

Translations from Arabic into Hebrew and from Hebrew into Arabic

Yohanan Friedmann

Let me start by thanking the organizers for inviting me to this fascinating symposium. Reading translated works produced in a neighbouring cultural area is probably the most feasible way to get acquainted with an adjacent culture. It would of course be better if many people knew the language of the "other", but this not a really feasible proposition when one speaks of real knowledge and not of the ability to conduct basic conversation for purposes of tourism. When discussing translations from Arabic into Hebrew and vice versa, it is appropriate to start this survey with the translations of the Jewish and Muslim scriptures. This process started in the 10th century when Saadia Gaon, known in Arabic as Saadia (or Sa`id) b. Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī (882-942 AD), who was born in Egypt and lived most of his productive life in Iraq, translated the Torah into Judaeo-Arabic, this is to say Arabic written in the Hebrew script. This is how the first two verses of Genesis sound in 10th century Judaeo-Arabic: *awwal ma khalaqa Allah al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ. wa al-arḍ kānat ghāmira wa mustabḥara wa ḡalām `alā wajh al-ghamr wa rūḥ Allah tahubbu `alā wajh al-mā`.*

Moving to translations of the Qur`ān into Hebrew, these started in the early modern period (17th and 18th centuries); though these translations were not made from the original Arabic, but rather through the mediation of Latin or other European languages. The first Hebrew translation of the Qur`ān from the original Arabic was made by the Jewish German scholar Herrmann Reckendorf (1825-1875) and published in Leipzig in 1857. Then we had two more modern translations in the 1930s (by Yosef Yoel Rivlin) and in the 1970s (by Aharon Ben Shemesh). In 2005 a new scholarly translation of the Qur`ān into contemporary Hebrew was published by Uri Rubin, professor of

Arabic at Tel Aviv University. Yosef Yoel Rivlin also translated into Hebrew the standard biography of the Prophet Muḥammad (*al-sīra al-nabawiyya*) by Ibn Hishām and parts of the *Thousand and one nights*.

We need also to mention several works written in Judaeo-Arabic in the mediaeval period and translated into Hebrew. Yehuda ha-Levi (1075-1141) wrote *Kitāb al-radd wa al-dalīl fī naṣr al-dīn al-dhalīl* ("The book of refutation and proof in support of the despised religion"). The book's framework relates to a tradition about a religious disputation between Jewish, Christian and Muslim sages at the court of the Khazari king in the 8th century; as a result of this disputation the king embraced Judaism. This framework allowed Ha-Levi to present his arguments in favour of Judaism in its polemics with Christianity and Islam. The book was translated into Hebrew by Yehuda Ben Shaul Ibn Tibbon (d. 1190). Another major work of medieval Jewish philosophy, written in Judaeo-Arabic by Moshe ben Maimon, Mūsā b. Maymūn in Arabic and Maimonides in Latin (d. 1204) for the benefit of Middle Eastern Jews whose main language of communication in the medieval period was Judaeo-Arabic. The work's original name in Judaeo-Arabic is *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, "Guide of the perplexed." It was translated into Hebrew by Shmuel Ibn Tibbon under the title of *Moreh Nevokhim* for the benefit of European Jews who did not know Arabic (12th century). There is also a modern Hebrew translation by Professor Michael Schwartz of Tel Aviv University.

Let me now say something about recent translations from Hebrew into Arabic, mainly in Egypt. I had very little time to prepare this and the list is probably not complete and there are more items in the modern novels category. My list includes 17 items. 6 are modern novels or literary analyses, 5 deal with Israeli or Middle Eastern politics, 3 with Jewish religion or related matters and 3 with Jewish history. In 2001, the *Markaz al-dirāsāt al-sharqiyya* of Cairo University published an Arabic translation of a volume of studies related to the Cairo Geniza, edited by Mordechai Akiva Friedmann of

Tel Aviv University. I would also like to mention in particular a translation into Arabic which was published in Israel in 1966 at the initiative of the Hebrew University and includes an anthology from the prose and poetry of Haim Nahman Bialik, who died in 1934 and is considered the national poet of Israel. The translation was produced by the Israeli Arab poet Rāshid Ḥusayn. I would like to read a few lines in which Bialik speaks about the sources of his poetry, in a poem entitled *lo zakhiti ba-or min ha-hefqer*, "I have not found my light on the street". Here is the Hebrew original:

*lo zakhiti ba-or min ha-hefqer
gam lo ba li bi-yrusha me-avi
ki mi-sal`i ve tsuri niqqartiv
ve hatsativ mi-lvavi.*

In Arabic:

*ṣaddiqūnī lam aḥza bi-'l-nūri 'afwan
ana ayḍan min wālidi mā warithtuh
min ṣukhūrī 'ntaza`tuhu min jalāmīdī
wa min manjami fu'ādī 'qtala'tuh*

And in an English translation by Atar Hadari (slightly modified):

*I have not found my light on the street
nor did it come in bequest from my Dad
but from my store and rock I picked it
and carved it out of my heart.*

Moving to translations from Arabic into Hebrew, I would like to mention first of all a translation of classical Arab poems produced by Asher Goren and published by the Hebrew University in 1970. This is a bilingual book, showing the Arabic original and the Hebrew translation on opposite pages. It includes selections from the pre-Islamic poets `Amr b. Kulthūm, Imru' al-Qays, and Ta'abbaṭa Sharran and the pre-Islamic Jewish poet who wrote in Arabic, Samaw'al b. `Ādiyā'; it also includes selections from the Umayyad

and `Abbāsī poets `Umar b. Abī Rabī`a, Bashshār b. Burd, Abū al-`Atāhiya, Abū Nuwās, al-Mutanabbī and Abū al-`Alā' al-Ma`arrī. All these are central figures in classical Arabic poetry and we thought that they should be brought to the attention of the Israeli reading public. As an example, here are then first two lines from the pre-Islamic ode (*mu`allaqa*) by Imru' al-Qays in the original Arabic:

*qifā nabki min dhikrā ḥabībin wa manzilī
bi-siqṭi 'l-liwā bayna 'ddakhūli fa-ḥawmalī
fa-tūdiḥa fa-'l-miqrātī lam ya`fu rasmuhā
li-mā nasajathā min janūbin wa sham'alī*

In the Hebrew translation by Asher Goren:

*`imdu ve norid dim`a, ezkor ahuva, nave,
bi-qtse mifteley holot, beyn ḥawmal ve ad-dakhūl
ve tūdiḥ ve al-miqrāt - roshmam lo nimḥa biglal
maṭve ha-ruḥot - teyman mi-ze ve tsafon mi-mul*

And in the English translation by Alan Jones:

*Stop, let us weep at the memory of a loved one and [her] dwelling
at the place where the sands twist to an end between al-Dakhūl and Ḥawmal
And Tūdiḥ and al-Miqrāt. Her traces have not been [completely] effaced,
with all the weaving of the wind from south and north.*

It is a particular pleasure for me to report about a recent translation into Hebrew of one of the jems of Arabic literature, the *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma fī al-ulfa wa al-ullāf* ("The ring of the dove, on love and lovers") by the Andalusian writer Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064), translated in a most impressive manner, with an introduction and copious notes, by my good friend Dr. Ella Almagor who published it in 2002. This is a sophisticated work on the psychology of love, including the nature of this emotion, profound analysis of human approaches to courtship, the impediments which stand in the lovers' way, the nature of the lovers' union, their faithfulness and reasons for betrayal. Dr. Almagor has

also completed a translation of Usāma b. Munqidh (1095-1188), *Kitab al-I'tibār*, memoirs of a Syrian amīr who lived during the tumultuous period of the Crusades and described his interaction with them and with other rulers of the time.

Another major classic of Arab-Muslim literature which was translated into Hebrew is the famous spiritual autobiography of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl wa al-mūṣil ilā dhī al-'izzati wa al-jalāl* ("The deliverer from error ...), translated by the late Hava Lazarus-Yafeh of the Hebrew University and published in 1970. Many of you will know the importance of this work and of its author, who is credited with effecting a new synthesis of Islamic thought and creating a new equilibrium between philosophy, jurisprudence and mysticism. It is a fine example of the dilemmas facing a medieval intellectual who is torn between the conflicting trends in his civilization and creates a new balance between them. In the realm of Sufism, we now have also an anthology from Ṣūfī literature in Hebrew translation by Professor Sarah Sviri of the Hebrew University, published in 2008.

In 1966, the Bialik Institute in Jerusalem published a full translation into Hebrew of the *Muqaddima* or *Prolegomena* by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) by Emmanuel Kopulewitz. Many of you will know, that this is a unique work in Arab historiography. Ibn Khaldūn identified in it the factors which cause major changes in human history, in which he described the various types of civilization and identified the reasons which cause social and political units to flourish and decay. Some modern writers consider Ibn Khaldūn the father of modern sociology.

As for modern Arab writers, the pride of place belongs to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Najīb Maḥfūz. Numerous novels of Najīb Maḥfūz were translated into Hebrew and his literary production has been the subject of research by several Israeli scholars. There is also a translation of the novel by Sudanese writer al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, *Mawsim al-hijra ilā al-*

shamāl, *The season of migration to the north* (1973) by Tuviah Shamush. There are probably many more works which were translated from Arabic to Hebrew but it was not possible for me to prepare a more comprehensive survey.

Ladies and gentlemen, translating from Hebrew into Arabic and from Arabic into Hebrew is a significant enterprise. On the one hand, Hebrew and Arabic are linguistically related languages; on the other hand, they are spoken and written by peoples who have, to say the least, a complex relationship. It is encouraging to see that on both sides of the divide there are scholars and men and women of letters who see beyond the contemporary conditions and devote their energy and resources in order to bring the literature of one side to the attention and appreciation of the other.