# A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRANSLATION FROM THE ANCIENT TO THE MODERN ERA DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7688412

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Language is the greatest means of communication between people who tend to get closer to each other through dialogue. They try to overcome the language barrier among themselves through translation in any of its various forms, written or oral. Translation has played a major role in all aspects of life, including politics, diplomacy, government, administration, science and technology, and religious activities.

Without the translation of the sciences, the knowledge of Greece, Persia, Toledo, and India would not have been transferred to Baghdad, to pass after that to all parts of Europe, and it would not have traveled after that to Palermo and then to all parts of the world.

This article shows the relationship between Translation with language and culture. It will also shed light on the role of translation in the prosperity and advancement of ancient civilizations. It will also discuss prominent Persian and Arab Scholars and their contributions to Translation. It will briefly discuss the history of Translation in Arab and beyond the Arab world. Finally, it will introduce various Translation periods passed by Islamic history.

KEYWORDS: Translation, civilization, culture, Arab & Persian translators, translated books, Islamic era, Umayyad era, Abbasside era, Age of decadence, Renaissance, globalization

#### TRANSLATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE:

The relationship between language, culture, and translation is an issue of great importance in the process of human communication, given that language is the main means of connecting all people and nations, and through it, cultures and individuals

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are exchanged between those societies. In addition to the close link between language and culture because language is part of the culture of that nation, people, group, or nationality that speaks the language in question as a means of communication between the components of society, nation, group, or nationality. Languages differ according to different people and 'nations formation since the first creation. That is why we find the difference in languages and cultures and the need for these nations and people to communicate with each other, which made translation an effective and important element in the process of communication between nations for the purpose of exchanging knowledge, science, culture, and religions, as the multiplicity and different languages mentioned in the Holy Quran:

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the difference of your tongues and colors. Surely in this, there are signs for the persons of knowledge.

As a result of the association of language with culture, it is necessary, while translating, to take them as an inevitable necessity in the translation process.

Languages are all faculties similar to the industry, and they are faculties in the tongue to express meanings, as the quality of the language lies in its property and its structures, not its vocabulary. And it was made clear through all the different historical eras that languages are the most important means that are used to express the ideas, needs, feelings, and attitudes of man, and with the same importance we find that culture occupies an advanced position among people, given that language is part of a culture, although not all people share the same language and culture. Culture is closely linked to language, which gave the relationship between them great importance, which was manifested through many studies and research in various fields, for example, linguistics, applied linguistics, psychology, and anthropology. The relationship between language and culture, is characterized by three aspects and were classified by *Kramsch*, as follows:

- 1. Language expresses the cultural situation through people's expression of ideas, attitudes, and facts through the language they speak.
- 2. Language symbolizes the cultural situation through people's expression of their experiences through language communication.
- Language embodies the cultural situation through people's view of their language as a symbol of cultural identity that determines their social values.

Through these discussions, studies, and research, scholars of the development of linguistics considered culture on the basis that it is a major system and language is part of it. There were many studies proposing the relationship between language and culture and different theories that focused on the applied level of the relationship between language and culture.<sup>2</sup>

### TRANSLATION AND CIVILIZATION

Linguists have defined translation in general as putting a text from one language into the form of a text in another language. The first text is called the *source language* and the new text is called the *target language*. However, the important role here is that played by the translator, employing his linguistic and cultural capabilities in the first and second texts. The more the translator is proficient and masters the language, the closer he gets to his translation and his new text to the clarity, beauty, objectivity, good structure, and meaning of his new text.<sup>3</sup>

The predecessors were interested in translation, art, and science, which helped them transfer their understanding of civilizations and interact with them, and thus transfer them from one place to another. The Arabs had an important role in this regard, to the extent that Harun al-Rashid established a school for this art in his country, provided it with money, and brought qualified translators. Notable translators appeared, including *Huneen Ibn Ishaq* and *John Al-Batriq*. The school contributed to the transfer of the Greek civilization to Europe, where those in charge of it translated what the Greeks wrote into Arabic, and then the Europeans transferred it to their languages. In Egypt, *Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi* established the *Al-Alsun School* in 1835 AD. This school provided a lot of translations from French into Arabic and vice versa. It also played an important role during the French campaign against Egypt, and it should be noted that this school still exists to this day and is now one of the important faculties of languages affiliated with the Egyptian University of Ain Shams. There is the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Al-Azhar, the faculties of languages and translation in Saudi universities, the School of Translation at the University of Khartoum, and other schools to teach translation and study its arts in British universities. The United Nations is also showing great interest in this field and has established a translation school in Vienna, Austria.

All of this came as an inevitable consequence of what later proved to be a necessity. The world today has become equipped with high technologies and amazing scientific progress. Trade has flourished and travel between countries has increased for many reasons. The acquaintance of nations and their understanding of each other's civilizations, cultures, and ways of thinking has become necessary, and even more important than before. Some living languages have also become, for more than one reason, a key to culture.

For example, The tales of (الف ليلة وليلة) "One Thousand and One Nights" (which some Europeans question their origin), as the researchers wrote, are considered Arabic in origin in their atmosphere, climate, names, and titles. Large numbers of these tales have been translated into several languages, the first of which was French when *Galland* translated them in the late seventeenth century. But parts of the book

were published between the years 1704-1713 AD, and it had a great impact on world literature.

The impact of One Thousand and One Nights was and still is a fundamental influence on Western literature, beginning with children's literature and ending with the literature of the elite of Westerners, especially when they were fascinated by the way of narration and plot, and the elements of suspense on which the idea of tales was built, not to mention the general cultural climate and the picturesque eastern atmosphere that The stories reflected it. The admiration of the classicists in the eighteenth century was great, and they wrote in its style, and the East became the site of some of their writings, such as Samuel Johnson's novel (Rassila, Prince of Abyssinia), a novel that tells the story of the Emir of Abyssinia, who traveled to Egypt to live there, trying to forget history, but he could not live without a date. They wrote some plays that were weak, such as (The Hunchback of Bagdad) and (The Arab), then the admiration of the romantics in the nineteenth century made them imitate this wonderful literary masterpiece, so William Beckford weaved the most famous romantic literary work for which he built a hut in which to write his literary text. Pickford's work later appeared in Lord Byron's Poems on the East.<sup>4</sup>

# THE ROLE OF PERSIAN SCHOLARS IN TRANSLATION AND CIVILIZATIONS

Persian scholars paid attention to the language of the blessed revelation, and enriched it through the Arabization of literary, linguistic, historical, and scientific studies in general, especially in the Abbasid era, which witnessed a major linguistic movement that strengthened the Arabic side and enrich it with the scientific developments it has reached. And quickly, Arabic spread among Persian society, and it became the language of the common people and the intellectuals among them in particular. The news of debates, research seminars, and teaching in the Arabic language, which historians affirm, is nothing but conclusive evidence of the penetration of the Arabic language and Arab culture into Iranian society.

The works of Persian scholars are of great value, and they were written in the Arabic language, just as and they developed the sciences of Arabic in its morphology, grammar, and rhetoric. They codified its rules and organized its templates. Among these scholars are: Abdul Hamid Al Kaatib (132AH), Abdullah bin al-Muqaffa' (142AH), Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin al-Abbas bin Muhammad al-Sawli Al Khorasani (243AH), Ibn Qutaybah Al-Dainouri, and Ali bin Abbas al-Ahwaazi (384 AH), author of the book "كامل الصناعة الطِّنيَّة" in medicine, and Abu Sahl Al-Jurjani author of the book "Al-Qanun" in medicine, and Muhammad bin Zakariya Al-Razi (313 AH), the author of the book "Al-Hawi" in thirty volumes, and it contained valuable information about medical issues that he obtained through scientific experiments and which he benefited from in his treatment of patients.

Al-Razi wrote many books in the field of medicine, including طب المنصور، كتاب الجدري، طب المنصور، كتاب الجدري، and others. Among them are Ubaidullah bin Gabriel (d.450 AH), author of the book طبائع الحيوان, Abu al-Hakim Muhammad bin Abd al-Malik Salehi al-Khwarizmi (425 AH), author of the book الجماهر and Abu Rehan Al-Biruni (d.440 AH) author of the book "في معرفه الجواهر".

In addition to that, we see a great gathering of the great Arab poets of Persian origins, such as: **Bashaar bin Brad al-Takhristani**, **Abu Nawas al-Ahwazi**, **Abu al-Atahiya** and others.

In addition to these, the history of the sciences of Arabic and Islam has known many Iranian scholars. In the science of grammar: Al-Sibawaih, Al-Kisa'i, Al-Sijistani, Al-Sirafi, Ibn Dasturiya, Abu Ali Al-Farsi, Al-Sarkhasi, Al-Karmani, Al-Razi, and Ibn e Khalawiyeh.

And the seven reciters to whom the ummah has come to recite the Qur'an, goes back to the seven imams, most of them are of Persian origin. We cannot ignore the generosity revealed by the names of *Ibn al-Muqaffa*, *Abdul Hamid al-Katib*, *Ibn al-Amid*, *Al-Sahib Ibn Abbad*, *Ibn Sina*, *Sibawaih*, *Al-Zamakhshari*, *Al-Tha'alabi*, *Ibn Qutaybah*, *Abul Faraj Al-Isfahani*, *Al-Ferozabadi*, *Omar al-Khayyam*, *Sa'adi Al-Shirazi*, *Jalal al-Din Al Rumi*, *Al-Kisa'i*, *Nasir Khosrow*, *Al-Suhrawardi*, and others in different fields of scinces and culture.<sup>5</sup>

# THE ROLE OF ARAB SCHOLARS IN TRANSLATION AND CIVILIZATIONS

Arabs have known translation since their earliest times. The Arabs used to travel for trade in summer and winter and were influenced by their neighbors in various aspects of life. They knew Persia, and the colors of their culture were passed on to them, and some Persian words were transferred to the Arabic language, and they appeared in the poetry of the great poets. Poet *Al Aasha* was one of the most famous who used Persian words in his poetry. Some poets also knew their Byzantine neighbors. So, of their ignorance, the Arabs encountered the three nations surrounding them: the Romans in the north, the Persians in the east, and the Abyssinians in the south. It is difficult to establish such literary and economic links without translation, even if it is in its primitive stages. During the time of the Umayyad dynasty, the collections were translated. The Arabs in the past ages were interested in translation, and for this reason, several translations of one text appeared.

For example, *Abu Bishr Matta bin Yunus* translated the book "Poetry" by Aristotle (322-384), then it was translated again by *Yahya bin Adi*'. The repetition of the translation indicates the concern for its accuracy. Translation of the book "

was written in Sanskrit by the Indian philosopher *Baidba* and presented as a gift to the King of India, *Debshalim*, who ruled India for a period of time after Alexander the Macedonian conquered it. He was unjust and tyrannical, so Al-Hakim Baidba compiled the book to convince him to move away from injustice and tyranny, and to give moral advice. The book is a collection of proverbs on the tongues of animals. The Persian physician *Barzwaya* brought the book from India and contributed to translating it from Sanskrit during the reign of *Khosrow Anushirwan* and his minister *Buzurgmehr*, who had a great role in authoring and translating the book.

Abdullah bin al-Muqaffa, who was of Persian origin during the reign of Abu Jaafar

*Abdullah bin al-Muqaffa*, who was of Persian origin during the reign of Abu Jaafar al-Mansur, translated it from Persian into Arabic and added some things to it.<sup>6</sup>

# HISTORY OF TRANSLATION

It is difficult to define an accurate historical beginning for translation, as it is considered one of the oldest human activities and the most effective ways that nations have taken to exchange knowledge and cultures. It appeared with his feeling of the urgent need for communication and understanding with people speaking different languages, following the principle of give and take and enriching each other. This was the emergence of oral translation prior to written translation. That is, before the emergence of writing, resorted to it to manage affairs in cases of peace and the accompanying economic and commercial relations, and in cases of war and what it required of concluding reconciliation agreements and the exchange of prisoners. It has contributed - and still is - to advancing development and building bridges of civilized and cultural acquaintance between nations over the years.

#### TRANSLATION BEYOND THE ARAB WORLD

The ancient Egyptian state knew translation in 3000 BC. Bilingual inscriptions were found in the area of the first cataract, Elephantine. In the third century BC, the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek in the great Library of Alexandria. Around the same period, the Romans translated much of Greek culture, art, and mythology. Having conquered the Greek world, the Arabs introduced many Greek works of science and philosophy into the language. In the 12th century, the West came into contact with the Arabs in Córdoba, Spain, where Latin copies of Arabic copies of Greek philosophy and science were made in addition to the original Arabic works on arts, philosophy, science, etc., providing the West with Greek and Arabic knowledge.

The date of translation has been confirmed since 3000 BC. The Rosetta Stone is the oldest work of translation, which dates back to the second century BC. *Livius Andronicus* translated Homer's Odyssey into Latin in 240 BC. All that remains are

fragments from 46 scattered lines from the 17 books of the 24-book Greek epic. In some lines, he translated literally, though in other lines he was freer.

His translation of the Odyssey was of great historical importance. Prior to this, Mesopotamians and Egyptians had translated legal and religious texts, but it was not until the Roman Empire that no one translated a literary work written in a foreign language.

Efforts to translate the Bible from its original languages into more than 2,000 other languages spanned more than two millennia. A partial translation of the Bible into the languages of English up to the end of the seventh century can be emphasized, including translations into Old English and Middle English. Over 450 additional copies were created. The Bible is still the most translated book in the world. This fact is revealed by the same approximate statistics. As of 2005, at least one book of the Bible has been translated into 2,400 of the 6,900 languages listed by the Summer Institute of Language including 680 in Africa, followed by 590 in Asia, and 420 in Oceania, 420 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 210 in Europe, and 75 in North America.

# TRANSLATION IN THE ARAB WORLD

Historically, Arabs did not live in isolation from other neighboring nations, including Persians, Turks, Romans, and others. Contact was not limited to their neighbors, but also to other geographically distant countries, such as India and China, with which the Arabs established "diplomatic" and, most importantly, commercial relations. The commercial activity of the Arabs contributed to the extension of intercultural contact and communication with other peoples, as evidenced by the contents of both Arab and foreign literature and cultures. This is evident from the undeniable number of foreign words in the dictionary of Arabs and neighboring countries. This mutual contact reached a level of maturity thanks to the translation from Arabic into the other languages concerned.

**TRANSLATION BEFORE ISLAM**: Translation from foreign languages into Arabic began before the advent of Islam. **Al-Akaasria** (Rulers of Kisra) had a special **diwan** for translation from and to Arabic, and **Laquet** was in Kasra's palace, writing from Persian to Arabic, and from Arabic to Persian.

Of their ignorance, the Arabs came into contact with the nations surrounding them, such as Rome, Persians, Abyssinians, and others. They used to travel for trade in summer and winter. Considering these commercial transactions, the Arabs defined translation as a communication process required by the necessity of communication between human groups speaking different languages. Those continuous trips were among the most important factors in introducing some aspects of the culture of other nations to Arab culture. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of the influence of the Arabs in the past on the cultures of other nations, especially their neighbors at the time, is the introduction of some foreign vocabulary into the Arabic language, especially those related to new cultural elements that did not exist among the Arabs

before, whether in food, drink, clothing, or other aspects of daily life. Among those cultures that the Arabs influenced before Islam was the Persian culture. Where this influence was embodied in the transfer of some Persian words to the Arabic language, which became circulated by some poets. Where **Dr. Abd al-Salam Kafafi** says in his book Comparative Literature: "**Al-Aasha** was one of the most famous poets, who used Persian words in their poetry."

TRANSLATION IN THE PROPHET'S ERA: There are many indications that explicit the era of the Prophet (PBUH), witnessed activity in translation, especially with the need to spread the message of Islam outside the Arabian Peninsula. According to Husam uddin Mustafa, some narrations indicate that Hadhrat Salman Farsi, was believed to be the first to translate the meanings of Surat e Fatihah in the Prophet's era. It also indicates that the Zaid bin Thabit, who was fluent in Syriac, Persian and Greek languages, was famous as the first translator of Islam, and was responsible for correspondence commissioned by the Messenger (PBUH). He also mentions that there was an old garment (عدا المعاقبة) dating back to 643 AD containing a text of three lines in Greek with an Arabic translation bearing the name of the companion Amr Ibn Al Aaas.

TRANSLATION IN THE UMAYYAD ERA: Despite the interest of the Umayyads in the conquests and expansion of their country, their interest in translation was equally important, as they considered translation as an essential means to achieve strength and prosperity. The Umayyads translated into Arabic the most important science books from Latin and Greek, and books on medicine, astronomy, chemistry, and architecture from Syriac. Among the important translation figures of the Umayyad dynasty was Khalid ibn Yazid (d.704 AD/85 AH), who instructed scholars from Egypt to translate works of chemistry, medicine, and astronomy by Greek and Coptic authors into Arabic. Another famous translator during the Umayyad rule was the Syriac Ya'qub Al Raha (d.708 AD / 89 AH), who translated many books from Greek into Arabic.

Among the most important works that were translated into Arabic during the Umayyad era are:

- During the reign of the Umayyad caliph *Marwan ibn Al Hakam* (d.65 AH), a doctor from Basra named *Masergoyeh Kannach*, Rev. Ahroun, transferred from Syriac to Arabic.
- The Translation of *Diwan Al Kharaj*. This Diwan was written in the early Umayyad state in Iraq in the Persian language. During the days of *Hajjaj bin Yusuf Al Thaqafi* (95 AH), *Saleh bin Abdul Rahman Mawla bin Tamim* translated it into Arabic.
- Diwan ul Kharaj in Greek and its translation into Arabic by the writer of letters, Abu Thabit Suleiman bin Saad, in the succession of Abdul Malik bin Marwan (d.86 AH).

• In the succession of *Hisham bin Abdul Malik* (125 AH), the writer *Abul Ala Salem* - one of the eloquent- transmitted the letters of Aristotle to Alexander the Macedonian, and among those who transmitted from the Persian *Jibla bin Salem*, the writer Hisham bin Abdul Malik.

In this era, the Arabic language became the language of the bureaus throughout the Arab and Islamic states, which led to the necessity of non-Arab people to learn the language of the Holy Qur'an and the noble hadith to work with the provisions of Islamic law and understanding with their brothers in religion.

# TRANSLATION IN THE ABBASID ERA

The translation became very active after the Abbasids came to power in Iraq after a victorious revolt in  $750~\mathrm{AD}/132~\mathrm{AH}$  against the Umayyad caliphs. The history of the translation movement during the Abbasid rule can be divided into three phases.

- The first stage describes the first steps toward establishing the *House of Wisdom*.
- The second stage deals with the translation movement in the "GOLDEN AGE OF ARABIC TRANSLATION" during the reign of Caliph Al Ma'mun.
- The third stage relates to the beginnings of the decline of the translation movement during the Abbasid era.

Under the rule of *Al Mansoor*, the second caliph, the new capital was moved from Damascus to Baghdad, at a time when the Muslim conquests and imperial growth were beginning to foster a dynamic cultural climate. Various intellectual traditions were united under Islamic rule, including Greek learning from Europe and Alexandria, as well as from the Persians, Indians, Syriacs, and Sumerians of the East.

In this era, the Arabs became interested in philosophy, pharmacy, medicine, engineering, arithmetic, astronomy, and theology, and translators encountered many meanings that did not exist, especially in philosophy, which motivated them to strive to find counterparts for them in the Arabic language, which welcomed to absorb foreign terms and words from Science, Medicine, and Astrology.

Among the most famous Greek books that were transferred to Arabic in this era are:

- The Book titled "Golden Rule" of Pythagoras.
- The book "Politics or the Republic".
- The book "Nawamis" by Plato.

This translation movement between the third and fourth centuries had an impact on enriching the Arabic language with terms in various sciences, and thus on raising the cultural and scientific level of students of science, as a result, a class of doctors and scholars emerged, among whom were: *Al Kindi*, *Jabir bin Hayyan*, *Abu Bakr Al Razi*, *Abu Rehan Al Biruni*, *Ibn Sina*, *Al Khwarizmi*, and others.<sup>8</sup>

# TRANSLATION IN AN AGE OF DECADENCE AND STAGNATION

Translation witnessed an era of stagnation in the second half of the seventh century AH, when the Crusades stopped and the campaigns of the *Mongols* and *Taatars* dispersed, resulting in the destruction of the land and the facilities of science, Illiteracy and ignorance spread, and students went to study the abbreviated books from the main ancient Arabic books, and encyclopedic scholars appeared who collected and coordinated the previous literature without adding scientific value.

# TRANSLATION IN THE RENAISSANCE

The translation movement in the Arab world faces several challenges that revolve around the sphere of political will. When the political decision during the Abbasid Caliphate encouraged the transfer from other cultures to the Arabic language, translation at that time played a great role in transferring the early sciences and brought about an intellectual renaissance in the Arab world. It surpassed the role of translation and paved the way for scientific authorship on a large scale. It was created in the following ages and was translated into European languages. Then *Muhammad Ali Pasha* came after ages of darkness, so he kindled a glimmer of hope again, and signs of an Arab scientific renaissance appeared in Egypt at the beginning of the last century, when he realized the importance of translation and decided to Arabize higher education and build bridges of communication with developed nations.

#### TRANSLATION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Translation witnessed unprecedented prosperity in the second half of the twentieth century, which is the stage that was dubbed the "Era of Translation". The circle of communication between people expanded at that time, including official, military, tourism, media, cultural, commercial, customs, and other communications that made translation an urgent need, just as technological progress and the huge amount of information that resulted from it, as well as the emergence of active international organizations, increased the need for translation and for workers in the field of translation, and these reasons also led to its development in terms of quality and quantity, in addition to a significant increase in the activity of translation.<sup>9</sup>

Today, it is no secret to anyone what the global communications revolution has achieved in terms of radical changes in various fields of daily life. Scientific, social and others, the explosion of information in our current era has led to the need to resort to modern technical means in order to speed up the process of transferring and transmitting it across different people, and it also contributed to a massive revolution in the ability to extract information very quickly, transfer it and exchange it via the Internet and what It includes an endless amount of knowledge, making quick and frequent contacts, especially in the various fields of translation; And in which the use of the computer in various forms has become one of the modern technology methods of communication.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Translation has been one of the most effective ways used by nations to exchange knowledge and cultures since ancient times and to enrich each other to give and take. The translation is the "language of tomorrow" because the global language and the mediator between any two languages have no link between them. Without it, the Iliad and the Thousand and One Nights would not have crossed times and places, and people would not have enjoyed what was created by the pens of Cervantes, Tolstoï, Hemingway, and Marquez.

Translation has experienced all human civilizations and the periods that peoples went through, from socialism to capitalism, modernity has completed globalization, and it is the stage the world is currently living through, which crystallized from previous systems that did not withstand the massive technological development, which shrunk the world and abolished geographical borders. Through the miracle of the century, which is the World Wide Web or the Internet.

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