

# Historiography and Hagiographic Texts

## The Syriac Versions of Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*

Claudia Tavolieri  
(Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italia)

**Abstract** The present paper is part of a larger project promoted by the University RomaTre on translations of Greek Patristic Texts (2nd-6th century CE) in the Latin and Syriac sources, between the 3rd and the 8th century CE. In this paper I give priority to the analysis of the cultural context of the Syriac monasticism without neglecting the more important aspect of evaluation. Some of these aspects are connected to the relationship between the hagiographic production and the historiographical tradition. This relationship is clarified, not only from the reconstruction of the manuscript tradition, but also from the opportunity to capture certain problems present in the preparatory phase of the heterogeneous Lausiaca material. Therefore, their manuscript tradition must be analysed for each individual case. After a brief presentation of the *status quaestionis* of the studies conducted on Palladius' text, the paper focuses on some aspects of this tradition that help us better understand the historical and cultural environment. The first aspect concerns the problem of the transmission of texts in monastic circles, the second aspect regards the original choices of Syriac translators.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 *Status Quaestionis*. – 3 The Transmission of Texts in Monastic Circles: the Construction of a Genre? – 4 The Translator's Choices: Some Examples. – 5 Conclusions.

**Keywords** *Historia Lausiaca*. Translations. Monastic ideology. School movement.

To my mother, Marina

### 1 Introduction

The present paper is part of a larger project promoted by the University Roma Tre in cooperation with the University of Udine, pertinent to translations of Greek Patristic Texts (second-sixth centuries CE) in Latin and Syriac sources, between the third and the eighth century CE. The project is based on the selection and analysis of parallel passages that shed light on the strategies and techniques of translations in Late Antiquity and the early Medieval period.<sup>1</sup>

1 This paper was presented at the workshop on *Intercultural Exchange in Late Antique Historiography* (Ghent, 16-18 September 2015).

Though in the article is analysed especially the cultural context of Syriac monasticism, nevertheless in it isn't neglected the relationship between the hagiographic production and the historiographical tradition. This relationship can be clarified not only by the reconstruction of the manuscript tradition, but also by the opportunity to assess certain problems present in the preparatory phase of the heterogeneous Lausiatic material.

A critical review of the Lausiatic material, emphasizing the analysis of hagiographical sources in the study of the contexts of production, is now needed in order to improve our understanding of the complex cultural phenomena that have left traces in the manuscript tradition. This is the aim of this paper. Therefore, the manuscript tradition must be analysed for each individual case. After a brief presentation of the *status quaestionis* of the studies conducted on Palladius' text, the paper will focus on particular aspects of this tradition.

The first aspect is the problem of the transmission of texts in monastic circles, characterized by an ability to absorb and assimilate many traditions for ideological and cultural reasons, and the second concerns the original choices made by the Syriac translators.

The complex manuscript tradition of the Syriac versions of Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca* (HL; fifth century CE) is a valid source for trying to understand the historical and cultural contexts in which the work flourished and was consolidated.

These texts, which circulated in several versions - Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Arabian, Ethiopian, Old Slavonic and Sogdian - in Late Antiquity and the early Medieval period inside Eastern monasticism, have come down to us through 'Anānīshō's *Book of Paradise* of seventh century CE (CPG 6036). This work, described in Thomas Margā's *Ktābā d-Risāne* (Book of Governors) of ninth century CE (Vat. sir. 126), along with a current Syriac *Apophthegmata* (sayings and anecdotes of the leading Egyptian monks) is a rich compendium of ancient and not so ancient traditions which provides a vision of various monastic contexts.

The critical editions by E.A.W. Budge, based on Vat. sir. 165 (seventeenth century CE) and by P. Bedjan, who added Ber. 329 (Sachau 179) and Paris. sir. 317 (nineteenth century CE), provided a new studies of the manuscripts (Budge 1893; Bedjan 1901). After these studies, no critical analyses of the entire text were conducted for many years.

Recently, C. Chahine (2000, p. 460) has studied the question again, focusing on Thomas' testimony and defined it as «d'une inébranlable véracité».

The author verified the manuscript tradition of *Paradise* and examined the index of the most ancient manuscripts related to this tradition (BL, Add. 17,174 and Add. 14,853).

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This is a three-year Research Project PRIN (2013-2016), entitled *Tradurre Tradire Tramadare: I Padri Greci nell'Occidente latino e nell'Oriente siriano* (Translate, Betray, Hand down: The Greek Fathers in the Latin West and in the East Syriac).

By virtue of this method of investigation, Chahine correctly focused on the testimonies attributed to Abraham Nethprāiā (sixth century CE) and John Chrysostom (second half of the fourth century CE) in the *Paradise* and overcame the limits of Bedjan's and Budge's previous research, which was based mainly on the interpretation of Vatican Library manuscripts: Vat. sir 126 and 165 (Chahine 2000, pp. 449-454).

Chahine's study has allowed us to formulate some hypotheses regarding the contexts of production and circulation of this material – that is, Western or Eastern Syriac theological and cultural contexts. Naturally, for a better understanding of this scenario we need to analyse its relationship with the Greek tradition gathered in the organic (but incomplete) edition by Dom Cuthbert Butler at the end of the nineteenth century CE (Butler 1898-1904).

## 2 *Status Quaestionis*

The most comprehensive study of the Syriac versions of *HL* is still the one conducted by R. Draguet and published in 1978 for CSCO (Draguet 1978). Nevertheless, this study has not received particular attention from scholars, especially his research of the Greek Vorlage. G. Bunge's interpretation of Coptic elements present in the Lausiac material supports Draguet's interpretation (Bunge 1990, pp. 79-127).

As for certain features present in both the Syriac and Coptic texts but absent from the Greek text, Bunge has suggested that they were eliminated from the Greek in the course of the Origenist controversies in the sixth century CE due to the presence of Evagrian elements: the theological implications of this proposal are particularly interesting (Bunge 1990, pp. 124-127).

However, Bunge's reconstruction is not convincing, as it deals mainly with R3 (the most recent texts in Draguet's subdivision)<sup>2</sup> and only marginally with R1 and R2 (the most ancient texts in Draguet's subdivision), which, according to the author, were reused by Palladius in a previous work (Bunge 1990, p. 124). In fact, Bunge does not pursue the study of the ancient testimonies of the manuscript tradition.

Previously, B. Flusin (1984, pp. 117-120) had accepted Draguet's conclusion, but without a careful analysis of the texts. Challenging Draguet's conclusion, K. Nickau (2001, pp. 131-139) correctly interprets some linguistic forms (Coptic) present in the most ancient texts (R1, R2). Nevertheless, he cannot solve all the problems related to the presence of the most ancient texts, within the Syriac versions of *HL*.

2 Draguet classified them into four different text forms called R1-R2-R3-R4 (Draguet 1978, pp. 65-70; Brock 2008, pp. 191-193).

In an article, G. Lenzi (2007, pp. 15-21) analyses the manuscript tradition of the *Paradise of the Fathers*, which preserves parts of the *HL* texts, and examines some fragments conserved in the Ambrosiana Library in Milan, attributed by the author to the Sinai sir. 46. Through an examination of fragments, Lenzi is able to identify the beginning and the end of the manuscript and to propose a persuasive new dating for it (534 CE).<sup>3</sup>

In an excellent article entitled «Saints in Syriac» S.P. Brock (2008, pp. 181-196) focuses on the current state of the studies of hagiographic texts in Syriac and in particular on the manuscript tradition of the Syriac versions of *HL*. Brock's study underlines the importance of studying all the manuscript traditions of *HL*, especially the tradition of the *Historia Monachorum* (400 CE) and the *Apophthegmata* (Brock 2008, pp. 195-196).<sup>4</sup> The author considers that this question of manuscript tradition of *HL* remains open, and hopes to renew scholars' interest in this tradition (Brock 2008, p. 196).

### 3 The Transmission of Texts in Monastic Circles: the Construction of a Genre?

Closely connected with the problem of the transmission of texts in monastic circles is the question of the Syriac 'Dādīšō 'Qatrāiā's *Commentary on Paradise of the Fathers* by 'Anānīshō'. This text is key to understanding the structure of the *Paradise of the Fathers*, because it contains a large part of the *HL*. From the confused indications given by 'Abdīshō's (died 1318) fourteenth century *Catalogue*, 'Dādīšō 'Qatrāiā appears to have flourished in the second half of the seventh century CE and wrote the commentary on the *Paradise of the Fathers* by Anānīsō (PO III/1, pp. 98-99) and other works. This text has been preserved in its entirety in a codex of BL, Add. 17,264 (n. 930 of Wright's *Catalogue*) (thirteenth century CE).

In the same collection there are at least two fragmentary manuscripts and a summary, connected to Dādīšō: Add. 17,263 (n. 931 of Wright's *Catalogue*) (thirteenth century CE); Add. 14,589 (n. 830 of Wright's *Catalogue*) (eleventh-twelfth century CE); Add. 17,175 (n. 932 of Wright's *Catalogue*) (tenth century CE).

Sims-Williams' interesting study (1994, pp. 65-84) has been followed by other general works on the subject. For example, D. Phillips of the

3 Sinai fol. 1ra = Milano f. 168vb = the beginning of the manuscript; Sinai f. 107vb = Milano fol. 169ra = the end of the manuscript (Lenzi 2007, pp. 17-21).

4 In fact, these texts circulated in several different collections, as in the case of manuscripts R3 (Brock 2008, p. 195).

University of Leuven proposes an interesting comparative method (2012, pp. 1-23). The comparison of *Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers* with the *Paradise* itself and the careful analysis of Dādīšō's other extant works – for example, the *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* – can shed light on the history and composition of its texts. The author (Phillips 2012, p. 23) states his intention as follows:

Many other avenues of research lie before us: the relationship of DOC (= *Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers*) with *Paradise* itself and the light it can shed on the history and composition of its text; the relationship between DQC (= *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*) and Dadisho's other extant works, especially DQI; the lengthy quotations of otherwise lost works such as those of Theodore of Mopsuestia; the Ethiopic version of Dadisho' and its Arabic intermediary.

We hope to shed new light on Dadisho' studies by tackling his last surviving work to be made fully accessible to the scholarly world.

Evidently, these writers from Qatar were all educated in a major school-system practised in monastic circles, which was certainly not inferior to the famous schools where many monks had been trained (Becker 2006, pp. 169-203; Bettliolo 2012, pp. 263-280).

This is the cultural background of Dādīšō's work, which also includes the *Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers*. The great many quotations from Theodore of Mopsuestia in Dādīšō's *Commentary* are very important for understanding seventh-century Eastern Syriac ascetic and mystical thinking (Phillips 2014, pp. 205-230). This information must have been available to Eastern Syriac monastic circles of the seventh century where the Lausiac material has been constantly used. In fact, in the seventh century, after Abraham of Kaškar's reform which adopted the criteria of Egyptian monasticism as the structure of the monastery (as a *Laura*) (Chialà 2005, Jullien 2008), new elements were introduced: for example, the close relationship between work and silence, and the connection between prayer, reading and liturgical practice to counter the drift towards Messalianism.

As V. Berti (2010, p. 178) says «La comunità si pensava come cenobitica e il modello, sotto il profilo degli intenti, era quello pacomiano anche se a ben vedere la comunità era organizzata [...] come una laura».

In this scenario, the typical elements of Eastern monasticism coexisted with the urban theological academies; monks who where trained in Nisibi read the Fathers of Egyptian monasticism, putting this interaction with Antiochene theology and spirituality.

These practices were not always successful, due to the inconstancy of the monks who were appointed to lead the monasteries.

However, Abraham's reform was consolidated and its norms were

observed in other contexts (Nau 1918-1919, pp. 161-172; Chialà 2005, pp. 89-93): among them, the monastery of Rabban Šabur on Mount Suster in Bet Huzaye, where Dādīšō Qatrāyā lived in solitude.

Here Dādīšō practised the *way of perfection/šelya*, a term with a polysemous value in the author's works.

In this case as well, the relationship between this term and the corresponding Greek term highlights a complex reworking of materials and meanings in order to produce a model of perfection: *šelya*/ἡσυχία = the sublime way; ἁπλάθεια (del Rio Sanchez 2009, pp. 139-150).

What we have said so far with reference to the innovations introduced by Abraham of Kaškar and the peculiarities of Dādīšō Qatrāyā's works certainly invites reflection on the complex issue of the bonds and divisions which throughout the Syro-Oriental monastic history either brought monastic ideology and the school movement closer together or set them apart (Bettiolo 2012, pp. 268-278).

If it is true that the familiarity with the models offered by Egyptian asceticism has become a topos (and indeed much has been written on the subject in recent years) it is also true that in the work of the solitary monk from Qatar we can find the signs of the consolidation of an educational practice that can be attributed to both monastic ideology and the school movement.

Neither a theorist nor a mystic, Dādīšō should be regarded rather as a teacher of monks. In his works, pervaded with Evagrian spirituality and influenced by the experience of John the Solitary, we find a whole of different experiences (del Rio Sanchez, pp. 143-146). But it is not a random or chaotic conglomerate; on the contrary, with considerable critical intelligence the author presents the various elements of his reflection gained through reading the Scriptures and the authors who, in part, were witnesses: Ephrem, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Evagrius and Theodore of Mopsuestia are widely cited as the latest studies by D. Phillips show (Phillips 2012, 2014).

But there is more. The hypothesis of the consolidation of a certain monastic-scholastic practice in Dādīšō's work is confirmed by the valorisation of the whole tradition among the cycle of Mar Eugenius, an alleged disciple of Pachomius, and the establishment of Greek-Egyptian monasticism in Mesopotamia (Berti 2010, pp. 161-164).

This very controversial hagiographic cycle may have found its historical foundation in Thomas of Margā's *Monastic History* which speaks of Greek exiles during the time of Valens (364-368). This cycle was absent from the monastic reflection of Eastern Christianity before Dādīšō (Berti 2010, p. 162). Moreover, Dādīšō also used the debate on corruption of monastic life towards the end of the seventh century CE as a teaching.

Dādīšō, then, established the monastic tradition of Egyptian origin through a meticulous elaboration of materials related to the exploits of the Desert Fathers.

This editorial technique was not uncommon in the Syro-Oriental monas-

tic context of the seventh century. In fact, Thomas of Margā, in the section that he dedicates to Anānīšō in the *Book of Governors* (II, XI) (Budge 1893, 1, pp. 79-80; 2 [Eng. Transl.], pp. 177-178), among other information, mentions a piece of writing that stood over the monk's cell door (Budge preferred to translate «upon the walls of his cell») along with other 'annotations' or 'clarifications' (Budge preferred the translation «definitions» and «divisions»; I prefer 'annotations' or 'clarifications', terms related to the concept of 'discernment', which validates the presence of a mystical thinking) that were found inside.

This may have been either preparatory material for the *Paradise of the Fathers* or a series of sayings/anecdotes which the other monks, who shared the experience of solitary life with him, may have asked him to gather together in a systematic collection. This second hypothesis appears to be more plausible and, if demonstrated, might prove the presence and consolidation of specific publishing techniques in Syro-Oriental monastic circles in the seventh century (Phillips 2012, 2014).

#### 4 The Translator's Choices: Some Examples

I will now adopt a different argument to certify some characteristics of the Lausiatic material. I aim to analyse parallel passages drawn from two traditions (Greek and Syriac) in order to identify genuine Syriac variants that might indicate an intentional choice on the part of the translator, and not a random one. I will start from the edition by Draguet (1978) which divided the manuscript tradition of the Syriac versions of *HL* into two sections: SoPa (= *Sources du Paradis*, sixth century CE) and Pa (= *Tradition du Paradis*, seventh century CE). The manuscripts SoPa, are representative of more ancient testimonies (Draguet 1978, pp. 17-44); the manuscripts Pa, retain several Egyptian monastic texts (Draguet 1978, pp. 44-113).

R1 and R2, the most ancient texts, are of particular interest and neither contains the *letter* of Lausus and they are not as complete as *HL* (Draguet 1978, pp. 76-83; Brock 2008, p. 194). In fact, these texts must be properly attributed to their authors<sup>5</sup> (Brock 2008, p. 195) and must be identified in their context of production and circulation as well as in relation to other possible translations (Coptic and Latin, but also Armenian and Ethiopian). In the case of *HL* it is also necessary to identify the real addressee of the work (Brock 2008, p. 194).<sup>6</sup>

5 Hieronimus or Rufinus? The debate among scholars is still open.

6 Lausus or Publicola? According to Brock's opinion, Publicola, the son of Melania the Elder, «would be an eminently appropriate person to whom a work on the Egyptian monks» (Brock 2008, p. 194).

Draguet described the general subdivision of *HL*'s manuscript tradition as follows

Nous désignons par SoPa (= Sources du Paradis) toute la tradition du Vie s., par opposition à MssPa tradition du Paradis VIIe s. Le sigle SoPa comporte une part de convention, car le a du graphique, - en fait la recension R1 - n'apparaît pas dans le Paradis; elle se justifie pour deux raisons: outre que, par sa date (Vie s.), R1 aurait pu parvenir à Anan Isho, le Paradis a remployé R2, très voisin de R1, les deux formes R1 et R2 dérivant en parallèle d'un R1/R2 dont le caractère linguistique est très particulier. [...]

Dans l'expression SoPa, l'élément So (= Source) recouvre donc à la fois les sources réelles du Paradis et celles que l'on peut qualifier de potentielles. (Draguet 1978, p. 15)

The author explains the relationship between R1 and R2 and this point may shed light on the original context of the texts and the various historical and theological implications. As we have seen, even modern authors have done this, superficially, with some exceptions. Bunge and Nickau, for example, analysed the particular linguistic forms in the most ancient texts R1/R2 (Bunge 1990, Nickau 2001), and above all, Lenzi's work on the fragments of the Ambrosiana manuscripts identified significant variants in the collections and correctly interpreted the gaps in the texts. Lenzi also studied the Syriac fragments comparing them with the Greek tradition and has highlighted differences and similarities (Lenzi 2007).

Therefore, the complex manuscript tradition of the Syriac versions of Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca* still awaits study.

Now I want to provide some examples of interpretation of the Syriac text in relation to the Greek reference text. The edition of the Greek text of *HL*, published by Butler, remains extremely important for the comparison of the information on the manuscript tradition of the text. On the basis of Butler's edition there are two versions of *HL*, a short one (G) and a long one (B) (Butler 1898, p. 77). The shorter version is very similar to the original text, while the longer one is the result of the merge with the *Historia Monachorum*. The version B was translated by Rufinus and was written after the *HL*.

The chapter subdivision that I use in this paper is based on the one proposed by Butler and Draguet in their editions (Butler 1898; Draguet 1978). However it does not correspond to any internal subdivision in the manuscript that contains the most ancient text G (twelfth century CE). According to Draguet, R1 and R2 reflect a lost form of Greek, more ancient than the ones found in manuscripts G and B (Draguet 1978, pp. 5-14). In any case, R3 and R4, which translate G and B respectively, also lend themselves to interesting interpretations.

However, the chronological subdivision proposed by Draguet remains a valid point of reference.

In accordance with the author's subdivision, I have chosen two passages concerning holy women. The passages deal with similar topics but are substantially different because they come from two Syriac manuscript traditions, but are not devoid of originality.

The first case (SoPa = text form R3 c. 41A) is a short story about female types common in Christian circles in Late Antiquity (Draguet 1978, pp. 289-290, French translation 1978, p. 192) whereas the second case (Pa = text form R4 c. 61) concerns the short narration of Melania the Younger's *Life*. This is a famous text (Draguet 1978, pp. 335-338, French translation 1978, pp. 217-219), much studied in the Greek and Latin versions as an important source for the history of Late Antiquity.

The first example is reconstructed through a group of manuscript sources indicated by Draguet with letters *CHTB*, within the materials of R3 (SoPa, Pa1).<sup>7</sup> The chapter is preserved in the manuscript BL, Add. 17,173 in Estrangelo on parchment and dated to the sixth or seventh century CE. The codex (BL, Add. 12,173) is divided into two parts = ff. 2-117 and ff. 118-181, and the whole text was composed by the same author.

The scribe may have read the two parts in two separate codices and may have joined them later, inserting the Lausiac material. I am interested in the second part of the codex which contains chapter 41A (ff.126vb-127va). This part is characterized by the presence of Lausiac material and some extracts from the *Apophthegmata*.

According to the Greek text G (short) and a small group of Greek Mss B (long) the Syriac version SoPa gives only a brief introduction on the «Holy Women» (see Draguet 1978, p. 289). This has been interpreted as being the unintended result of the translator's work. However, the short story can be read independently from the Greek text (see also Rapp 1998, pp. 431-448).

In fact, although the model of the manly woman belongs to the whole ascetic experience, in the case of the Syriac text it is inserted in a religious and spiritual context which is more fluid and heterogeneous than the Greek models and ascetic practices. The Syriac text highlights a context where the intervention of God's grace to support women's struggles to fight like men (Gr.), is the result of instinctive willpower (Syr.) and the practice of virtue (Gr.) is transformed into an innate excellence (Syr.)

The use of short stories in the Syriac versions of *HL* reflects the particular approach of the Syriac translator who is inclined to propose some selected examples and certifies the originality of his choice (Draguet 1978, p. 290; Mohrmann, Bartelink 1985, pp. 210-211; Rapp 1998, pp. 431-448).

<sup>7</sup> This manuscript tradition has been fully reported by Draguet (1978, pp. 21-44).

The Syriac version of the *Life* of Melania the Younger is in a codex dating from the ninth-tenth century CE. The codex is a part of the main group of codices related to the Syriac *Paradise* and contains many parts of the Lausiac materials along with the *Apophthegmata* (Pa/R4). Naturally this text deserves to be studied in depth because it can be compared with the Greek texts of the *Life* of Melania the Younger (VG).<sup>8</sup>

Briefly, in this case it is interesting to note some variants made in the Syriac version which can be attributed to the differences in cultural context with respect to the Greek. An example is the presence of Biblical quotations that the Syriac translator cites directly, unlike the Greek text of *HL* and the *VG*.<sup>9</sup> Probably, the Syriac translator used the text of the Syriac Bible, which was more familiar to him and his readers.

Another important aspect is the maternity of Melania: both versions, Syriac and Greek remember the double maternity of Melania as the cause of her subsequent chastity.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, in Greek versions of the *Life* the woman's attitude seems to be inspired by a sense of liberation, reflecting a long tradition on maternity typical of the Christian West (Duby, Perrot 1990; Ales Bello 2004; Corsi 2004; Osiek, Macdonald, Tulloch 2007). In the Syriac text, however, this attitude appears blurred: the death of children and the pain of this loss become the main causes of the radical choice taken by the holy woman.

On the contrary, the different number of children reported by the sources (*HL* and *VG*), may be the result of a copyist's mistake. The processing of materials by the Syriac translators in monastic circles was inspired by original choices and followed specific, established translation techniques. Certainly, there are important differences with respect to the Greek text that help us understand the Syriac text. Other aspects, of course, will be brought to light after a thorough study of the text.

## 5 Conclusions

With these brief examples I have tried to demonstrate the need to carry out further research into a set of materials which constitute a remarkable testimony of the cultural monastic context of Christian Syria and Persia.

A close comparison between the Syriac translations and the Greek text will allow us broaden our understanding of the specific historical and cultural scenario of the Syriac translations and will shed light on the strategies and techniques of translations used in Late Antiquity and the early Medieval period.

8 The reference translation is Mohrmann, Bartelink 1985, pp. 264-269.

9 *Koran* 7,16. Syr. lin. 20; Gr. 61, 3 (Draguet 1978, p. 336; Mohrmann, Bartelink 1985, p. 266).

10 Syr. lin. 5; Gr. 61, 2 (Draguet 1978, p. 336; Mohrmann, Bartelink 1985, p. 264).

The study should not be limited to the search for the original Greek Vorlage of the different oriental versions, which is a recurrent pattern in philological studies. Through a textual analysis and the identification of Syriac variants, the aim of this research is to investigate the contexts of production of Syriac traditions and to decipher the message and choices of the translator inside a precise theological, ideological and cultural context, as well as to explore the relationship between Greek, Coptic and Syriac monastic ideals.

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