# "POPULAR" GREEK LITERATURE ON THE MOVE: THE TRANSLATION OF SEVERAL WORKS OF AGAPIOS LANDOS OF CRETE INTO ARABIC IN THE 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY[*]

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In der Frühen Neuzeit – vornehmlich im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert – zeigte sich in der arabischen Literatur ein neues Phänomen: die massive Übersetzung von Werken aus modernen europäischen Sprachen ins Arabische. Die Protagonisten und die Zielgruppe dieser Bewegung waren die Christen des Orients. Die Übersetzungsaktivitäten entsprangen vor allem den intensivierten Kontakten der christlichen Kommunitäten Syriens mit dem Westen, müssen aber auch als Ausdruck indigener Prozesse des kulturellen und religiösen Erwachens in den Kirchen der Region verstanden werden. Während die übersetzten Werke in ihrer Mehrzahl in europäischen Hochsprachen verfasst und für einen begrenzten Leserkreis bestimmt waren, gibt es auch wenige Beispiele von Übersetzungen von Büchern aus Volkssprachen ins Arabische. Als Beispiel für diesen Transfer populärer Literatur wird nachfolgend der Fall des Agapios Landos (before 1590–ca. 1671) näher betrachtet. Der aus Kreta stammende Athosmönch Agapios war einer der populärsten griechischen Autoren des 17. Jahrhunderts. Einige seiner Werke wurden noch zu seinen Lebzeiten ins Arabische übertragen. Die Übersetzungen wurden von Makarius ibn az-Zaʿīm (gest. 1672), dem produktivsten Autor der arabischsprechenden Orthodoxen seiner Zeit, durchgeführt bzw. angeregt. Es soll diskutiert werden, warum Makarius die Werke des Agapios der Übersetzung wert befand und wie sie von den arabischen Lesern aufgenommen wurden.

**Keywords:** Greek popular literature, Christian Arabic literature, Agapios Landos, Macarius ibn al-Zaʿīm, translations.

## 1. Introduction

The Greek language and literature have been for long periods characterized by the phenomenon of *diglossia*, the existence of two varieties of language, differing in terms of grammar and lexis, grade of standardization, usage, etc. Actually,

the term *diglossia* was coined to describe the situation of Greek at the end of the 19th century. Beside an 'elevated' variety of Greek that had developed in Byzantine times from the classical language of ancient Greece and was mainly used for writing, there existed the vernacular, the language spoken by the people in real life. This form, called *Dimotiki*, also developed into a written language as the understanding of Ancient (Attic) and Byzantine Greek demanded a thorough linguistic training which people increasingly lacked.

The first examples of written vernacular appeared already in the 10th/11th centuries, but exclusively as a stylistic feature. It was only a few centuries later that authors started to write in the spoken language in order to make their texts understandable for the people. Furthermore, classical texts were rendered in the written vernacular too.[1]

## 2. Agapios Landos of Crete

One of the protagonists of this movement in early modern times was Agapios Landos (in the following only Agapios). He came from Crete, which played a pioneer role in the transformation of the vernacular into a written language.[2] Agapios regarded the production of books in the popular speech as his life-task imposed on him by God.[3] We do not know much about his life. As has been said, Agapios originated from Crete where he was born before 1590 when the island was still ruled by Venice. Beside Greek he knew Italian; whether he was also versed in Latin is debated. Later Agapios became a monk at Mount Athos. After a life mainly devoted to writing and publishing he died around the year 1671.[4]

In his *Encyclopedia of Modern Greek Literature* Bruce Merry summarizes the literary merits of Agapios as follows: "Agapios Landos gave generations of deprived Greeks some of their favorite reading. He wrote in an accessible style, signing his pages 'from Friar Agapios,' or 'one who trained at Mount Athos.'"[5]

Agapios composed more than a dozen works which mainly consist of translations or compilations paraphrased into the language spoken by the ordinary people of his time. This kind of prose literature which used a language that "differed only very little from the standard speech of the time […] comprises a substantial chapter in the literary history of Crete that has yet to receive the scholarly treatment it deserves".[6] And Agapios is a good example of this neglect: so

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[1] On these aspects of Greek literature see Lendari, "Beginnings"; Hinterberger, "Vernacular literature".

[2] See Knös, *Littérature néo-grecque*, 197 (on Cretan literature in general: 186–271); Kaklamanis "Cretan literature", 44.

[3] He explains this in the introduction to one of his works (see Klein, *Legende*, 46).

[4] On the life and works of Agapios see Tomadakis, "Il Monaco Agapio", and the short bio-bibliographical survey in Klein, *Legende*, 45–51.

[5] Merry, *Encyclopedia*, 243.

[6] Kaklamanis, "Cretan literature", 54.

far only one study has been written that deals comprehensively with his person and his work.[7]

Agapios' magnum opus is a work entitled *Amartolon Sotiria* ("Salvation of the Sinners"), in the words of Merry "an edifying discussion of miracles, virtue, penance, fasting, and money"[8]. The author himself saw it as a "handbook of ascetics for the people in the parishes".[9] The work consists of three parts, dealing with a) the different types of sins, b) the confession, the Eucharist and eschatology and c) the miracles of the Mother of God. Agapios compiled "Salvation of the Sinners" from different sources, amongst them some of Italian, non-Orthodox origin. The work appeared in 1641 in Venice in print and enjoyed a tremendous popularity. By 1972 34 editions had appeared and we know of translations into Arabic, Romanian, Turkish and other languages.[10]

One focus of Agapios' literary activities was the translation of hagiographic texts into the vernacular. He produced five works containing saints' lives for which he mainly relied on Simeon Metaphrastes, the undisputed master of Medieval Greek hagiography. Only the *Kalokerini* (Venice 1657), his last work in that genre, contains saints' lives of non-Metaphrastic, so far unspecified origins. All these hagiographic works met also with great success and experienced many editions.[11]

Although there seems to be no general and undisputed definition of what "popular literature" is, there can be no doubt that Agapios was a popular author. By using the vernacular, the language understood by all, he wrote for wide strata of people and not for a distinctive group. His choice of this level of language means that he aimed to be popular. And as his works were highly appreciated by the public and much read it is also justifiable to declare him popular from the reader's point of view.

## 3. Arabic translations of works by Agapios Landos

It has already been said that "Salvation of the Sinners" was also translated into other languages, amongst them Arabic. The merit for that goes to a man who, like Agapios, devoted his intellectual activities to providing his fellow-countrymen with edifying and exemplary information for a pious life agreeable to God. I refer to Macarius ibn al-Zaʿīm, a churchman from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch who served from 1635 until 1647 as metropolitan of his native town, Aleppo, and from then on until his death as Patriarch of Antioch. He was not only a

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[7] Kostula, *Agapios Landos* (this work was not available to me). Wassilios Klein, who made extensive use of Kostula's work, has contributed a very valuable study of the legend of *Barlaam and Josaphat* in the version of Agapios (Klein, *Legende*).

[8] Merry, *Encyclopedia*, 243.

[9] Klein, *Legende*, 48.

[10] Klein, *Legende*, 48.

[11] Ibid., 49–50.

devoted and active leader of his community but also the most prolific writer the Arabic speaking Orthodox knew in early modern times. Like Agapios, Macarius came mainly to the fore as a translator and compiler who drew heavily on Greek sources. Much of the material he used for his writings came into his possession during his travels abroad. Financial pressures drove Macarius to undertake two long journeys which took him to the Romanian principalities, the Ukraine, Russia and Georgia.[12] Especially the second journey to Georgia and Russia carried a high yield in terms of the literary outcome as Macarius himself tells his readers: "In order not to stay idle I used to work hard at translating from among the Greek books (*al-kutub al-rūmiyya*) those which had not been available in our language and our land, and I rendered them into our tongue because of the benefit to be obtained from them. And I used to ask those who knew it [sc. Greek] [about] the meaning of the words and their explanation and did as I was able and translated ten books during this second absence […]."[13]

Amongst these ten books are also two works by Agapios: the *Kalokerini*, a collection of non-Metaphrastic saints' lives for the summer months (no. 3 in Macarius' list), and the miracles worked by the Virgin Mary which formed the third part of "Salvation of the Sinners" (no. 9). Whether another work called "The new [book of] treasures" (no. 10) can be attributed to Agapios is not sure (see below 3.5). But Macarius had encountered the works of the Cretan monk already during his first journey, as becomes clear from his own words: "And I, the humble [servant of God], during our first journey translated five books with God's help. They contain [amongst other things] about 50 saints' lives which are absent from our language and our country and are among those which Agapios the Cretan has collected."[14]

Thus we can identify three different works by Macarius which are based on Agapios: The fifty lives of saints, the *Kalokerini* and "The Miracles of the Virgin Mary". Furthermore, there exists a translation of the first two parts of "Salvation of the Sinners" by Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir, a close confident of Macarius and a collaborator in the patriarch's intellectual projects. In addition Macarius translated two other works whose authorship cannot be attributed with certainty to Agapios Landos.

Let us take a closer look at these works by Agapios translated into Arabic.

### 3.1. *The fifty saints' lives*

Joseph Nasrallah believes that these lives formed a single volume ("recueil complet des cinquante") which has not come to light so far.[15] I have a different understanding of what Macarius meant by saying:

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[12] On the life and works of Macarius ibn al-Zaʿīm see Graf, *Geschichte*, 94–110; Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 87–127; Walbiner, *Mitteilungen*, 8–38.

[13] Quoted in Rosen, *Notices*, 133; see also Al-Zayyāt, *Khazāʾin al-kutub*, 141–142.

[14] Rosen, *Notices*, 135; Al-Zayyāt, *Khazāʾin al-kutub*, 143.

[15] Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 106.

والفقير ايضا اخرجت فى سفرنا الاوله بمعونة الله خمسه كتب فيهم مقدار خمسين خبر قديس معدومين من
لساننا وبلادنا ومن الذين جمعهم اغابيوس الاقريطشي ومعهم مسايل كثيره واجوبتها وقوانين كثيره وشرايع
تشتمل على المواريت [...] وغير ذلك من كتب المعلّمين والمورخين [...][16]

"And [I] the humble [servant of God] also translated five books during our first journey with the help of God. In them there are about fifty lives of saints unavailable in our language and our land, and they are among those collected by Agapios the Cretan. And beside them [there are] many questions and their answers and many canons and legal regulations concerning matters of inheritance […] and other things [drawn] from the books of the learned and the historians […]."

One can understand this passage to mean that the 50 lives of saints can be found dispersed through the works Macarius had written during his first journey and not in a single book. Georg Graf identifies the subjects mentioned by Macarius – including the 50 lives – with the contents of a collection of miscellanea called *al-Majmū' al-mubārak*, written by Macarius in 1757/58.[17] This work contains indeed a lot of hagiographic material[18], but many other writings of Macarius are dedicated to the lives and deeds of the saints. They have mostly not been thoroughly investigated and could indeed contain pieces going back to Agapios Landos.

Be that as it may, the 50 lives have so far not been identified and we are thus unable to say from which work or works of Agapios they were taken. From an allusion in Macarius' introduction to his translation of the *Kalokerini* to which I shall turn subsequently, it may be concluded that Macarius extracted these 50 lives from several works by Agapios and not only from the *Neos Paradeisos* as Georg Graf assumes[19], which could in any case not have been possible as the work appeared only in 1664 (and not in 1641 as Graf has it).

### 3.2. *Salvation of the Sinners*

During the period of Macarius' first journey his close confident Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir[20] who had stayed behind in Syria translated the first two parts of "Salvation of the Sinners". The complete work was entitled *Khalāṣ al-khuṭāt*, – an exact rendering from the Greek – but separate translations of the two parts with individual titles also existed.[21] One copy of the second part is dated 1659, without further specifications about the circumstances of the translation.[22] It is possible that Macarius commissioned Yūsuf to make the translation as he had done before when

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[16] Rosen, *Notices*, 135.

[17] Graf, *Geschichte*, 100.

[18] On the content of this work see Graf, *Geschichte*, 99–100 and Slīm, "Makhṭūṭ 'Majmū' mubārak'".

[19] Graf, *Geschichte*, 100, n. 1.

[20] On Yūsuf see Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 206–209.

[21] Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 208.

[22] Graf, *Geschichte*, 108.

he entrusted Yūsuf and his son Paul with the translation of Matthew Kigalas' history of the Byzantine Empire into Arabic.[23] But it is also possible that Yūsuf came into possession of Agapios' book when Macarius was away and started to translate it on his own initiative. Be that as it may, it seems that Yūsuf died before he could complete his work, as we read in a colophon where an otherwise unknown Ibrāhīm al-Dimashqī claims to have completed the translation after Yūsuf's death,[24] which happened sometime between 1659 and 1667. The Arabic translation was extremely successful. Nasrallah says that the majority of [church] libraries possessed copies of the work, which was also printed in Jerusalem in 1889.[25]

### 3.3. *Kalokerini*

Macarius called this collection of non-Metaphrastic saints' lives "The book of the stories, lives and legends of some prophets, martyrs, women saints and pious men" (*Kitāb qiṣaṣ wa-siyar wa-akhbār baʿḍ al-rusul wa-l-shuhadā*[*'*] *wa-l-qiddīsāt wa-l-abrār*). As it contains the lives of saints whose festivals are celebrated in summer, the book also became known as "The estival book" (*al-Kitāb al-ṣayfī*).[26] Macarius composed a most interesting introduction[27] on which I would like to dwell a little.

After having informed the reader of his efforts to collect information on the saints from all parts of his own patriarchate, Macarius gives a historical overview of the development of collections of the saint's lives starting with "Simeon the Translator", i.e. Simeon Metaphrastes, in the tenth century up to Maximus [Margunios], bishop of Kythera, in the seventeenth, who was the first to compose such a collection in the vernacular. This had become necessary as most of the people were no longer able to understand the "classical" texts. Macarius describes this process of linguistic degradation and partly even annihilation very clearly and in some detail.[28]

Agapios Landos is then introduced as follows: "And then, after him [Bishop Maximus], in our times a priest-monk named Bābā [= *Papas*] Agapios appeared from the monastery of the Georgians [i.e. Iviron] which is on the Holy Mountain [i.e. Mount Athos][29]. He was very learned and loved to take pains in doing what is good and virtuous. And he too went to great lengths when he saw that many

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[23] Rosen, *Notices*, 135; Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 95.

[24] Ms. Dayr ʿAṭīya, Orthodox community church, 30; see *Waṣf li-l-kutub*, 41.

[25] Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 207. It is worth noting that the work transcended confessional boundaries as copies are also to be found in Syrian Catholic, Maronite and Melkite libraries (see Graf, *Geschichte*, 108).

[26] On this work see Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 104–105.

[27] Edition by Kilzī, "'Ināyat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs".

[28] Kilzī, "'Ināyat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs", 620–623, 686.

[29] According to Tomadakis, Agapios was a monk at the Great Lavra monastery on Mount Athos (Tomadakis, "Il Monaco Agapio", 381).

Christians did not know the holy books but were hungry and yearned to understand and know them. He took much trouble and exerted himself, going through the holy books in Ancient Greek (*al-kutub al-muqaddasa al-yūnāniyya*), which are available in their monastery in countless numbers and are old and authentic (*al-qadīma al-qawīma*). And he translated from them all that the believers are in need of, from the lives of the saints, the useful sermons which are read on the feasts of the Lord and the Mother of God and other [saints]. And he rendered them all in the language of the Greeks (*al-Rūm*) who live nowadays and translated them from Ancient Greek (*al-yūnānī*) so that men, women and children, and all the priests and monks could understand and derive benefit from them. He shortened some of the saints' lives and authored several books of these [lives]. He gave each book its own title."[30]

Macarius then tells how Agapios arranged for the printing of these books in Venice and provides his readers with some interesting insights into the functioning of the European book market and printing business.[31]

Finally Macarius reports how he came across the works of Agapios and what made him translate parts of them into Arabic. He says: "And whenever I, the humble [servant of God], forced by necessity to go abroad, saw his above-mentioned books and discovered in them a [saint's] life which did not exist in our lands, I used to take great pains to translate it into our language. And I translated from these books about 50 lives of saints, other than [those in] this book. Finally I saw another book of Agapios' which he composed at the end of his life. In it were the lives of some saints whose feast-days fall in summertime. He therefore called it 'The estival book'. And I translated from it into our language all these [saints'] lives which are in this book. And as the [memorial of the] Seven Youths [i.e. the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus] rising from sleep falls on the fourth day of August and [that of] their passing away on the 22nd of October, he put their lives in the days of summer.

And I made this in order to bequeath these accounts to my Christian brethren for their benefit, so that they might read in them and hear them, and especially write them down and distribute them amongst their loved ones and make them available in all our lands. And there will be great reward for them in that. […] Blessing and mercy from the mouth of Jesus Christ be upon all who do this [i.e. write or copy these lives] and listen to [them] and order [others] to do so. And I have called this book 'The book of the stories, lives and accounts of some prophets, martyrs, women saints and pious men'."[32]

The copyist of the manuscript containing the "Foreword" which I have quoted from says that Macarius translated the *Kalokerini* when he was in Georgia (*fī bilād al-akrāj*).[33] It is known that Macarius stayed in Georgia twice during his

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[30] Kilzī, "'Ināyat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs", 687.

[31] Kilzī, "'Ināyat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs", 687–689; see also Walbiner, "Observations", 75.

[32] Kilzī, "'Ināyat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs", 689–690.

[33] Ibid., 690.

second journey, first for one and a half years from 1664 to 1666 and then again for nearly one year in 1669/1670.[34] The work must have been written before February 21, 1668, which is the date given in the colophons for the completion of another work by Agapios that Macarius translated into Arabic (see below). As Macarius does not mention the latter translation in his "Foreword" to the *Kalokerini* it must have been written later. This means that the *Kalokerini* was translated during Macarius' first stay in Georgia.

### 3.4. *The Miracles of the Virgin Mary*

In February 1668, while in Russia, Macarius translated "The Miracles of the Virgin Mary" (*'Ajā'ib al-sayyida al-adhrā'*) which form the third part of "Salvation of the Sinners" but also circulated separately.

The work in its Arabic translation contains 68 miracles; the Greek original has 69[35]. In a short introduction Macarius says that he translated it into "our Arabic language" (*lughatinā al-'arabiyya*) so that it can be of benefit to all Arabs (*jamī' abnā' al-'arab*).[36] Agapios' sources have been identified by Despoina Kostula: beside the liturgical books *Menaion* and *Pentekostarion* Agapios drew on Simeon Metaphrastes, some unidentified manuscripts, a work written in 1599 by the Cretan priest Ioannes Morezenos (d. 1613), from whom Agapios also received oral information, and a miracle Agapios had witnessed himself. Furthermore, 37 of the 69 chapters can be traced back to a collection of miracles (*Miracoli Di Nostra Donna*, Florence 1576) composed by Silvano Razzi (1527–1611), a Florentine Renaissance author. Some of these stories had already been used by Morezenos, but this does not alter the fact that Agapios made use of Western, i.e. Catholic sources.[37] Wassilios Klein has proven that this has not to be regarded as a theological deviation from Orthodox positions, although Agapios admitted that the material he made use of might contain some dogmatic errors. "Agapios appears therefore as an author who is influenced by Roman Catholic literature inasmuch as he wants to use the good contained in it […] without thinking of union, conversion or denial of the dogmatic differences."[38] In this respect too there is a great similarity with the attitudes Macarius developed towards western sources.

Although it is not easy to measure the perception of the Arabic version of "The miracles of the Virgin Mary", the relatively high number of surviving manuscripts indicates that it became a widely read book amongst Arab readers – even beyond confessional boundaries.[39]

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[34] See Walbiner, *Mitteilungen*, 20–22, 26–27.

[35] Klein, *Legende*, 71.

[36] Al-Bustānī, *'Ajā'ib al-sayyida al-adhrā'*, 45.

[37] Klein, *Legende*, 71.

[38] Ibid., 72.

[39] There are copies in Maronite and Melkite libraries (see Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 113). A manuscript kept at the Maronite monastery of St. Anthony in Rome bears the strange title "The Miracles of Lourdes" (*Kitāb 'Ajā'ib Lūrd*) (see Fahd, *Fahāris*, 42, no. 104), perhaps to make the book more attractive to the Catholic readership.

### 3.5. *Works whose attribution to Agapios Landos is uncertain*

In the list of the works he translated or composed during his second journey Macarius mentions as the last entry a book which "I have called a book of comfort [and] which anyone who wants might name 'The new [book of] treasures'"[40]. A book by this title is mentioned by Macarius in his description of the works of Agapios Landos contained in the introduction to the translation of the *Kalokerini*: "Then he composed another book and called it 'The new [book of] treasures' ([*Kitāb*] *al-Kunūz al-jadīd*), because some years before him a virtuous deacon called Damaskinos had appeared and had written a book full of wonderful treatises on all the feasts of the Lord, the Mother of God, the great saints and the important Sundays. And he called it 'The book of treasures'[41]. He composed it in the tongue of the masses so that they could understand it; and it is very wonderful. And therefore Agapios called his book 'The new [book of] treasures' (*al-Kunūz al-jadīd*)."[42]

Ms. Damascus, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, 161 (copied in 1789), which I have not examined personally, seems to be the only extant copy of that work in Arabic. According to the catalogue "it contains treatises on the seven feasts of the Lord, the explanation of each of it, what was its reason and what is the name of that feast, and [treatises] on the lives and the praise of the great saints".[43] Whether the title *Mawā'iẓ (al-Kunūz al-jadīd)* ("Sermons [The new (book of) treasures]") is to be found in the manuscript or it was given it by the cataloguer is not clear. Although the name of the original's author is not mentioned, the striking similarity in content makes it very likely that the Damascus manuscript is a translation of "The new book of treasures" by Agapios Landos. A remark notes that Patriarch Macarius composed the work in 1668 AD while in foreign lands.[44]

Based on a manuscript in Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ (Jūn/Lebanon), Georg Graf mentions that Macarius translated from the Greek "the 14th chapter of 'The Paradise' with instructions on the 32 virtues and 32 vices, the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit, the 7 sacraments of the Church, the 7 main virtues and the opposite vices".[45] Agapios is the author of a work called "Paradise" (*Paradeisos*), whose existence was known to Macarius.[46] But according to Wassilios Klein *Paradeisos* is a collection of saints' lives[47] and therefore could not have been the source of the above-mentioned translation.

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[40] Rosen, *Notices*, 134–135; Al-Zayyāt, *Khazā'in al-kutub*, 142.

[41] Macarius refers here to Damaskinos Studites (c. 1500–1577) and his work *Thisavros* which he also translated into Arabic (see Rosen, *Notices*, 134; Al-Zayyāt, *Khazā'in al-kutub*, 142; Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 117–118, without mentioning the author).

[42] Kilzī, "'Ināyat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs", 687.

[43] *Al-Makhṭūṭāt*, 26.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Graf, *Geschichte*, 110.

[46] The Arabic title he gives is *al-Firdaws* (Kilzī, "'Ināyat al-baṭriyark Makāriyūs", 687).

[47] Klein, *Legende*, 49.

## 4. Conclusion

The material presented in this paper allows some general observations which can serve as a conclusion:

1. All the translations of Agapios' works into Arabic were made in the 17th century, relatively soon after the publication of the Greek editions.

2. All translations are connected with Macarius ibn al-Za'īm: three, perhaps even four works were translated by him personally; another one was rendered into Arabic by a member of his entourage.

3. The translations met with varying success. While the three parts of "Salvation of the Sinners" became real 'bestsellers' and were widely read and copied during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, the hagiographic works and the uncertain "New book of treasures" enjoyed less popularity.

The translations of selected works of Agapios Landos are fine examples of how during the 17th century popular literature moved easily from one language to another. That they were received by Arab readers partly with the same enthusiasm as in Greek circles allows us to conclude that there existed a common mood and taste amongst the Greek and Arab Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire in early modern times, deriving from their comparable political and religious situation.

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