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Plautus: *Aulularia*, translated into Arabic by A. Shaarawi, with an Introduction, Notes and Select Bibliography, *World Theater Series*, No 369, Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts and Literatures, 2014. Pp. 293. Paperback ISBN 978-99906-0-403-0

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In her preface to *Reading Roman Comedy: Poetics and Playfulness in Plautus and Terence*¹, Alison Sharrock says:

"I hated Roman comedy as an undergraduate. Not only was it hard Latin, but also it gave little promise to be worth the effort, as being apparently a stereotype-ridden exercise in lamentable literary secondariness. It was only many years later when I was forced to teach the genre that I began to see that there might be some fun in it. Perhaps I should apologise for being slow, but anecdotal research suggests that I am not alone in my early experience,.."

I believe that Alison Sharrock's experience was shared by some others, but in recent years the situation has totally changed especially regarding Plautus' comedies. We are living in the "years of Roman comedy, and Plautine scholarship", if one may say.

¹ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. ix.

Until recently, Plautus has not received much attention in the Arab-speaking world. In the last few years, Plautus has started to attract the attention of academicians in Egypt.

In 2014, an Arabic translation by Professor Abd El-Moati Shaarawi (S hereafter), of Plautus' *Aulularia* has come out to light in the series of *World Theatre*, Kuwait. It is the first Arabic translation of Plautus' *Aulularia* for over fifty years². This translation is accompanied by notes commenting on matters relevant to the translated text.

The book consists of five main parts:

- 1- Preface (pp. 11-13).
- 2- General introduction (pp. 15-119).
- 3- An Arabic translation of the play (133-249), preceded by *Dramatis Personae*.
- 4- Notes, for both the introduction (pp. 121-130) and the translation (pp. 251-274).
- 5- Comparatively extensive bibliography including the references that are relevant for both the introduction and the play itself (pp. 275-289). More specific references are to be found in the endnotes of the introduction.

The book does not include *indices*, whether a general *index* or an *index locorum*.

In his short preface, S gives more than one reason for choosing Plautus (p. 11): He had a "distinctive character", and his comedies have "special taste". He "did not imitate his predecessors, yet did not neglect their works". Though he lived "physically among the lower classes in the bottom of the society, he was swimming with his heart and mind in the waves of the upper classes which were floating on the surface".

S admits that the *Aulularia* is one of Plautus' masterpieces, though not his best, he adds that all Plautus' plays that came down to us are masterpieces.

S states (p. 12) that it is not easy to translate Greek drama, yet it is the more difficult to translate Roman drama especially Plautus'.

S mentions the difficulties that faced him in translating this play. Though the verse translation was difficult, yet the prose translation was the more difficult. So, S

² Another case in point is *Plautus: Aulularia*, Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by Keith Maclennan and Walter Stockert, Liverpool UP/Aris & Phillips, 2016, reviewed by Colin Leach, 21 November 2016:

<http://classicsforall.org.uk/book-reviews/plautus-aulularia/>

The reviewer states that: "This welcome book, the first commentary in English for just **over a century**".

preferred to translate the *Aulularia* in a language intermediate between verse and prose.

S explains that he followed line by line translation, a method he has been familiar with in his other translations from both Greek and Latin texts.

After the brief preface, S provides 104 pages to the general introduction which serves as preliminary to the reading of the play. The introduction contains some 18 sections. S talks about Plautus and his works, Plautus and the Punic wars, comedy and society, Plautus and economic life, Plautus and love, Plautus and education, Plautus and slave-master relationship, Plautus and the gods, comedy before Plautus, Roman folk arts, Greek drama, Roman drama, *contaminatio*, Roman theatre, Plautus' theatre, depicting characters, language and style. Though there is no section devoted to the use of funny words, the translator's commentary on this crucial point of Plautus' theatre is included briefly in the section of language and style (pp. 94-98). He mentions puns, word-play, jokes, double entendre, and then refers the reader to Michael Fontaine's *Funny Words in Plautine Comedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press³.

Then S arrives at his main point which is the *Aulularia* (p. 98). After presenting a synopsis of the play (pp. 98-99), S devotes 6 sections to dealing with it (pp. 99-119): the events of the play, the lost end of the play, the impact of the *Aulularia* upon subsequent theatre, the influence of Plautus upon his successors, Plautus in the Middle Ages, Plautus during the European Renaissance.

S concludes his introduction by saying that this quick tour among playwrights, in both the ancient and the modern worlds (Arabic drama is not included), reflects the importance of Plautus, and the major influence he exercised. Nevertheless, S points out that no Arab playwright acknowledges his debt to Plautus.

As far as the translation is concerned, according to S, we have but one Arabic translation of the *Aulularia*, which appeared in Baghdad, more than 50 years ago (without date).

³ In his *BMCR* (2014. 06. 52) of Michael Fontaine's book, James Tatum argues: "It's the kind of book that makes you wish it had been at hand when you attempted to translate the untranslatable and explicate the inexplicable". This statement may inspire reviewers as well to read through Fontaine's book before reviewing any Plautine play. Though Fontaine's book was published in 2010, to my knowledge, it is still innovative as far as Plautine scholarship is concerned.

Though S expresses in his introduction (pp. 102-106) doubts about the end of the play due to its unfinished state, yet in his translation there is no intervention that the verses translated are inauthentic⁴. May be S does not like to hinder the readers' perception of the play. More than one scholar suggested a different end to the play, the translator found himself facing more than one end and had to choose a suitable one. Nevertheless, S does not define the text edition he used in his translation. He just says (p. 106) that he adopted the end of the play suggested by Antonius Urceus Cordus (1446-1500).

The bibliography is reasonably up-to-date and rich (135, all of them are Anglophone), though some distinguished references are missing⁵. His introduction and notes include some other sources, both literary and historical.

To sum up, with this newly Arabic translation of the *Aulularia*, which comes to the convenience of students, hopefully it inspires researchers, and makes it a pleasure to study the play in the Arab World.

M.N.

⁴ Even in the preface, S stresses the incompleteness of the play (p.12). According to him, "what makes the translation more difficult is the fact that the play came down to us in an incomplete form".

⁵ See for one, the classic and indispensable study by Eduard Fraenkel, *Plautinisches im Plautus*, Berlin, 1922(= *Elementi plautini in Plauto*, Firenze, 1960), which is available for a wide English-speaking readership in the following edition: *Plautine Elements in Plautus*, trans. by Frances Muecke and Thomas Drevikovsky, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.