whether Wilmart was right to choose the manuscript from Norcia as the best version, and whether it is helpful for the establishment of the Greek archetype.

While in Aramaic we cannot go further than editing the fragments and comparing them with the Greek witnesses, in Latin it may be possible to establish one or several archetypes and to arrive at a better understanding of the place of each witness within the Latin tradition.

Beyond the separate textual histories of the *Life of Abraham* in each of its languages and through the establishment of different hypothetical archetypes, we will be able to propose a comparative lexicon for these languages. A study of the phenomenon of translations from Syriac to Greek and from Greek to Aramaic remains a *desideratum*. For the Syriac-Greek it needs to be established how the translator proceeded: Did he stay close to the Syriac or not? Did he use invariable counterparts for Greek words (that is, did he make use of a Syriac-Greek lexicon)? How did he handle Syriac grammar? How did he render specific (typically Semitic) turns of phrase? For Aramaic it has already been noted that translators stayed very close to their Greek models, and the *Life of Abraham* is no exception to this rule. Even if the Aramaic fragments of the *Life of Abraham* are tiny, they still allow for a comparison between the two languages. This will also increase our knowledge of this rare language, for which new words are still being discovered. A study of the translations from Greek to Latin may be somewhat less interesting, as the two languages are much closer to each other. However, the direct influence of the Greek on the Latin can easily be discerned, especially when comparing the old Latin versions. The comparison of the different translations is clearly not without problems, and the method will have to be adapted to the particulars of each linguistic tradition.

Editing the Syriac version with seven witnesses is not without effort, at least if one wants to provide a truly scholarly critical edition with a glossary, even if the edition will be based on one manuscript with variant readings of the others referred to in the *apparatus criticus*. As for the Greek, the aim is to reconstruct an archetypal text on the basis of three manuscripts but with the occasional introduction of variant readings from other witnesses, especially from the three isolated versions, which sometimes seem to reflect a better text from a genealogical point of view. A comparison not only with the Syriac text but also with the old Latin and Aramaic fragments will be indis-

pensable. The work started by Wilmart on the Latin version, with its abundant manuscript tradition, awaits completion. An in-depth study of the San Pietro and Norcia manuscripts may constitute a good beginning of what will necessarily be a long term project. Of the three Aramaic fragments, one (the Cambridge fragment) has already been re-edited and *Vaticanus Sir. 628*, which is well edited, has been studied, which leaves some work to be done on *Vaticanus Sir. 623*.

CONCLUSION

In 1982, a group of scholars published the corpus of all the versions of the *Life of Pelagia*.³² The first volume is devoted to the old languages, the second to the modern languages. Published more than thirty years ago, it still is an exemplary work, providing access to all the versions of the text in one book, edited and supplemented with a solid scholarly introduction. The book is the result of collective work, with each scholar responsible for one particular version of the text. The aim of the edition, however, is not to compare the various linguistic traditions, but rather to provide a reference text for each version separately. There is no synoptic presentation of two or more versions; there is no lexicological study of the translations; there is no edition of different manuscripts. However, the editors have provided a number of tools to further the study of the translation process of the *Life of Pelagia*. Also for the *Life of Abraham*, a first step would be to provide editions of the different text versions of the *Life*, an aim that will be hard to achieve without the collaboration of several specialists. However, the advent of the digital has opened up many new perspectives, especially to move beyond the documentation of isolated versions towards a truly comparative approach. It would be useful to compare various texts within or beyond a particular language group. The real added value of a project as the one proposed here would be in the connections that can be established between various linguistic traditions. At least, we can provide the data for other scholars to be used (e.g., those interested in translation studies or comparative linguistics). Part of the ideal outcome for the *Life of Abraham of Qidun*-project would be an online edition. The exploration of the digital possibilities has to be part and parcel of this kind of project.

³² See *Pélagie la pénitente: Métamorphoses d'une légende*, t. 1: *Les textes et leur histoire: Grec, Latin, Syriaque, Arabe, Arménien, Géorgien, Slavon*. Dossier rassemblé par Pierre PETITMENGIN et al. (Séminaires d'Histoire des Textes de l'École normale supérieure, Études augustiniennes), Paris, 1982.

SUMMARY

The present contribution deals with the textual tradition of the *Life of Abraham of Qidun and his niece Mary*, apparently written in Syriac at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century and spread in various translations throughout the Christian world. An outline is given of the “genealogy” of the different translations – viz. the Greek, Latin, Christian-Palestinian Aramaic, Slavonic, Arabic and Georgian –, followed by an exploration of the requirements and the pitfalls of a broad edition project aimed at a reconstruction of the text’s history. The focus of the article is on the Syriac, Greek, Aramaic and Latin versions.

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