The earliest references to Arabic translations of the Bible date back to the pre-Islamic period, although at the present time we have no textual evidence that can prove this hypothesis. The first known evidence would date, according to some authors, to the end of the 8th century CE. This is the case of a fragment of Psalm 78 (Septuagint 77) from the Qubbet el-Khazneh (a repository located in the courtyard of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus) specifically verses 20-31 and 51-61, taken from a Greek text of the LXX, together with the corresponding Arabic translation in Greek script.
From that same century come the Biblical quotations contained in the “Biography” (ṣīrah) of the Prophet Muḥammad composed by Ibn Iṣṭaqq (d. c. 767 CE). Although everything indicates that there must have been translations of Biblical texts from the 8th century onwards, a practice of systematic translation of Biblical texts began in the 9th century. The earliest translations of books from both the Old Testament (Job, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Daniel) and the New Testament (Gospels, Pauline Epistles and Catholic Epistles) belong to this century. Along with other versions of that same century, one of the oldest translations of an Old Testament text is Sinai Arabic 155, which contains the Arabic version of the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach. Everything indicates that it belongs to the 9th century.

Sinai Arabic 1, 9th century, Old Testament.
Of all the surviving manuscripts, the oldest dated manuscript is Sinai Arabic MS 151. This MS contains the Arabic text of the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul, and the Catholique Epistles, and was translated by Bishr ibn as-Sirrī in the city of Damascus from a Syriac original in year 253 of the Hijrah, which corresponds to the year 867 CE. But this is not the only 9th-century MS that contains an Arabic translation of a Biblical text. Among others, we have the MSS Sinai Arabic 72 and Vatican Arabic 13.
The various Eastern (Melkite, Syrian Orthodox, Eastern Syrian and Coptic) and Western (Mozarabs and North African groups) Christian communities planned their projects to translate the Bible into Arabic from different original texts: Greek, Syriac and Coptic in the Eastern case; in the Western case from the Latin text of the Vulgate. Obviously, the bilingual and trilingual Christian Arab translators combined various languages in contact: Arabic, Greek, Syriac, Coptic and Latin. We know that even translations done from a single language, for example Greek, were sometimes revised in parallel or later with a Syriac text.
Furthermore, Christian Arab translators inherited a number of translation techniques and strategies developed by earlier schools of Syriac translators. The techniques of literal or free translation were used, both separately and in combination, by Christian Arab translators. The choice of one or the other technique depended, in general, on the difficulty of the original text or to the exegetical possibilities it offered, or to a simple uninterested passage. When faced with a text of the latter type, the translators used the technique of *verbum e verbo*, while for more difficult texts or passages of great exegetical importance, they used the *sensus de sensu* technique.

Thus, in every translation process the translators combined the two translation techniques, together with various strategies such as the modulation of phrases or text units, duplication of terms, omissions, etc. In trying to maintain the syntax of the original language, on many occasions the literality of the translation produced a text in Arabic that does not adhere to the rules of classical Arabic. In these cases, as in fact happens with the text of the Hexaplar version, we find versions that had been conceived as a tool for purposes of study and not a text intended for the liturgy or for reading by the Christian believers.

However, all these technical features adopted by Christian Arab translators must have been conceived as a general project planned within the various ecclesiastical circumscriptions, which consisted of transferring and preserving in Arabic the legacy transmitted by the various Eastern churches over the centuries in their respective mother tongues.

The translations of Biblical texts provide relevant information about the language of the Christian Arabs both in Eastern and Western lands. To understand the use of the Arabic language by Christian Arab translators and the Arabized Christian population, we must keep in mind that Arabic was the language of the new state and that Christians used it to integrate themselves within Muslim society, but also in the social, economic and cultural spheres of the Islamic administration. However, while Arabic is the language of the Qur’an and therefore the language of God for Muslims, for Christians it is not a religious language, nor does it represent the same as for Muslims. Hence, Arabized Christian translators had no problem in using a register that sometimes did not follow the rules of classical Arabic. The influence of the dialectal environment and the interferences from the neo-Arabic would help the various registers exhibited in the Christian Arabic translations to produce texts of a singular distinctiveness at the socio-linguistic level.
Yet the texts tell us something else, because sometimes they talk about hybrid linguistic cultures: Greek-Arabic, Syriac-Arabic, Coptic-Arabic or Latin-Arabic, with an interesting linguistic and cultural symbiosis, which portray the Arabized Christians who lived under Islamic rule as wise receivers and transmitters of various cultural traditions that they intelligently combined throughout the centuries.

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