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***Virgil: The Aeneid*, translated into Arabic with notes by various hands, revised by A. Shaarawi, with an Introduction and Select Bibliography, Two Parts, 2nd edition, Cairo: National Center for Translation, 2011. Pp. 654. Binding: Paperback.**

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As a discipline, translation ranks as high in the Arab World as it does in the rest of the world. It has become a necessity for the dialogue of cultures. Some classical authors have appealed to a wider public in the Arab World; among those are Homer and Virgil, two of the greatest poets of all time. The *Aeneid* has held widespread attraction and appeal for Egyptian scholars. The first edition of an Arabic translation of the *Aeneid* was produced in the early seventies.

In 1971, an edition of a specialized academic series under the title "Greek and Latin Studies" was published in Egypt. Its first volume included the first part of Virgil's *Aeneid* rendered into Arabic prose. In 1977, a translation of the second part of the *Aeneid* was published. Owing to the lack of any other adequate complete Arabic translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, it was determined in 2011 to produce an updated version of the original 1971 and 1977 editions, a process which reflects the results of the scholarly attention paid to the *Aeneid* in Egypt during the past 34 years. This attests to the fact that Virgil has continued to be one of the best known and most widely read of classical authors among classicists in Egypt.

While remaining to a great extent faithful to the original text, one of the purposes of this Arabic translation is to offer pleasant and easy reading, even to the non-classicists who have no or only a brief knowledge of the ancient world. In his introduction to the second edition of the Arabic translation of the *Aeneid*, A. Shaarawi (hereafter Sh.) states that the preparation of an edition of the *Aeneid* in Arabic first suggested itself to him on the occasion of his coming back home after more than six years of study in both Greece and the UK. Immediately after Egypt recovered from the consequences

of 1967 War, many cultural activities were revived. Hence, a group of specialist young men decided to keep up the momentum by devoting themselves to producing a series of translations of Greek and Latin masterpieces into Arabic.

To give to the Arabic translators of the *Aeneid* their due share of the credit, let me mention them by name in order of the books translated. For the First Part: Kamal Mamdouh, Abd El-Moati Shaarawi, Farouk Farid Said, Mohammad Hamdy Ibrahim, Abdullah El-Mosallami, and Ahmed Etman. As for the Second Part, each translator has undertaken a couple of books. They are successively: Abd El-Moati Shaarawi, Mohammad Hamdy Ibrahim, and Ahmed Fouad El-Semman.

It is worth mentioning here that Sh. quotes Dante in the *Commedia*, as an inscription to the Arabic translation. Dante chose Virgil to be his guide through the underworld, paying tribute to his genius by saying:

"TU DUCA, TU SEGNORE, E TU MAESTRO" (Dante, *Inf.* II, 140)

By these words Sh. has prefaced the two editions.

At the end of the First Part of the Arabic version, there is a List of Illustrations containing 31 figures. In the Second Part, there are 47 figures. In the Arabic text there are line references to the original alongside the translation, set in Arabic numerals.

There is no dramatic change in the body of the Arabic text between the first and second editions. Sh. has not changed or modified the views which he had previously expressed in his introduction to the first edition. The new material Sh. has added to the second edition comes in the form of an updated Second Introduction, a Glossary of Proper Names, and Select Bibliography, which he has added to his new introduction. A comprehensive bibliography of Virgil is a complicated matter for any scholar. For this reason, I suppose, Sh. has found it sufficient to include just a brief Select Bibliography.

The introduction (which covers pages 11-79) offers an overview of the historical background of the Augustan Age, Virgil's life and career, his work including the three known authentic works, besides some shorter poems attributed to him, his style, and the structure of the *Aeneid*, with Arabic synopses of the individual books. The introduction concludes with a brief account of Virgil's reception in later ages, and examines the esteem with which the *Aeneid* was regarded in the centuries that followed. Sh. also briefly traces the *Aeneid*'s influence on some masterpieces of world literature, including some from Virgil's own land of Italy.

It seems that Sh. believes the assertion in Donatus' *Life* of Virgil (23), that the poet first wrote a draft of the *Aeneid* in prose, then he took up parts of this in no particular order, and turned it into verse (pp. 48ff.). This translation, however, is considered a monumental achievement as it is the first Arabic translation of the *Aeneid* from the Latin text, and was undertaken by specialists. The translators' knowledge of Greek and Latin Classics in general was naturally of special value.

In the laborious task of translating the Latin text into Arabic, it was impossible to match every Latin word in Arabic. In search for suitable Arabic phrases, the translators found it necessary to utilize more words than those used by the poet in Latin. In order to clarify the narrative for the non-specialist, Sh. adopted a useful method as a solution in the 2nd edition. He added a glossary of proper names for the sake of those without specialized classical knowledge, instead of inserting some brief descriptive phrases in the translation. The glossary also contains the main gods and heroes mentioned in the poem. In short, the glossary should be useful to both new students and the more advanced students.

In addition, the explanatory notes each translator has appended to the translation of each book help the reader understand the text. Those notes are directed toward the

elucidation of words, expressions, and allusions in the text. All this has materially increased the utility of the translation in keeping with the translators' aim at a general audience. Owing to the gulf of time and space between us and the ancient Romans, the translation, if a literal one, would be unacceptable to the Arab readers. What makes the task harder still is that the translators have done their best to produce a comprehensible and fair translation, and at the same time one that is enjoyable to modern students and scholars.

This translation may also facilitate in some measure the study of Virgil in the Arab World, since it to date the most useful for Arabic speakers. Even Arab classical scholars, who can read Virgil in the original Latin, know this translation and make use of it. In short, it enjoys readability in the absence of other outstanding Arabic translations.

To conclude, the Arabic translation of the *Aeneid*, together with the current flow of translations from Greek and Latin texts into Arabic, constitutes remarkable advances in our understanding of the intersection between Egyptian and Graeco-Roman Classics.

M. El-N.