educated at Hamilton College and the University of Pennsylvania, Pound was one of the most influential figures in the modernist literary movement. In 1908, after pursuing graduate study in Romance languages and literatures, he left for Europe, living first in London (1908–19) and then in Paris (1919–23) before settling in Italy at Rapallo. Pound’s speculations on the relationship between culture, economics, and politics led him to support Mussolini during World War Two. Upon his return to the United States in 1945, he was arrested for treason and committed to St Elizabeth’s Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Washington DC, from where he was released in 1958 and returned to Italy. Pound viewed translation as a key practice in modernist poetics: he wrote poems that incorporated adaptations and translations, like Homage to Sextus Propertius (1919) and the voluminous Cantos (begun in 1917), but he also produced many translations of poems and prose from Anglo-Saxon, Provençal, Italian, Chinese, and French. Pound’s work as a translator was experimental and innovative, drawing upon a range of English dialects and discourses and producing unusual translation effects. He rationalized his choice of foreign texts to translate and his translation strategies in a number of essays and prefaces.

RIPLEY, George (1802–80). American minister, journalist, and translator. Born at Greenfield, Massachusetts, Ripley graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1826 and entered the Unitarian ministry. He served as a minister in Boston while editing and writing for such periodicals as The Christian Examiner and The Dial. Ripley belonged to the Transcendental Club, a group of New England intellectuals who were known as the Transcendentalists for their interest in European philosophy and literature. From 1841 to 1847 he joined other Transcendentalists in founding the Brook Farm community, a socialist experiment informed by the ideas of the French utopian thinker, Charles Fourier. Ripley later worked with The New York Tribune, where he wrote influential book reviews and translated foreign news dispatches. He also edited the 16-volume New American Cyclopaedia (1858–63). As a translator and editor of translations, Ripley’s most important achievement is Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature (1838–52), a multi-volume anthology of translations that aimed to enrich American culture by making available the French and German writing that inspired his fellow intellectuals.

WINNEMUCCA, Sarah (1844–91). American interpreter, lecturer, and author. A member of the Paiute tribe, Winnemucca was born in western Nevada. Between 1857 and 1860, she lived with the family of an American military officer, with whom she became proficient in English. During the 1860s, she performed with her father Chief Winnemucca and other Paiutes in tableaux vivants that represented Indian customs. In these performances staged in California and Nevada, Winnemucca interpreted her father’s speeches. From 1868 until 1880, she interpreted for agents with the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, helping to negotiate between belligerent tribes and eventually becoming an interpreter at the Malheur reservation in Oregon for a brief period. In 1881 Winnemucca lectured in the eastern United States in an effort to promote changes in American Indian policy that would improve the living conditions on reservations. She started two schools for Indian children. In 1883 she published an autobiography, Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims.

LAWRENCE VENUTI

Arabic tradition

Arabic is a Semitic language. It originated in the Arabian peninsula but spread far beyond the confines of its birthplace with the rise of Islam in the seventh century. Prior to the rise of Islam and the consolidation of the ‘Arab nation’, the various peoples who inhabited different parts of the territory now known as the Arab World were in many cases bilingual, speaking Arabic in everyday
contexts and using a variety of languages such as Syriac and Aramaic for trade and learning (Hitti 1937:70ff.), especially as Arabic did not develop a writing system until almost the rise of Islam. They were of different ethnic backgrounds and followed very different ways of life, varying between a nomadic, tribal existence in the peninsula (present-day Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Gulf states) and a sedentary, agricultural/merchant culture in the Fertile Crescent (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine). The tribes in the peninsula were not ruled by outside powers, whereas the inhabitants of other parts fell under the rule of either the Byzantine or Sassanian Empire.

The birth of Islam in the seventh century is the most important event in the history of the Arab peoples: it changed the political, cultural and linguistic map of the area for ever. The spread of Islam began during the Prophet’s lifetime and gathered phenomenal speed after his death in 632. By 698, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt and North Africa had become part of the new political and religious order. At the height of its expansion, the Islamic Empire stretched from present-day Pakistan to Spain.

The political history of the Islamic World is rather complex, with the seat of Empire moving from one capital to another as different dynasties rose to power, and with several caliphates at times existing in various parts of the world. The most important periods and caliphates are as follows:

- The orthodox period of the early caliphate, starting with the death of Muhammad in 632 and ending with the death of ‘Ali, the fourth Guided Caliph, in 661. The seat of the caliphate during this period moved from Medina, in present-day Saudi Arabia, to al-Kufa and al-Basra in present-day Iraq
- The Umayyad Caliphate (661–750), with its seat in Damascus
- The Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258), with its capital in Baghdad
- The Fatimid Caliphate (909–1171), a Shi‘ite offshoot of the main caliphate, with its capital in Cairo
- An offshoot of the Umayyad Caliphate which was established in Cordoba (929–1031)
- The Ottoman Caliphate (c.1517–1924), with its seat in Constantinople. This last great caliphate of Islam was Turkish.

The office of caliph (i.e. leader of the Muslim community) was officially abolished in 1924.

From the point of view of the history of translation into Arabic, the orthodox period, the Fatimid Caliphate and the offshoot of the Umayyad Caliphate in Spain are of relatively little interest. Although the Arab conquest of Spain is associated with an important period of translation activity, much of this activity involved translation out of rather than into Arabic (see SPANISH TRADITION). The most important periods in the history of translation into Arabic are the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, which were followed by a long period of intellectual stagnation in the Islamic World from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries.

The widely celebrated flourishing of translation in the Islamic Empire is closely associated with and dependent on the growth of Arabic as a written literary language, which began with the need to fix the form of the Qur’ān (see QUR’ĀN TRANSLATION). The status of Arabic as lingua franca was established when the Umayyad Caliph cAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (reigned 685–705) declared it the sole administrative language of the empire. Since then it has been the official language of all Arab countries and continues to play a unifying role in the area, enabling the variety of religious and ethnic groups that make up the population of the Arab World to think of themselves as a ‘nation’.

Translation in the Arab Islamic Empire (seventh to thirteenth centuries)

Some translation activity seems to have taken place on a small scale prior to the rise of Islam. A manuscript dating back to AD 513 and written in Greek, Syriac and Arabic was found near Aleppo. It lists, among other things, the names of men involved in building the church where the manuscript was found (Ali 1986:51).

Some translation and interpreting activities must have also existed in the very early days of Islam, though we have very few
records of such activity. We do know, however, that the Prophet sent messages to various political rulers, such as the Viceroy of Egypt, urging them to adopt the new religion (see QUR'ĀN TRANSLATION). This type of exchange between the Prophet and non-Arab rulers could not have taken place without some form of linguistic mediation. Moreover, the Qur'ān itself includes many words borrowed from Greek, Persian, Syriac and Hebrew.

The new cultural environment which developed following the rise of Islam and the expansion of the Islamic Empire was infinitely richer and more complex than anything previously experienced by the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. The new empire lay at the intersection of Eastern and Western civilizations and brought together the most sophisticated cultural traditions of the period: Greek, Indian, Persian and Egyptian. One of the most important consequences of this development was the shift of Arabic from a mainly oral language, spoken by an ethnically homogeneous community of native speakers, to a written and spoken lingua franca of a vast civilization comprising many ethnic and linguistic groups.

The nomadic Arabs who came out of the desert had a great deal to learn from the nations they conquered and relatively little to offer in return. And they were eager learners. Inspired by the richness of the civilizations they were now encountering for the first time, and explicitly encouraged by the Qur'ān to seek knowledge wherever it could be found, they began a huge campaign to acquire the learning of the nations under their rule and naturally turned to translation as the means by which the new sources of knowledge could be accessed.

The period from the eighth to the eleventh century in particular witnessed an unprecedented level of translation activity, aided greatly by the availability of paper, which was introduced into the Muslim World shortly after Samarkand was captured in 704 (Stock 1978:13). With the introduction of paper, the process of transforming the oral Arabic culture into a literate one could proceed in earnest, with translation playing the main role in enabling this process to take shape.

The Arabs are credited with initiating the first organized, large-scale translation activity in history. This activity started during the reign of the Umayyads (661–750) and reached its zenith under the Abbasids (750–1258), particularly during the reign of al-Ma'mūn (813–33), known as the Golden Era of translation. The centre of this activity was Baghdad, a fabulous city built by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansūr and the scene of many episodes in the famous Thousand and One Nights.

This unprecedented commitment to translation can be distinguished from any translation activity the world had known before in terms of three factors (al-Khûrî 1988:24):

(a) Range of source languages: the Arabs translated voraciously from Sanskrit, Persian, Syriac, Greek, Aramaic and other languages.

(b) Range of topics and subjects: all aspects of knowledge interested the Arabs. They translated manuscripts on mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, logic, medicine, chemistry, politics, etc. Literature was of relatively less interest during this period, partly because it often included religious myths which conflicted with Islamic teachings, and partly because the Arabs already had a strong literary tradition of their own.

(c) Most importantly, the translation movement which evolved under Islamic rule was organized and institutionalized. Translation was sponsored and supported by the government, and specific institutions, or translation chambers, were set up to initiate and regulate the flow of translations. The first such translation chamber was set up by al-Mansûr, the second Abbasid caliph (754–775) and expanded considerably by al-Rashîd (786–809) and al-Ma'mūn (813–33).

The Umayyad Period
The first half of the eighth century witnessed a number of developments which laid the longterm foundations of the Empire: the development of a postal service, Arabic coinage and, most importantly, the establishment of Arabic as the official language of administration, replacing Greek in Damascus, Pahlavi in Iraq and the Eastern provinces and Coptic in Egypt.
Translation activity also started in earnest during this period. The most authoritative and comprehensive source about translation and writing activities in the Islamic Empire is *al-Fihrist* (lit. ‘The Index’), compiled by al-Nadîm in 988. *Al-Fihrist* claims that it was Prince Khâlid, son of the second Umayyad caliph, who commissioned the first translations from Greek and Coptic (al-Nadîm, in al-Khûry 1988:31), having turned to the pursuit of knowledge following his failure to acquire the position of caliph. Although the ascription of this activity to Khâlid is contested in the literature (Hitti 1937:255), there is general agreement that the first translations were carried out during this period and were from Greek and Coptic. *Al-Fihrist* further suggests that the first treatises to be translated were on alchemy because Khâlid believed it was possible to turn minerals into gold. At any rate, we do know that translations carried out during this period included treatises on medicine, astrology and alchemy. In addition, arabicizing the administration under Marwân naturally involved a certain amount of translation of official documents in the initial stages.

Byzantine and Persian songs also first began to appear in translation during this period. The translations were carried out by Saţîd Ibn Misjâh, the first Meccan musician and one of the best known during the Umayyad period (Hitti 1937:275).

A great deal of Greek gnomologia (wisdom literature) was translated into Arabic towards the end of the Umayyad period, including virtually all gnomologia connected with Aristotle and Alexander (Gatas 1975:444). These translations were to have a strong influence on Arabic poetry in the ninth and tenth centuries. Two of the most celebrated Arab poets of the period, Abu al-cAtâhiya andal-Mutanabbi, used gnomic material in their poems.

The Abbasid Period

Whereas the élite of the Umayyad Empire was largely Arab (ethnically speaking), the Abbasid Empire was overall more international in composition and character, with ethnic Arabs forming only one part of the nation and its élite. In due course, the word ‘Arab’ came to refer to any Arabic-speaking Muslim, irrespective of racial background or affiliation. Thus it must be borne in mind that the many references to the large body of knowledge accumulated during this period as ‘Arab’ (Arab medicine, Arab philosophy and so on) often apply to work which is not necessarily attributable to ethnic Arabs from the Peninsula. There were certain areas in which the ethnic Arabs excelled (in particular theology, jurisprudence and linguistics), but in almost all other areas it was the Persians, Syrians and Jews who led the way, both in terms of translation and of original writing. The Persians in particular were instrumental in shaping the intellectual development of Muslim society. By the tenth/eleventh century, even the Arabic language had become more ornate under the influence of Persian.

Generally speaking, however, it is often very difficult to asportion credit for translation or original work to specific ethnic groups within this melting pot of an empire. The earliest work of science to appear in Arabic (in 683), for example, was a translation by a Jewish physician of Persian origin (Masarjawy of al-Basra) of a Syriac treatise on medicine, originally written in Greek by Ahrun, a Christian priest in Alexandria (Hitti 1937:255). Similarly, it is often difficult to specify the boundaries between original and translated work, or for that matter, to identify the exact source of a translation. The Thousand and One Nights, the best-known work of Arabic literature in the West, is itself based on an old Persian work, Hazar Afsânî (Thousand Tales; Shehrazâd—the story-teller—is a Persian name); this in turn contained several stories of Indian origin. Some of the stories were also added much later and may have been inspired by the new context and written in Arabic. Alexandria had been captured in 642 and the Arabs had begun to sample the riches of its great scholarly tradition. The first centres of education started to appear in the early eighth century in Egypt and Iraq, and early Abbasid caliphs subsequently began to take an active interest in translation. The second Abbasid caliph, al-Mansûr (reigned 754–75), commissioned a number of translations and set up a translation chamber. Al-Rashîd (reigned 786–809) similarly supported translation.
activity and enlarged the translation chamber set up by al-Mansūr. But it was al-Ma‘mūn who founded in 830 the most important institute of higher learning in Islam, which also became the most celebrated centre of translation in Arab history. Bayt al-Ḥikma (House of Wisdom), in Baghdad, functioned as an academy, library and translation bureau and had a personnel of 65 translators, working from Greek, Syriac, Persian, Sanskrit and Aramaic. Al-Nadīm tells us in al-Fihrist that in Bayt al-Ḥikma alone 47 translators worked from Greek and Syriac, 17 from Persian, two from Sanskrit and one from Aramaic (in Kaya 1992:391).

A vast range of material was translated under the Abbasids. Ptolemy’s Geography was translated into Arabic several times, most notably by Thābit Ibn Qurrā, either directly or through Syriac. Generally speaking, Greek material already available in Syriac was translated from Syriac, which still functioned as the liturgical language of the Nestorians who headed the translation chambers. Greek works which were not available in Syriac were either rendered directly into Arabic or first into Syriac and then into Arabic. Greek works on moral philosophy, starting with Aristotle’s Ethics, were among the first to be translated and laid the foundation for the indigenous version of philosophy known as šī‘līn al-Akhlāq (lit. ‘science of manners/behaviour’). The scientific study of astronomy was inspired by the translation (c.771) of an Indian treatise, Sindhind, by Muhammad Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Fazari, whose translations of this and other Hindu works also introduced into the Muslim World, and later Europe, the Hindu numeral system and the ‘zero’. The Old and New Testaments, or fragments of them, were translated several times. The most important, full translation of the Old Testament was done by Sa‘īd al-Fayūmī (882–942) in Egypt.

Overall, the Arabs translated essentially scientific and philosophical material from Greek and showed little or no interest in Greek drama and poetry. As far as literature was concerned, Persian—rather than Greek—provided most of the source texts during this period. India, on the other hand, was the chief source of wisdom literature and mathematics, though it must be borne in mind that much of Persian literature can be traced back to Indian sources. For example, as in the case of the Thousand and One Nights, Kalilah wa Dimna (another important work of literature in Arabic) is based on a translation from Middle Persian, which in turn is based on Sanskrit sources. Sanskrit was also important as a source language for medical treatises, though the translations were often carried out via Persian, as in the case of the great Indian medical treatise Charaka-Samhita (Meyerhof 1937:26).

A large number of the translators active during this period were Christian (Rosenthal 1975:6), and many were scholars in their own right. The most notable was Yuhanna Ibn Māsīwāyih (777–857), who headed Bayt al-Ḥikma and who wrote Daqīq al-‘Ayn (Disorders of the Eye), the oldest systematic work on ophthalmology in Arabic.

One of the most outstanding translators during this period is Hunayn IBN ISHĀQ, who was paid by al-Ma‘mūn in gold, matching the weight of the books he translated. Being somewhat greedy, he wrote in large letters, on thick, heavy paper, with wide spaces between lines (al-Dīwān 1984/85:111; al-Khūry 1988:40). His greed had the unexpected side benefit of ensuring that the manuscripts remained intact and readable for several centuries. Ibn Ishāq is credited with translating some 100 manuscripts into Syriac and 39 into Arabic, including the works of Aristotle, Plato and Ptolemy. He was aided in this ambitious enterprise by his son Ishāq and his nephew Ḥusayn.

Another prolific translator of the period was the Sabian Thābit Ibn Qurrah (c.836–901); the Sabians were a community of star worshippers who naturally had a longstanding interest in astronomy. Ibn Qurrah and his disciples were responsible for translating most of the Greek works on astronomy and mathematics, including the works of Archimedes and Apollonius of Perga (Hitti 1937:314). As in the case of Ibn Ishāq, other members of Ibn Qurrah’s immediate family followed in his footsteps and distinguished themselves as translators, including his son Sinān, his grandsons Thābit and Ibrāhīm, and his great grandson Abu al-Faraj (Ibid.).

Two methods of translation seem to have been adopted during this period (Rosenthal
1975:17). The first, associated with Yuhanna Ibn al-Batrūq and Ibn Nā'ima al-Himṣi, was highly literal and consisted of translating each Greek word with an equivalent Arabic word and, where none existed, borrowing the Greek word into Arabic. This method was not successful overall and many of the translations carried out by al-Batrūq were later revised under al-Ma‘mūn, most notably by Hunayn Ibn Isḥāq. The second method, associated with Ibn Isḥāq and al-Jawhari, consisted of translating sense-for-sense, creating fluent target texts which conveyed the meaning of the original without distorting the target language. Ibn Isḥāq and his followers thus gave priority to the requirements of the target language and the target reader from the outset, stressing readability and accessibility in a way which suggests that the translations were conceived as having a didactic function: Ibn Isḥāq, for instance, explicitly praised his own translations for their ‘pleasant and limpid style which can be understood by the non-expert in the field of medical science or by him who does not know anything of the ways of philosophy’ (cited in Salama-Carr 1996).

In addition to comments concerning the most successful method of translation, there was also some reflection during this period on such issues as whether translation of certain text types was at all possible, whether translated texts in general offered a reliable source of information, and the effect of interference from Greek and Syriac on the structure of Arabic. Al-Jahiz (d. 869), one of the best-known writers of the period, was particularly caustic in his statements about translators and translation, insisting that ‘the translator can never do [the philosopher] justice or express him with fidelity’ (cited in Salama-Carr 1996). But apart from such occasional criticism of their profession, translators generally enjoyed a most enviable position under the Abbasids. Their work was highly valued and they seem to have enjoyed a rather luxurious style of life, at least the more successful among them. Al-Nadim (988, cited in Hitti 1937:306) gives a lavish description of the daily routine of Hunayn Ibn Isḥāq: he bathed, relaxed in a lounging robe, enjoyed a light drink and a biscuit, had his siesta, and on waking ‘burned perfume to fumigate his person’, had dinner, went back to sleep, woke up again and drank several roits (Arabic measure of weight) of wine ‘to which he added quinces and Syrian apples if he felt the desire for fresh fruits’.

This Golden Era of translation under early Abbasid rule was followed by a rich period of original writing in many fields, including astronomy, alchemy, geography, linguistics, theology and philosophy. Here again, the most outstanding contributions came from Arabic-speaking subjects of the Empire (i.e. non-ethnic Arabs), especially Persians such as Ibn Sīna (Avicenna), al-Tabarî and al-Rāzi (Rhazes). Much of this original writing included a substantial amount of commentary on Greek sources, such as Aristotle, by writers who often had no knowledge of Greek and who relied on existing Arabic translations in developing their own philosophical positions. This is true, for example, of the works of Ibn Rushd (Averroës) and the Jewish philosopher (as well as astronomer, theologian and physician) Mūsā Ibn Maymūn (Maimonides). Another interesting feature of the ‘original writing’ which followed the Golden Era of translation is that some of it, though written in Arabic, was either lost and later found only in Hebrew translations or Latin translations from the Hebrew (as in the case of Ibn Rushd’s commentaries) or was written in Hebrew characters from the outset (as in the case of Ibn Maymūn’s works; Hitti 1937:582ff.).

The flowering of knowledge that took place in the Islamic World during the tenth and eleventh centuries and that later provided the impetus for the development of all branches of knowledge in the West, including natural science and philosophy, could not have taken place had it not been for the intense programme of translation carried out under the Abbasids. Thus translation lay at the centre of the most important period of intellectual activity in the history not only of the Islamic World but of the world at large.

**Translation under the Ottomans**

Starting with the late tenth/early eleventh century, the Islamic Empire began to experience a long period of gradual disintegration, resulting in the establishment of rival caliphates in Egypt and Spain and endless petty
dynasties in various parts of the empire. A series of onslaughts by the Mongols eventually culminated in the destruction of Baghdad and the slaughter of the caliph and his officials by Hulagu in 1258. For a time, the Islamic World had no caliph to rule it. The Muslim Ottomans, a new power which was to endure well into the twentieth century, eventually took control of the region and claimed the title of caliph for their rulers in 1517. Under this new political order, Arabic continued to be the language of learning and law, the latter because the Ottomans, being Muslim, had to rule the empire according to Islamic jurisdiction. In other areas, Arabic began to lose ground to Turkish (now the language of government) and Persian (which became the language of polite letters). As the language of learning, Arabic continued to play a major role in the translation movement, though now it had to share this role with Turkish.

The Arab World was largely isolated and deprived of cultural contact during the first few centuries of Ottoman rule. The first major contact with Europe came with the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, which lasted only three years but had a considerable impact on the intellectual development of the area. Napoleon had brought with him a 'scientific expedition' which included a number of orientalists who set up the first Arabic press in the region. Initially, he brought his own translators and interpreters with him, including some Muslim sailors whom he had captured in Malta (al-Shayyāl 1950:36). These 'foreign' translators prepared the Arabic circular that Napoleon distributed on landing in Alexandria, a circular designed to reassure the Egyptian populace and to incite them to rebel against their rulers. The circular, like much of what these foreign translators produced, was grammatically unsound and stylistically poor (al-Jabarti, cited in al-Shayyāl 1950:36). The French also relied on foreign interpreters for reading out their decrees, and even for pacifying angry crowds. In addition, interpreters worked in the diwān, where they interpreted lawsuits and read out letters and statements. Al-Jabarti tells us that these foreign interpreters often used French words while interpreting into Arabic. Translators and interpreters during this period fell into three main groups: (a) Moroccan, Arab and Turkish sailors captured by the French in Malta and released to work as translators in Egypt; (b) French orientalists who accompanied the scientific expedition, the best known among them being Venture, Jauper and l'Hormaca; (c) Christian Syrians who had a good knowledge of both French and Arabic, in addition to sharing the religion of the invaders. Some 500 of these Christian Syrians left with the French in 1801 and settled in Marseilles (al-Shayyāl 1950:45ff.). Very few Egyptians were involved in the translation effort during this period. The best known was Père Antūn RAPHAEL, a Christian priest of Syrian origin who became the only Arab member of Napoleon's Egyptian Academy of Science.

The greater part of translation activity under the French focused on official documents and legal decrees. However, a few interesting texts were also translated during this period, among them a grammar of spoken Arabic printed in a bilingual edition in 1801, and a treatise on smallpox translated by Père Antūn Raphael and printed in French and Arabic in 1800.

Translation under Muhammad Ali

In 1805, Muhammad Ali, an Ottoman soldier who was originally sent to take control of Egypt on behalf of the caliph, managed to establish himself as the de facto governor of Egypt and later Syria and Sudan. Muhammad Ali had military ambitions, which he proceeded to support by initiating a substantial programme of foreign education and subsequently of translation, mainly of technical works. He set up professional schools, sponsored groups of students to study in Europe and, on their return, instructed them to translate the texts he required for modernizing his army and administration. Initially, most of the students sent to Europe were Turks or Christians from the Levant, but Egyptian students later began to join these learning missions. Among the most active translators during this period were the Maronite Christians of Lebanon and Syria, who translated or adapted various works of Catholic theology and who were used by political leaders such as Fakhr
al-Dīn as interpreters in negotiations with the courts of Europe (Hourani 1962:55–6). Under Muhammad Ali and his sons, this group enjoyed more freedom and were able to establish their own schools, where they also translated textbooks and printed them in their own presses. Students of these mission schools were later to act as interpreters for local government and foreign diplomats in the area and to form the first generation of journalists in the Arab World (ibid.: 67).

Some of the translations which appeared during this period were done by Europeans, among them the French consul Basili Fakhr who translated several French books on astronomy and natural science into Arabic. French was the main source language during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and Muhammad Ali’s sponsored student missions to Europe had France as their main destination. In particular, modern Arabic drama owes its existence to the translation efforts of Lebanese emigrants in Egypt, who transferred a great deal of French drama into Arabic during this period (see Sadgrove 1996). Starting with close, literal translations, they eventually moved on to fairly extensive adaptation which involved even changing the setting and names of characters in Molière’s plays, among others. But it was not only French dramatic texts that were transferred into Arabic: the whole French tradition of drama was imported wholesale. Many of the current terms used in Arabic theatre (especially in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon) reveal their French origins; examples include décor, vaudeville and exessoire.

In 1826, one of Muhammad Ali’s student missions to France was accompanied by a religious guide, a graduate of al-Azhar who was to become one of the most important figures in translation during this period and a leading educator of his time. Rifā’ī al-ṬAHTĀWI (1801–73) spent five years in Paris, where he acquired an excellent command of French. On his return, he worked as a translator in one of Muhammad Ali’s new specialist schools and later headed al-Alsun (lit. ‘the tongues’), originally called madrasat al-tarjama (school of translation), which was set up by Muhammad Ali in 1835 on al-Ṭahtāwi’s recommendation. Al-Alsun started out with 80 students, chosen by al-Ṭahtāwi himself from various regions. Within a few years, this number grew to some 150 students who studied Arabic, French and Turkish (and occasionally English) in addition to technical subjects such as geography and mathematics. Al-Ṭahtāwi would choose a number of books which he thought required translation and distribute them among the translation students in the school. He would guide them through the translation and then revise each text himself before committing it to print. Al-Ṭahtāwi and his student translators were instrumental in making a vast range of European sources available in Arabic, covering numerous areas of knowledge. Among their most important translations were various histories of the ancient world and the Middle Ages, histories of various kings and emperors, Montesquieu’s *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence*, as well as a large body of texts on medicine, geography, military science and other technical subjects.

Teaching in the various schools set up by Muhammad Ali was initially conducted by foreign instructors in French or Italian. These instructors relied on interpreters in the classroom to communicate with their students. Thus the use of interpreters in the educational context seems to have been fairly common practice at the time. The first complete modern translation of the Bible into Arabic was produced in the 1850s by missionaries in Cambridge, Britain. This was soon replaced by a superior version produced in 1865 by American missionaries in Beirut. The 1865 version was the first Arabic translation to be based on the original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic (Sokhe 1995). It took 17 years to complete. The main translators, Eli Smith and Cornelius van Dyck, employed three Arab translators to help them with the task. The Jesuit Arabic Bible, published in Beirut between 1876 and 1880, is very closely modelled on the Smith-van Dyck version. This too was undertaken by a Western scholar, Augustin Rodet, with the help of an Arab translator, namely Ibrāhīm al-Ŷāẓījī. Some of the most distinguished translators of the period, who were later to form the intellectual leadership of Egypt and Syria in particular, were involved in producing these new versions.
of the Bible. They included Fāris al-Shidyāq, Butrus al-Bustāni and Naṣīf al-Yāziji. Muhammad Ali’s translation programme lasted about 20 years. During this time the circulation of the translated books was restricted to a small group of academics, essentially the students and former students of al-Alsuni, and government officials who needed access to specific information. However, the impact of the translation work done during this short period was quite considerable, for the new intellectual leadership in Egypt (which has since been the major cultural influence in the Arab World) came from the ranks of students who had access to translated books. Thanks to these students, Egypt, and with it the rest of the Arab World, started the twentieth century with a wealth of knowledge and an intellectual curiosity that have assured it a place in the modern world.

The twentieth century

France, Britain and Italy had had their designs on various parts of the Arab World since the early nineteenth century, and the Ottoman Empire was growing too weak to defend its territories. By the early part of the twentieth century most of the Arab World was under occupation, with the British in Egypt, Palestine, Sudan and Iraq, the French in North Africa and Syria, and the Italians in Libya. For the first time in many centuries, the Arab World lacked a common political leadership. This and the subsequent rise of individual nation states meant that cultural development in the area, and with it translation activity, began to diverge considerably. The territory is simply too large and too diverse to be covered in a short exposition.

In this century there have been efforts to develop a coherent pan-Arab programme of translation. One such attempt took place in Tunis in 1979, under the aegis of the Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Science (Fi al-Adab wa-l-ta’lif wa-al-tarjama 1993:171ff.). The recommendations of this committee included developing common criteria for selecting texts for translation, reassessing the status of translators in the Arab World, establishing a coherent policy for language learning and translator training, setting up regional and Arab unions to represent translators, and encouraging theoretical research in translation. This ambitious programme does not seem to have been followed up so far.

Translation training programmes exist in various parts of the Arab World, either in the form of independent institutions (as in the case of the King Fahd School of Translation in Tangier) or university departments or centres within departments (for example in Yarmuk University, Jordan, and Alexandria University). Iraq had a thriving school of translation (al-Mustansiriyya) and a professional organization for translators prior to the Gulf War, but up-to-date information on these institutions is currently difficult to obtain.

The King Fahd School of Translation in Tangier publishes a bi-annual scholarly journal of translation under the title of Tarjumān (Translator); this contains articles in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

Further reading


MONA BAKER

Biographies

Ibn Ṣibṭān, HUNAYN (809–73); known as JOANNITIUS in the West. A Nestorian Christian from al-Hima (in modern-day Iraq), nicknamed the ‘Prince of Translators’, Ibn Ṣibṭān was among the most gifted and productive translators during the Abbasid period. Bilingual in Arabic and Syriac, he studied medicine under the renowned physician and translator Yuhanna ibn Mas‘āwyh, went on to learn Greek and then began his career as physician and translator in Baghdad. He headed Bayt al-Hikma, the celebrated translation chamber set up by the caliph al-Ma‘mūn, where he took charge of all scientific translation work and, with his son Ṣibṭān, his nephew and other students and members of his school, translated into Syriac and Arabic the bulk of Greek medical material known at the time, many of Aristotle’s works (including Car-
egories, Physics and Magna Moralia), Plato’s Republic, works by Hippocrates, various treatises on mathematics and physics, as well as the Septuagint. In the course of producing this enormous translation output, he enriched Arabic with a very large number of scientific terms. Ibn 1śāfī was held in very high regard by al-Ma’āmmūn and enjoyed the support and sponsorship of Banu Mūsā, a wealthy family which patronized learning during this period. He also enjoyed the support of al-Mutawakkil, al-Ma’āmmūn’s successor, who nevertheless sent him to prison for a year for refusing to prepare a deadly poison for one of the caliph’s enemies (Hitti 1937:313). Ibn 1śāfī was a conscientious and sophisticated translator who took great pains to verify the accuracy of a source text before proceeding with a translation. He also adopted a sense-for-sense approach which distinguished his work from many crude, literal translations of the time.

RAPHĀĪL, PÈRE ANTŪN (b. 1759). An Egyptian Catholic priest of Syrian origin who became the only Arab member of al-majma‘ al-film al-masri, the Egyptian Academy of Science set up by Napoleon in 1798. Educated in Rome between the ages of 15 and 22, he spent some five years in Sidon translating religious texts then returned to Rome on a religious mission, where he translated between Arabic and Italian for a time before finally returning to his birthplace, Egypt. The Napoleonic decree for establishing the Egyptian Academy of Science had stipulated that there should be one Arab translator as a permanent member of the Academy, and Père Raphael was to occupy this position on the Committee of Literature and Fine Arts. He translated and interpreted extensively for the French during their occupation of Egypt and became important enough to sign his name as Chief Translator on legal decrees and similar official documents. He stayed in Egypt for two years after the departure of the French but then left for Paris where he was rewarded for his support of Napoleon in 1803 with an assistant professorship at the Oriental Institute in Paris (al-Shayyāl 1951).

TAHTĀWI, SHEIKH RIFĀ‘A RĀFI‘ (1801–73). Egyptian educator, translator and founder of the first school of translation in Egypt. Al-Tahtāwi spent five years in Paris where he mastered the French language and developed a passion for French culture. On his return to Egypt, he worked as a translator in one of Muhammad Ali’s new specialist schools. In 1835, he was appointed head of al-Alsun, the prestigious school of languages set up on his recommendation to train a new generation of officials and translators. Al-Tahtāwi guided his students while they translated books of his choice, which he then revised and had printed. In addition to revising his students’ work, he also produced a large number of his own translations, mostly in the areas of medicine, administration and technology. He was sent to Khartoum (Sudan) in 1850 as a sort of punishment by the Khedive Abbas, who did not appreciate his intellectual and political sympathies, especially his passion for the French model of democracy. While in the Sudan, al-Tahtāwi translated Fênelon’s Les aventures de Télémaque, the first French novel to be translated into Arabic. The translation was completed in 1851 and published 16 years later in Beirut. Al-Tahtāwi was later allowed to return to Egypt where he again headed a school with a translation chamber attached to it. Thereafter, his priority was to translate the French legal codes into Arabic.

MONA BAKER