

ECONOMY, FAMILY, AND SOCIETY FROM ROME TO ISLAM

Bryson's *Management of the Estate* (*Oikonomikos Logos*) offers advice on key private concerns of the Roman elite: getting rich, managing slaves, love and marriage, bringing up children. This estate owner is a farmer and a merchant, making his money through good and effective business. His wife is co-owner of the estate and their love promotes material prosperity. Their child needs 24-hour supervision in 'all his affairs'. Bryson's book was almost certainly written in the mid first century AD, but survives mainly in Arabic. It had a profound effect on Islamic thinking on the economy and on marriage, but is virtually unknown to classicists. This new edition of the text together with the first English translation will appeal to Roman social and economic historians, students of imperial Greek literature, and all those interested in the development of Greco-Roman thought in the Islamic empire of the Middle Ages.

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ECONOMY, FAMILY,
AND SOCIETY FROM ROME
TO ISLAM

*A Critical Edition, English Translation, and Study of
Bryson's Management of the Estate*

SIMON SWAIN



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02536-3 — Economy, Family, and Society from Rome to Islam
Simon Swain
Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107025363

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First published 2013

First paperback edition 2016

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-02536-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-61513-7 Paperback

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Prefatory remarks

The present volume seeks to present Bryson's *Management of the Estate* to a majority of readers who will not be familiar with it, and to offer something new to those who are. The range of skills and the knowledge of different subjects and subdisciplines needed to do justice to the book make its interpretation a task best suited to a team or a committee. For a single author to attempt this is a bold undertaking and readers should bear in mind that their own knowledge and interests in particular areas covered by this study will certainly enable them to improve and further my examination of a work that is important for two reasons: its focus on major social problems of the early Roman empire (money, slaves, marriage, children), and its role as a fascinating and unique bridge between the vastness of the Roman world and the still vaster empire of medieval Islam.

The problems involved in approaching Bryson are of two kinds. First, his treatise survives in Arabic, with a very little in Greek, and this immediately throws up technical issues of editing, translation, and not least the reliability of the Arabic version. Second, relatively few classicists have heard of his work with the exception of scholars working in Greco-Arabic studies (in absolute terms a tiny number, especially from the Classical side) and a handful of economic historians (but not many of them), and this will perhaps lead to suspicions of its value.

With regard to the first of these problems, a mere classicist, and one less interested in and informed about matters philological than he should be, wanders in great danger. The standard edition of the text of Bryson by the eminent German–Jewish Arabist Martin Plessner was a doctoral thesis done in the 1920s. It has been possible to improve on it because Plessner did not have at his disposal a copy of the main surviving manuscript (the Taymūr) but relied rather on an inadequate and hasty transcription by the Jesuit orientalist scholar Louis Cheikho (Shaykhū). The use of the manuscript for the edition in this volume has undoubtedly led to better readings and the remedying of Cheikho's several omissions. This is sufficient justification

for presenting the text. I have also been able to draw on some traditions unknown to Cheikho and Plessner and on a valuable epitome of Bryson held in the library of al-Azhar. An English translation is obviously a requirement in order to communicate the contents of an unknown work to as large an audience as possible, and the preparation of this has been made far easier by the existence of Plessner's German (even if he himself called it 'unreadable' for reasons I shall explain in Chapter 1) and a fluent Italian version by the orientalist and Hebraist Mauro Zonta. There are several ways to present Arabic texts and of the two readers used by Cambridge University Press for this part of the study one wanted it more or less as it is presented, while the other offered constructive but quite different advice. The system of presentation chosen here owes much to that used by Robert Hoyland (now Professor of Islamic History at the Oriental Institute, Oxford) in the volume of collected texts and studies carried out under my editorship on the topic of Greco-Arabic physiognomy (Swain 2007). The main idea in that volume was to allow navigation between the Arabic and the English so that the English-language reader too could be part of the text and understand its variants while classicists with some Arabic could more easily find their way around in the text itself. There is no doubt that more philologically minded scholars and those interested in the intricacies of textual criticism will wish I had done things in different ways. The ever-present possibility that another manuscript of Bryson will come to light will, should it happen, give such scholars the opportunity to make their improvements as they wish. For present purposes it is to be hoped that the text and translation do their job sufficiently, especially as it is clear that the *Taymūr* represents the tradition of Bryson available to the medieval authors who used him and the business of trying to say something interesting about his book's content is unlikely to be affected too adversely, should further evidence allowing a re-edition come to light. For the present volume is not a philological and literary study but an historical one and its interests and aims are located in the history of thought between two amazing cultures.

I return to issue of the reliability of the Arabic version below.

On the second general problem, more needs to be said, for if a work is largely unknown, can it really be important? A book which dates to the first century AD and offers original thought on the ancient economy (an area which produced little reflection by ancient authors) and in addition contains highly original material on the family is evidently of an importance that does not need to be argued for – so I would say. Nevertheless my fear is that something unfamiliar will meet with scepticism in certain quarters. In his definitive recent edition and translation of the Greek, Arabic, and Latin

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survivals of Theophrastus' *On First Principles* Dimitri Gutas, who is one of the most distinguished scholars of the development of ancient Greek thought in Islam, notes 'among scholars of Greek a certain hesitation ... to engage with [the Arabic] translations' of Greek, and he goes on to regret that 'classics departments are not rushing to teach Arabic as the third classical language, at least for students in Greek philosophy and science' (2010: xiv–xv). There are of course perfectly good reasons for not teaching Arabic in Classics departments: classicists have enough to do in a subject area which is more popular and richer than ever. But for anyone prepared to invest the time, the intellectual interest and pleasure in looking at the Arabic translations is very rich. And Gutas' point is that professional classicists *should* be looking at these translations, and not just leaving it to Arabists, if they want to be able to make use of what are typically the earliest witnesses to scientific and philosophical Greek literature, and based on texts often several hundred years older than the available Greek transmission. There are in fact Classics departments, such as my own, where Arabic is studied and taught at post-graduate and postdoctoral level for this very reason. The numbers are small, the intention is big.

Intention is what is important here. Consider what Gutas calls 'hesitation'. This is not a matter of opportunity alone. There are prejudices at work too which are part of a larger picture of centuries of uneasy engagement with the Muslim world. They are exacerbated in some academic circles by strongly held views about the purity of the classical canon. A tiny minority of ancient philosophers with roots in a different era who prefer to think that the world ended with Aristotle are among the worst offenders in this regard. Fortunately the vast majority of classicists are interested in connections and are anything but parochial; and there are not a few who have learnt Arabic or enough of it and/or the major language of transition between antiquity and the middle ages in the east, Syriac. The explosion of work on late antiquity over the past few decades has led more recently to a now firmly established interest in what happened to the Roman world after the Arab conquest during the seventh and eighth centuries, an interest that applies to both historians and scholars of the material culture. This is an impressive development and promises much progress towards making and sustaining connections between Classics and Islamic/Arabic studies.

In this context the parts of the present volume that investigate the transmission of Bryson not as text but as thought will hopefully be welcome. As I have said, it is simply impossible for one person to cover this material successfully or comprehensively: making the attempt is what is important. And just as it is important for classicists to know something of what

happened to classical thought, so I hope those interested in medieval Islam will at least take note of the ancestry of a work which they will most likely know of but perhaps only by name. Herein lies a major difference between the two potential audiences. Bryson is part of the Translation Movement which gathered pace in the eighth century and flourished in the ninth and tenth. We can be fairly sure that his book was translated around 900. Of the several reasons for its translation its first use shows that its contribution to Greek political thought and the incorporation of that thought into Islamic political theory is primary (with political thought meaning social and economic relations rather than political-administrative ones, which had no interest for Bryson). Beyond this theoretical side, which pertains to the introductory part of the text, Bryson was considered useful. If one takes account of the fact that there is a broad continuity in patterns of estate ownership and management from antiquity through to the time of the translation, it will be immediately apparent why this was. Perhaps more surprising than the relevance of Bryson's economic thoughts is his utility in social relations. His work had a profound effect on thinking about the 'Islamic' wife by writers as major and as orthodox as al-Ghazālī, a towering figure who remains of fundamental importance for Muslims to this day. On the regulation of children too Bryson became core reading among medieval Muslims. The Islamic reception ('Islamic' because Bryson was used by authors writing in Persian as well as Arabic) has much in common with the classical production of the text. For on all these levels – economic, conjugal, disciplinary – where Bryson was evidently at the forefront of thinking in his own period in the first century AD his status in Islam reflects a similar appreciation. In both cultures we can see good evidence of Bryson setting trends.

So why is he practically unknown? Part of the reason for his neglect in spite of his central focusses may be that Martin Plessner found himself disappointed by the loose relationship between the two short Greek fragments preserved in Stobaeus' *Anthology* and the corresponding parts of Bryson Arabus and pronounced that it was not possible to get back to the original Greek; and this verdict was repeated by reviewers and then championed for quite dubious reasons unconnected with Bryson by the great Belgian scholar of late antiquity, Joseph Bidez. In some way or other the beginnings of the modern Bryson encouraged neglect and this kept him unknown even to scholars like Rostovtzeff who would have found him most useful. What is the truth of Plessner's belief? Some of Bryson is epitomized for sure. Stobaeus' two fragments come from the introduction to the first section, which was not advice but theory as I have noted, and from the section on

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slaves, which is certainly short in Bryson Arabus as we have him. What Plessner did not know is that the argument of Bryson's third section on the relationship between the husband and wife co-owners was summarized by Musonius Rufus at the end of the first century and in places used verbatim by him. Musonius thus offers powerful reassurance about the reliability of the text. The translations done as part of the great Translation Movement naturally vary in quality. But no one has any doubt that the aim of the translators was to render the sense of the base text accurately for their Arabic audience. Given this, any shortening undergone by the text of Bryson Graecus at the disposal of the translator was perhaps already done in the course of his transmission in Greek, though there is evidence of further abbreviation of the prefatory section in Arabic after the translation had been made. The overall length of the treatise – some 10,000 words in English – suggests that what shortening there was has not been extensive. In sum, while we cannot turn Bryson back into Greek, we can be fairly confident that the Arabic translation gives us the argument of the original dependably.

The fact that Bryson covers so many topics and raises so many issues is the excuse for the length of the present study. I start in Part I with a clean translation of the text stripped of all notes to enable readers simply to see what Bryson says. This will be the main point of reference for most. Bryson is broken into 162 numbered sections, which for convenience follow those of Plessner, and I refer to the text by these. The parallel text and translation with annotation are to be found at the end along with other relevant texts and translations in Part v. In between is a series of studies which readers should engage with according to their interests. I begin in Part II with a wide-ranging introduction which offers a summary of the text's main points, gives an account of Bryson's rediscovery at the end of the nineteenth century, and explores the different contexts of the work in antiquity and especially in medieval Islam. The second chapter takes this forward by considering aspects of the history of the text and presents in detail arguments for the reliability of Bryson Arabus as part of the story of his use in antiquity and after. Part III addresses economy and slavery. Chapter 3 investigates Bryson's contribution to our understanding of the ancient economy and places him against what we know of ancient economic thought. Owing to his importance as a witness to the Roman economy, I have made an attempt here, necessarily incomplete and naturally subjective, to look at modern views on what is one of the most contested areas of classical research. Chapter 4 is a much shorter treatment of Bryson on slaves. Since the interpretation of slavery is

far less controversial than interpretation of the economy, I have said virtually nothing about modern debates but have traced Bryson's presentation against other Greco-Roman views. Part IV deals with the Brysonian family. Chapter 5 examines Bryson's discussion of the role of the wife as co-owner of the estate and places him in relation to other key texts of his age in Plutarch and Musonius Rufus. The final study (Chapter 6) on Bryson on children is again briefer. Bryson's interest is not in children – and certainly not in childhood – but in a code of behaviour made up of traditional requirements and applied to 'the boy', who stands for the future heir to the estate. What makes him of interest is the dearth of ancient works about children combined with his repackaging of traditional material with an eye always on the success of the estate.

In each of Chapters 3, 5, and 6 (economy, wives, children) I include a final subsection on the impact of Bryson's ideas in medieval Islam.

Many people and several organizations deserve thanks for their help in making this volume. My first and principal debt is to the Leverhulme Trust, which awarded me a Major Research Fellowship. The work could not have been done without this. The University of Warwick allowed me to hold the fellowship and thus supported me financially throughout. All Souls College gave considerable support both to this project and to a second, concurrent Greco-Arabic project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and directed by me on a Neoplatonic Arabic philosophy reader (Wakelnig 2013). Among individuals I would like to mention especially Amr 'Abd al-'Ati Salih, Jim Adams, Ewen Bowie, Keith Bradley (to these I am extremely grateful for various reasons), Kevin Butcher, Angelos Chaniotis, Ahmed Etman, Gregory Hutchinson, David Konstan, Chris Pelling, Bob Penella, Luc van der Stockt (and others who attended the delightful Leuven conference) – all of these and others were generous with time and information. I have always found the Arabist community unfailingly helpful to me as an outsider, and among them I must single out three individuals, Fritz Zimmerman, whose kindness is unsurpassed, Emilie Savage Smith, a source of advice and apposite wisdom at all times and a person of the greatest knowledge and sense, and Yossef Rapoport, a man of extraordinary intelligence and good humour. Geert Jan van Gelder happily answered questions and his pupil Harry Munt undertook the task of making improvements to the text with great enthusiasm and efficiency. Cyril Chilson gave help with the Hebrew text of Bryson. The Warwick Greco-Arabic team during the period of writing (Peter Pormann, Uwe Vagelpohl, Bink Hallum, especially Elvira Wakelnig) gave much direct and indirect help. Help in obtaining the

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cover image was given by Teresa Bernheimer and particularly Benoît Junod of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Crucial assistance was given at a critical moment and without a second thought by Jaś Elsner and Chris Howgego. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Michael Sharp at Cambridge University Press, a man of the utmost efficiency and integrity. To my wife and children are owed thanks as deep as to any of the above.