

## Translation in the Arab-Islamic History. An Avenue for the Culture of Tolerance and Knowledge Transfer Worldwide

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### **Abstract**

*Translation, in essence, constitutes a tributary of human thought that crosses cultures and borders. It plays a valuable and extremely important role in the cultural movement narrowing the breach between the West and the global South. On the other hand, translation is a mechanism of knowledge transfer and dissemination of cultures among all the peoples of the world. Regardless of any deficiencies, instability, or distortions that may have affected the process of transfer and dissemination, translation has consistently served as a means of cultural assimilation, fostering mutual dialogue, and creating connections between different civilizations and cultures. In this context, the current paper traces the different phases of the translation movements in the Arab-Islamic world since the seventh century until the present times to explore the role it played in the transmission of knowledge and cultures worldwide. The paper argues that translation in the Arab-Islamic world, in ancient times, triggered messages of acculturation and tolerance bridging the civilizational divide between East and West. The paper also illustrated that in the first half of the twentieth century, the translation movement in the Arab world participated in reducing the gap between colonized and colonizing countries providing an outlet for inter-civilizational reconciliation. Missionaries and Arab intellectual elites translated the masterpieces of Western literature into Arabic particularly in the post-colonial era. Thanks to these translation efforts, prominent Arab writers integrated Christian/Jewish cultural and Eurocentric narratives into literary works addressed to predominantly Muslim audience paving the way for religious tolerance, which exceeded the barriers of colonization.*

**Keywords:** translation, knowledge transfer, tolerance, inter-cultural dialogue, Western heritage, trans-civilizational reconciliation

### **1. Introduction**

This paper presents a panoramic overview of the history of translation in the Arab-Islamic world, focusing on how translation served as a vital avenue for knowledge transfer and the promotion of cultural tolerance across centuries. The paper highlights the pivotal role that translation played in the development of intellectual traditions in the Islamic world, starting from the Umayyad period (661–750 AD) and culminating in the Abbasid Golden Age (750–1258 AD). By tracing key translation movements and examining their contributions to various disciplines such as science, philosophy, and medicine, the paper aims to demonstrate how these efforts not only preserved ancient knowledge but also facilitated original intellectual advancements. More specifically, the paper demonstrates that translation was more than a linguistic exercise. It constituted a transformative practice that helped shape the cultural and scientific landscape of both the Islamic and the Western world. Through a

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critical examination of these historical periods, the paper underscores the broader cultural and intellectual impacts of translation, while advocating for its continued relevance in fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

Historically, the translation movement in the Arab-Islamic world spanned centuries, where translation has played a pivotal role in knowledge transfer and the development of a rich intellectual tradition. On this basis, the paper seeks to trace the evolution of translation from the early Islamic period through the Abbasid Golden Age, emphasizing not only the preservation of ancient texts but also the cultural and scientific innovations that emerged from these movements. A number of distinct epochs can be recognized, each characterized by unique contributions. The Umayyad period focused primarily on practical translations for governance, laying the groundwork for future intellectual efforts. By contrast, the Abbasid period witnessed the establishment of institutionalized translation efforts, most notably through the House of Wisdom/ Bayt Al-Ḥikmah,<sup>2</sup> established by the Abbasid Caliph, Hārūn Al-Rashīd and expanded by Caliph Alma'mūn. It was a great library and prominent cultural hub located in Baghdad. This institution was responsible for the translation of a substantial number of texts on science, philosophy, and medicine from Greek, Persian, and Indian sources. The Abbasid period marked the zenith of intellectual activity, with translations facilitating original contributions in philosophy, mathematics, and medicine that would later influence the European Renaissance.

The translation movement in the Umayyad and Abbasid reigns represents more than just a regular historical progression. They mark significant leaps in how knowledge was disseminated and how intellectual and cultural exchanges transformed the Arab-Islamic world. By examining these milestones, the paper offers a critical assessment of the broader cultural and intellectual shifts that these translation movements initiated. Through this lens, one can better understand how translation shaped not only the Arab-Islamic world but also the global intellectual landscape. When considering the unique role of the translation movement in Arab-Islamic history and the differences between the Abbasid and Umayyad efforts in this respect, one can argue that the Umayyad era mainly concentrated on establishing Islamic governance over extensive regions, resulting in less prominent contributions with regard to the translation movement. However, it laid the groundwork for future intellectual endeavors by integrating the diverse cultures within the Arab-Islamic Empire. Translations during the Umayyad period were more pragmatic, focusing on administrative and technical texts to aid governance. The Umayyad Caliphs also took an interest in translating works related to astrology, agriculture, and medicine, mostly from Persian and Byzantine sources. While not as systematic or expansive as the Abbasid effort, these translations helped establish the basic framework for the later surge in intellectual activity.

Moreover, the Abbasid era, especially under the Caliphate of Alma'mūn, marked the golden age of the translation movement in the ancient Arab-Islamic world. This era was distinguished by its formal institutional support, exemplified by the contributions of the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad. The Abbasid rulers made translation a state-sponsored activity, translating not just Persian and Greek texts but also Indian, Syriac, and other works. The uniqueness of the Abbasid translation movement lies in its scale, breadth, and scholarly rigor. In addition to translating texts on science, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy, there was a concerted effort to engage critically with these works. This led to

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<sup>2</sup> Transliteration in this paper follows the criteria of the American Library Association (Library of Congress).

original contributions from scholars such as Alkindī, Alfārābī, and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna). Unlike the more utilitarian approach of the Umayyad translation initiative, the Abbasid translation project aimed to create a comprehensive intellectual tradition, merging Islamic thought with Hellenistic, Indian, and Persian knowledge systems.

There are key distinctions between the Umayyad and the Abbasid eras with regard to the translation initiatives. It is obvious that the Umayyad translation movement was relatively limited and functional, focused on practical governance and administrative texts, whereas the Abbasid translation movement was far more systematic, institutionalized, and expansive, targeting a wide array of intellectual disciplines. The Abbasids viewed translation not only as a means of gaining practical knowledge but as an intellectual enterprise that could advance Islamic civilization and its scientific and philosophical understanding.

Concerning the impact of the preceding translation movements on knowledge dissemination and cultural shifts, there is no doubt that the translation movements in the Arab-Islamic world had profound implications for both knowledge dissemination and cultural transformation. By translating works from Greek, Persian, Indian, and other sources, the early Islamic empires enabled the preservation and transmission of ancient knowledge to later generations, including Western scholars during the Renaissance. However, the impact of these movements went beyond the mere transmission of texts. Unequivocally, the Abbasid translation movement, in particular, was a catalyst for the development of major scientific disciplines such as astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. Greek philosophical texts including the works of Aristotle and Plato were introduced into Islamic thought, merging with Islamic theology and giving rise to Islamic philosophy. This fusion allowed Muslim scholars to contribute original ideas, which were subsequently translated into Latin and reintroduced to Europe, sparking the intellectual revival of the Renaissance. Therefore, these movements were not just channels of knowledge transfer but also centers of intellectual innovation.

Unquestionably, the translation movements in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras also transformed the cultural landscape of the Arab-Islamic world. The process of engaging with texts from different civilizations fostered a cosmopolitan culture within the Arab-Islamic Empire, one that was tolerant of diverse ideas and intellectual traditions. The interplay between Islamic thought and Hellenistic, Persian, and Indian knowledge systems led to the development of a more pluralistic worldview. Scholars who worked within the framework of the Abbasid translation movement were often fluent in multiple languages, contributing to cultural shifts and cross-cultural dialogues that enriched culture in Islamic and non-Islamic societies. Likewise, these translation efforts also initiated a shift in the intellectual authority within the Arab-Islamic world. It moved from purely religious scholars to philosophers and scientists who could engage with “foreign” ideas and integrate them into the Islamic intellectual tradition. This process reshaped the societal hierarchy of knowledge and power, allowing secular intellectuals and scholars to gain prominence.

## **2. The centrality of translation in the Arab-Islamic history**

There is no doubt that translation is highly significant as an individual act or as a disciplined institutional process, whether it takes the form of elite personal preference for what is translated and what is not translated, or as a cultural policy supported by systematic and authorized organizations. Translation takes into consideration the geopolitical variables of the

era, the tireless and successive explosions of knowledge, the major cultural transformations, and the sweeping data of electronic culture. Apparently, the translation movements in the Arab-Islamic world have played a pivotal role in developing the concept of cultural hybridity for centuries ago. The Islamic conquests in the seventh century provided a historical opportunity for the establishment of a cultural dialogue between different civilizations and the hybridization of cultures, as many of the Islamic Caliphate's subjects were fluent in the Persian and Greek languages, both spoken and written

By the end of the seventh century, Greek language was the administrative language in Egypt and Syria, and the majority of population knew Greek culture at that time. Ishraq Ali (2022: 2) clarified that "there is a consensus of opinion among scholars that medieval Muslim political philosophy is largely based on Plato's Republic." Translators rendered the most important Greek books into the Syriac language, which was a written version of Aramaic. Historically, Aramaic was the language of writers and the language of church priests in the Byzantine era and was the dominant language among the Eastern Christians of the Jacobite and Nestorian communities. Further, Maria Mavroudi (2023: 216) argued that

the disciplines and genres transferred from Arabic into Greek during the Byzantine period include medicine and pharmacology, alchemy, astronomy and astrology, various other methods of prognostication such as geomancy, the interpretation of dreams and celestial omens, mirrors of princes, hagiography, and the Qur'ān.

The translation movement in the Arab world is not a recent phenomenon, but one that is deeply rooted in Islamic culture and history. Translation flourished during the Abbasid dynasty, which lasted for two centuries (750–935 AD). Therefore, historians and literary scholars pointed out that one of the most important achievements of the Abbasid court, especially during the reign of Caliph Alma'mūn (786–833 AD), and the rule of Caliphs Almu'tasim (796–842 AD), and Alwāthiq (815–847 AD), was the unlimited support of the translation movement. Throughout these epochs, translators transferred huge numbers of philosophical and scientific texts from Greek into Arabic. The movement of translating Greek books and documents into Arabic began on a small scale during the Umayyad era (662–750 AD). It reached its peak in the Abbasid era thanks to the establishment of the grand library of Baghdad (known as the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Hikmah), a public academy and intellectual center, which hosted scientists, academicians, and translators.

During the Abbasid era, there was an interest in the translation of Greek cultural heritage. They believed in the importance of acquiring Greek knowledge, especially books related to philosophy, logic, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and botany. Through translation, Arab-Muslims were familiar with the writings of Greek philosophers such as the famous Aristotle in addition to the writings of scholars, thinkers, and historians such as Hippocrates (the father of medicine), Galen (a brilliant physician), Euclid (a mathematician), Ptolemy (Mathematician, geographer, astronomer) and others whose works were translated into Arabic. It is obvious that translation played a valuable role in the global cultural movement including the transmission of science and culture among the peoples of the ancient world, no matter how much this transmission was marred by deficiency, uncertainty, or distortion. Further, translation usually aims to achieve prosperity for humanity. Throughout the ages, translators did not create any confrontational or uncivilized discourses with the other and translation was an avenue for mutual understanding between nations.

Evidently, translation is crucial in shaping national identity, highlighting local characteristics, and contributing to the shared human experience. It enriches various fields such as thought, art, literature, science, and technology by introducing new perspectives and ideas. This exchange not only enhances cultural understanding but also fosters innovation and creativity across different domains. Thanks to translation, the world became aware of the ancient Egyptian civilization with its repertoire of knowledge in arithmetic, astronomy, agriculture, medicine, and engineering. Likewise, the Greeks made use of the civilization of the Pharaohs, and the Romans learned Greek literature, philosophy, and sciences. Afterwards, the Arabs in Andalusia transferred the cultural treasures of the Greeks and the Romans from Greek and Latin into Arabic. Finally came the turn of Europe in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Age of Enlightenment to transfer knowledge and sciences from the Arabs into European languages.

In this context, the Europeans translated the works of great Arab-Muslim scientists and philosophers such as the brilliant physician, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), the prominent jurist Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Ibn Alhaytham (a medieval mathematician, astronomer, and physicist), Alkindī (father of Arab philosophy), Alrrāzī (a physician, philosopher and alchemist), and the music theorist, Alfārābī (Alpharabius), and taught them in European universities. Therefore, translation was one of the most prominent methods of stimulating the dialogue of civilizations and strengthening lofty human values. Consequently, translation constitutes a major source of cultural exchanges worldwide. No culture, regardless of its development, or linguistic richness, exists without engaging in translation. This engagement was triggered by a desire to understand the literature, science, and technology of other nations sharing common intellectual, artistic, and scientific achievements. The primary motivation is often to address a need, fill a gap, or remedy a deficiency.

Mingwei Xi (2023: 101) emphasized that, “during the Arab Empire, Arabs launched a massive translation movement to learn advanced scientific culture and technology, enrich their amateur culture, and translate advanced cultural classics from the East and the West into Arabic.” On this basis, the translation movements in the Arab-Islamic world throughout time were crucial in facilitating the exchange of knowledge and fostering civilizational dialogue. By narrowing the cultural gap between the West and the Arab world, translation enabled the transfer of human values between the two sides. Translation has evolved beyond mere stylistic and linguistic concerns to become a pivotal civilizational and cultural endeavor. It enables openness and understanding between different cultures, fostering coexistence. In the postcolonial era, initiatives to translate Western literature into Arabic have been instrumental in unifying common human values and promoting dialogue between Western and Eastern civilizations. The processes of translation and cultural exchange have profoundly shaped contemporary Arabic literature and culture. This influence is particularly evident in the use of intertextuality and the adaptation of Western Christian and Jewish traditions by Arab-Muslim writers to explore social and historical issues from an Arab and Islamic viewpoint. These adaptations not only enrich the literary landscape but also foster a deeper understanding and dialogue between different cultural and religious traditions.

### **3. Translation in the Early Islamic Age**

One of the notable ironies in translation research within the Arab world is the emphasis on Western methodologies, often overlooking the rich and flourishing history of Arab

translation. Tarek Shamma & Myriam Salama-Carr (2022: 4) demonstrated that “the emergence of Islam, as well as its later spread, were not divorced from the cultural and linguistic multiplicity of its environment, and the attendant translation activities.” From ancient times, Arabs recognized the significance of learning foreign languages, and thus, they prioritized translation. Although the ancient Arabs acquired other languages from the prisoners of war, it was indisputable that translation dated back to the era of Prophet Muhammad, who utilized it for diplomatic and administrative purposes. While the captives of the wars with the Persian and Roman empires were the first translators in Islamic history, the prophet employed local translators to help him contact with the Hebrew-speaking Jewish Rabbis in Al-Madīnah region located in Western Saudi Arabia north of the holy city of Makkah.

Halla Shureteh (2014: 1377) argued that “the discipline of Translation Studies worldwide is recognized today as a relatively new field that is still in the making.” However, the Arabs have shown a keen interest in translation since the early Islamic era. Islamic historians noted that Prophet Muhammad sent letters to various kings and rulers outside Arabia, who did not understand Arabic. These included the governor of Egypt (Almuqawqis), the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius, and the Persian Chosroes (Kisrá). The Prophet asked his companions, especially Zayd Ibn Thābit, to learn foreign languages to facilitate communication with other peoples. He was a prominent figure in the early Islamic history, who mastered Persian, Coptic, and Abyssinian languages. Ibn Thābit was not only the poet of the Prophet but also played a crucial role as a translator. His proficiency in Hebrew was instrumental in facilitating communication between the Prophet and the Jewish community in Al-Madīnah (Wikipedia 2023). This ability to bridge linguistic gaps highlights the importance of translation in fostering understanding and cooperation between the diverse communities in ancient Arabia.

In other words, translation in the early Islamic era became a vital means of developing intercultural dialogues among different nations (Bsoul 2019: 51). Ibn Thābit’s efforts exemplified the broader significance of translation in the early Islamic era, where it served as a vital tool for intercultural dialogue and exchange of knowledge. His work laid the foundation for the rich tradition of translation that flourished during the Abbasid era (750-1258 AD) contributing to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge across various civilizations. Fadi Jaber (2015: 130) pointed out that “the Arabic translation movement developed dramatically during the Abbasid ruling era. In fact, this historical period featured the development the Arabic knowledge and scientific research, and the evolution of the scientific Arabic language”.

During the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, who succeeded the Prophet (632–661AD) the expanding Islamic conquests in regions such as Egypt, the Levant, and Asia Minor highlighted the significance of translation. Yazid Al-Isma'il (2022: 289) argued that during the era of the Guided Caliphs, “translation activities were mainly restricted to political correspondence”. From the seventh century AD, following the onset of Islamic conquests, the Arabs prioritized the Arabization of official departments and bureaus (divans) in the newly annexed territories (Wikipedia 2021). This Arabization initiative (El-Ghazi & Chakib 2020: 66) was a significant effort that greatly encouraged a widespread interest in translation across the Arab-Islamic world. Omar El-Ghazi & Bnini Chakib (2020: 67) illustrated that “during the rule of the Umayyad dynasty, the fifth Caliph ‘Abd Almalik Ibn Marwān ordered the Arabization” of administrative Departments.

In the golden age of Islamic civilization, spanning roughly from the eighth to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Arabs were instrumental in promoting and advancing translation as both an art and a science. This cultural and scientific Renaissance in the Arab world facilitated the arrival of non-Arabic-speaking immigrants, leading to the formation of multilingual communities, who mastered languages such as Persian, Syriac, and Greek alongside Arabic. Obviously, the contributions of the Arabs to translation in the ancient world emerged from a rich history of cultural and scientific achievements, driving the establishment of a pioneering and flourishing translation movement (Bsoul 2019: 38). This movement significantly influenced the Western world, particularly during the Islamic civilization in Andalusia.

Throughout centuries, translation continues to be a powerful tool for cultural exchange, enabling people to share their stories, ideas, and values across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The Islamic Golden Age was a period of remarkable intellectual and cultural flourishing in the Arab-Islamic world. Translation played a crucial role during this era, significantly influencing various fields and fostering intercultural exchange. Translation has played a pivotal role in cultural exchange throughout Arab-Islamic history, serving as a bridge between civilizations and fostering mutual understanding.

The Islamic Golden Age exemplified how translation served as a powerful tool for cultural exchange and intellectual advancement. Moreover, translation enabled the preservation and dissemination of scientific, philosophical, and literary works across different cultures. For instance, scholars translated Greek, Persian, and Indian texts into Arabic, preserving and expanding upon this knowledge during the Islamic Golden Age. Translation synthesized different cultural and intellectual traditions leading to new ideas and innovations. The Arabic translations of the works of Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plato remarkably shaped Islamic philosophy. These translated works later played a crucial role in the European Renaissance through their subsequent Latin translations.

Owing to translation, the Arabization of official documents and bureaus helped, in the early Islamic era, integrate newly conquered regions into the Islamic empire, promoting administrative efficiency and political cohesion. In a related context, translation introduced new vocabulary and concepts into multiple languages, enriching them and expanding their expressive capabilities. This linguistic exchange often led to the development of new literary and scholarly traditions. Translation also facilitated dialogue between different cultures, promoting tolerance and understanding. By making the literary, religious, scientific, and philosophical works of one culture accessible to another, translation helped bridge cultural divides among different peoples.

There is no doubt that the extensive translation of Western literature into Arabic, in the first half of the twentieth century, had a profound impact on the literary movements in the Arab world. By virtue of these translations, Arab writers integrated Christian and Jewish grand narratives inherent in Euro-American culture into literary works addressed to local Muslim readers. The dissemination of Western Judeo-Christian heritage in Arabic literature acquainted local audience with the treasures of Euro-American cultures triggering an inter-civilizational dialogue between East and West. Thanks to translation, Arab writers and readers became interested in Western religious and cultural heritage subverting the clash of civilization narrative about the hostility of Muslims and Arabs toward the West.

#### 4. Translation and the expanding Muslim empire

The early Islamic conquests during the Umayyad (662–750 AD) and Abbasid (750–1258 AD) dynasties significantly heightened the awareness of the importance of translation in the Arab-Islamic world (Bsoul 2019: 79). Within fifty years of Prophet Muhammad's death (632 AD), the Arabs had ended the reigns of both the Sasanian and Roman Empires, extending their influence beyond the Arabian Peninsula to Southeast Asia and Northeast Africa, regions once ruled by Alexander the Great. Following these conquests, new developments emerged, particularly the political, administrative, and economic unification of Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, Persia, and India. The administration of the Arab-Islamic Empire, managed from major centers like Damascus, Baghdad, and Persia, necessitated translation. Through translation, the Islamic conquests unified the East and the West culturally, breaking down the economic and cultural barriers that once separated different parts of the world.

The use of translation as a means of communication during the Islamic conquests facilitated global free trade and the transfer of manufactured and agricultural products, as well as raw materials. These conquests also accelerated the exchange of ideas and cross-cultural dialogues among various nations, with translation being central to the continuity of progress. In the same vein, the translation movement flourished due to the introduction of the papermaking industry into the Islamic world by the Chinese prisoners of war.<sup>3</sup> Paper began to replace other writing materials, especially in the early decades of the Abbasid era, leading to tangible advancements in cultural and scientific fields, as well as in translation activities. These developments fostered new visions and sophisticated ways of thinking, affecting the intellectual, scientific, and translational productions. Scholars, proficient in multiple languages, began translating works from other languages into Arabic. Geographically, translation thrived in Baghdad due to its multicultural society, characterized by a diverse demographic and ethnic composition. The city's population included Aramaic-speaking Christians and Jews, as well as Persian-speaking communities, forming the majority of the settled population. At that time, a limited number of the Arab population lived in Baghdad and the majority of them settled in the desert (Abdulla 2020: 43).

In a related context, Selougha Fayrouz (2022: 420) displayed that “at the end, of the Umayyad era, monumental works were already translated into Arabic”. Evidently, the translation movement started in the Umayyad Era and reached the zenith during the Abbasid reign after the colonial expansion of the Abbasid Empire and the annexation of vast territories in Asia and the Middle East. Both Arab and foreign historians acknowledged that the Umayyad Prince, Khālīd Ibn Yazīd (668–704 AD), a chemist who never ascended the throne, was a pioneer in advocating the translation into Arabic of Greek and Syriac books and manuscripts on medicine, astronomy, and chemistry. Similarly, the Umayyad Caliph, ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz (681–720 AD), was notable for his interest in translation. He commissioned Masergwe, a Jewish physician from Basra, to translate a renowned medical book. This translated work, known as *Alkunnāsh* (a collection of papers arranged like a notebook), was originally authored by Ahron, a priest who studied at the Alexandria School of Medicine, which thrived between the fifth and seventh centuries.

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<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of the battle of Talas River between the Chinese Tang Dynasty and the Abbasids in 751 AD, the victorious Abbasids succeeded in obtaining the papermaking secrets from the Chinese prisoners of war. The Abbasids built their first paper mill in Baghdad in 794 AD.



By all accounts, in the Abbasid era, the translation movement gained significant momentum due to the efforts of Caliph Abū Ja‘far Al-Manṣūr (714–775 AD), who was the first Abbasid ruler to emphasize the importance of translation. He had a keen interest in astronomy and his efforts in promoting scientific translation were pivotal. Therefore, he sponsored the translation of the works of ancient scholars in related fields. He commissioned the translation of Euclid’s works and an astronomy book titled *Alhind wa Alsind* by an Indian author. Al-Manṣūr also sponsored the translation of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, a collection of fables of Indian origin, translated by Ibn Almuqaffa’. The preceding work became highly influential in Arabic and Western literatures. Additionally, Al-Manṣūr ordered the translation of significant Greek texts by Aristotle and Ptolemy, further enriching the intellectual landscape of the Abbasid era. These translations not only preserved ancient knowledge but also facilitated a profound cultural and scientific exchange between civilizations. The Abbasid era marked a significant period of intellectual and cultural exchange, laying the foundation for many scientific and philosophical advancements in the Arab-Islamic world (Hazari & Laskar 2020: 524). Hazari & Laskar (2020: 525) illustrated that “the Abbasid period left a lasting impact on Islamic civilization and contributed to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge from various cultures.” Translation, which flourished, in the Abbasid era, incorporated texts from various languages such as Syriac, Greek, and Indian languages, especially Sanskrit. Many books, rendered into Arabic, were originally translated from Indian into Pahlavi (Kahl 2015: 136), a language spoken in different parts of ancient Persia.

Following the reigns of the Abbasid Caliphs, Al-Mahdī (745–785 AD) and Al-Hādī (761–786 AD) who did not continue Al-Manṣūr’s extensive translation project, Caliph Hārūn Al-Rashīd (786–808 AD) revitalized the Arabic translation initiative. He believed that military expansion alone could not create a prosperous empire; instead, he emphasized the importance of acquiring cultural and intellectual knowledge as the foundation of an advanced state. Al-Rashīd was the founder of the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Ḥikmah as previously mentioned. He sent translators and scientific missions to Europe to bring European books on all sciences. Al-Rashid’s initiative to send translators, academic delegations, and scientific missions to Europe was a groundbreaking effort. These missions aimed to acquire Greek manuscripts on various sciences, reflecting his belief in the importance of cultural and intellectual enrichment for a prosperous empire. His efforts markedly contributed to the preservation and expansion of knowledge, laying the groundwork for many scientific and philosophical advancements during the Abbasid Golden Age, when translation played a great role in the dissemination and transmission of knowledge.

A notable feature of the Abbasid era was the employment of Arab-Christian translators, who were highly proficient in the major languages of the time, including Greek, Arabic, Persian, and Syriac, the language of the educated community in medieval Baghdad. Syriac served as a mediating language and a link of communication between cultures in ancient times. This period marked a significant revival of the translation movement, which contributed to the rich intellectual and cultural exchanges characterizing the Abbasid Golden Age. Mohammad Mehawesh (2014: 689) argued that

the flowering of knowledge in the Arab World during the 10th and 11th centuries later provided impetus for the development of all aspects of knowledge in the West, including natural sciences and philosophy. It could not have happened without the

implementation of the intense program of translation carried out under the Abbasid Caliphs.

For the Arabs, translation was about not only acquiring knowledge and applying scientific principles across various fields but also about fostering mutual coexistence and inter-civilizational dialogue between different communities. In other words, translation served as a bridge of communication and a means of exploring and understanding other cultures and knowledge systems. Nevertheless, John Willinsky (2018: 8) clarified that, “there were undoubtedly political motives at play in the Caliphs’ interests in what could be learned, for example, from astrology, and there are indications that they viewed translation as a tool of intellectual conquest in empire-building.”

## 5. Baghdad School of Translation and the Muslim Golden Era

The Baghdad School of Translation, affiliated with the grand library of Baghdad or the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Ḥikmah, participated enormously in the cultural Renaissance of the Abbasid era. The school focused on translating medical and philosophical texts from Greek into Syriac. These two languages (Greek and Syriac) were the primary targets of the translation initiatives particularly because Syriac<sup>4</sup> was a crucial linguistic and cultural bridge linking various languages as mentioned earlier. Translators were required to be experts in their fields, such as medicine, physics, and astronomy. Interestingly, the Baghdad school translators excluded literary works from their translations, except for proverbs and didactic texts. However, the translators in Baghdad were engaged in copying, editing, and binding books and publications. Nonetheless, their primary goal was to translate works that would propel Arab society forward in various knowledge domains. These efforts significantly enriched the Arabic language with new ideas, terminologies, and theories.

The golden era of translation reached its peak during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph, Alma’mūn (813–833 AD), who mastered the Persian language because his mother (who was a slave) descended from Persian origin. Under his leadership, translation experienced a significant revival. Alma’mūn broadened and renovated the celebrated House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad, originally founded by Hārūn al-Rashīd. This institution in the reign of Alma’mūn served as an academy, library, and translation center, focusing on scientific research, translation, and authorship across various fields. This epoch marked the rise of prominent scholars like Alkhawārizmī (a great mathematician, 790–850 AD), Aljāhīz (a famous polymath, 776–868 AD), and Alkindī (a well-known philosopher, 801–873 AD), as well as notable translators such as Ḥunayyn Ibn Ishāq (809–873 AD), who was both a skilled physician and a brilliant translator. During Alma’mūn’s rule, numerous academic missions were dispatched to Athens, which was then considered the hub of science and knowledge in Europe.

In the era of Alma’mūn, earlier translations of key publications were updated to reflect the advancements in Arabic language, incorporating new concepts and scientific terms. For instance, Ptolemy’s *Almagest* was translated for the first time during the reign of Caliph Al-Manṣūr (714–775 AD). Eventually it was re-translated multiple times. The rule of Alma’mūn was marked by the exploration of new fields such as mathematics, natural history,

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<sup>4</sup> As part of the Semitic language family, Syriac was derived from Aramaic and it predated Christianity.

ethics, psychology, philosophy, and medicine. Unequivocally, translation played a crucial role in making philosophy a significant field for the Arabs, who studied Aristotle's works through Greek commentators like Alexander of Aphrodisiacs. Renowned scholars and translators, who participated in the Renaissance of medieval Islamic history not only translated texts but also contributed to the enrichment of Arabic language and culture, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and ideas among different civilizations.

During the Abbasid Era, several notable translators made significant contributions to the translation movement including Thābit Ibn Qurrah (836–901 AD), who was a renowned translator, physician, mathematician, and astronomer, often referred to as the “Euclid of the Arabs.” Fluent in Syriac, Greek, and Arabic, he translated into Arabic significant works by Apollonius, Archimedes, Euclid, and Ptolemy. Moreover, Ishāq Ibn Hunayn (830–911 AD), son of the famous translator Hunayn Ibn Ishāq (809–873 AD), was a pivotal figure in translating Greek scientific and mathematical texts into Arabic. Like his father, Ishaq was a physician, but he also had a deep understanding of mathematics and astronomy. Besides, Qusṭā Ibn Luqā (820–912 AD) was a Christian physician, philosopher, and astronomer. Born in Baalbek, Lebanon, he spent much of his life in Baghdad before moving to Armenia, where he passed away. His contributions to the translation movement, in the Abbasid era, were significant particularly in the fields of medicine and philosophy. These scholars played an instrumental role in the transmission of knowledge from Greek and Syriac languages into Arabic, enriching the intellectual landscape of the Islamic Golden Age.

Other intellectuals and scholars enormously enriched the translation movement during the Abbasid dynasty. For example, Ibn Nā'imah Alḥimṣī (born in 835 AD) was a Syrian Christian who translated several Greek works into Arabic, including Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* and *Physics*. Besides, Aljawāhirī (800–860 AD) was a geometer and astronomer who worked at the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad as a translator. In addition, Alkindī (801–873 AD) was a renowned translator, physician, philosopher, mathematician, geometer, logician, and astronomer. He collaborated with a group of translators to translate into Arabic the works of Aristotle, the Neo-Platonists, and most of the Greek mathematicians and scientists.

On top of that, Hunayn Ibn ishāq (809–873 AD), known as the “Sheikh of translators”, played an influential role in translating medical and scientific texts from Greek and Syriac into Arabic. He stood out as the most famous and skilled translator, who mastered Greek, Persian, Syriac, and Arabic. He trained a team of young translators to assist him, and his translations were renowned for their precision and professionalism. His eloquent and fluent Arabic, combined with his deep understanding of various sciences, particularly medicine, made his translations unequal. He translated key Greek medical texts, including those by Hippocrates and Galen. From the reign of Alma'mūn to the rule of the tenth Caliph, Almutawakkil, the primary focus of the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Ḥikmah was on translating works by Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy, Hippocrates, and Euclid. Under Caliph Alma'mūn, this great institution featured separate galleries dedicated to each branch of science.

During the reign of Almutawakkil (847–861 AD), and due to religious and ideological reasons, the translation movement unfortunately experienced a significant decline. Almutawakkil promoted a stricter interpretation of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth traditions,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The corpus of the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, revered by Muslims as a major source of religious law and moral guidance.

discouraging the integration of Greek philosophy into Arab-Islamic culture. The achievements of the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Hikmah and the Islamic Golden Age came to a tragic end in 1258 AD with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad led by Hulagu, the grandson of Genghis Khan. The barbarian invaders destroyed all the mosques, the libraries, the houses, and the hospitals in Baghdad. The last Abbasid Caliph, Almusta'şim (1213–1258 AD), along with his household and thousands of Baghdad's residents, were massacred during the invasion. The invaluable collections of books and manuscripts at the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Hikmah were thrown into the Tigris River, causing the river to run black with ink for weeks. The dead bodies of the residents of Baghdad, including hundreds of scholars, were also cast out in the water of the river.

## 6. The translation movement in Andalusia

The Arabs settled on the Iberian Peninsula (Andalusia) in 711 AD and remained there for over seven centuries. During that time, Andalusia experienced various changes until it was reclaimed in 1492 AD following the decline of the Islamic empire. Similar to Baghdad and Damascus, Andalusia became a hub for translators and scholars in fields such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy, history, geography, biography, philosophy, poetry, and theology. In the diverse and multilingual society of ancient Andalusia, translation was a prominent activity. Translating Romanian and Spanish manuscripts into Arabic and vice versa was common practice. The influence of the Church and its institutions, represented by the Pope and the priests, along with the state's imperial authority, had a substantial impact on the translation movement in Andalusia. Many translators, affiliated with the Church, belonged to the educated elites capable of reading, writing, and translating multiple languages. Nevertheless, most translators, involved in this movement, were not from the Iberian Peninsula but came from countries like Italy and the British Isles in addition to the Arab-Islamic region.

The Toledo School of Translators, known as *Escuela de Traductores de Toledo*, referred to a group of translators linked to the city of Toledo after Alfonso VI conquered it in 1085 AD. These translators were either associated with scholars and patrons residing in the city or sought to acquire manuscripts from there. During the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, a wide range of works were translated in various Iberian cities, notably under the guidance of Raymond of Toledo, who was the archbishop from 1125 AD to 1152 AD, and King Alfonso X of Castile (1252–1284 AD) (Bsoul 2019: 128). Unmistakably, the endeavors of the Toledo School of Translators enriched the scientific literature of the time. Like similar initiatives in other cultural domains, such as the translations from Greek, Sanskrit, Syriac, and Pahlavi by scholars associated with the Abbasid translation movement, the Toledo translators contributed to the dissemination of knowledge worldwide. These translators participated in the selection of works and potential methods of translation. They cooperated with the local networks of patronage to facilitate the circulation of translated books in Medieval Iberia and the ancient Arab world.

The Umayyad Caliph Almustanşir (915–976 AD), who established a vast library in Cordoba, initiated the translation movement in Andalusia. This caliphal library incorporated books from Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Alexandria, and Constantinople. Greek, Persian, and Indian works, translated during the Abbasid era, were re-translated in Andalusia, often with additional commentary by genius local scholars. Andalusia was the home to notable scholars

such as Alzzahrāwī (latinized as Albucasis), a physician, surgeon, and chemist who died in 1013 AD, and Ibn Zuhr (latinized as Avenzoar), a physician, surgeon, and poet who died in 1162 AD. Further, Ibn Tufayl, known as Avetophail, who died in 1185 AD, was a notable novelist, physician, and astronomer. Other prominent figures were part of the Andalusian scholarly community including Ibn Rushd, who died in 1198 AD, a philosopher, theologian, physician, and jurist, as well as Ibn Albayṭār who died in 1248 AD, a pharmacist, botanist, physician, and scientist.

These scholars significantly contributed to the Andalusian cultural legacy, paving the way for the European Renaissance. There is no doubt that, the Arabs-Muslim scholars in Andalusia were responsible for the translation of important Greek works by Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Euclid, and Ptolemy. Andalusia boasted some of the best centers of learning in the world, located in Toledo, Cordoba, Seville, and Granada. The Toledo School of Translators, established in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, was the first real school of translation in Europe, which attracted many prominent translators from European and Arab descent.

## **7. The Toledo School of Translators**

Toledo was a prominent Islamic cultural center during the reign of the Petty Kingdoms, known as *Mulūk alṭṭawāʾif*, which emerged from the remnants of the Umayyad State. Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, Toledo was ruled by Banū dhī alnnūn dynasty, an Amazigh family descending from Hawwara in the Sous region of Morocco, who established their dominance through military victories. After Toledo fell to the Christians in 1085 AD, it became part of the Kingdom of Castile and was home to a diverse population of Spanish Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The city gained further prominence as a scientific center with the establishment of the Toledo School of Translators in 1125 AD. Under the leadership of Archbishop Raymond of Toledo, scholars like John of Seville and others were appointed to translate Arab-Islamic heritage into Castilian. The school focused on translating medical, astrological, and philosophical works from Arabic into Latin.

The Toledo translation movement significantly contributed to the development of a revised version of the Castilian language, making it accessible to people from various backgrounds. Under the direction of Alfonso X (the Wise), the translators at the Toledo School laid the foundations for the modern supranational Spanish language (Wikipedia 2024). Similar to the translators at the House of Wisdom/Bayt Al-Ḥikmah, in Baghdad, the Toledo translators played a crucial role in advancing modern civilization by translating ancient sciences and philosophies from Greece, Persia, India, and China. These translations, whether from Arabic into other languages or vice versa, were instrumental in the establishment of modern civilization (Wikipedia 2022). After the exodus of the Arabs, the population of the Andalusian society primarily consisted of Jews and Arabized communities who remained Christian. This demographic diversity resulted in a multilingual society including a multiplicity of tongues. For example, Tamazight was widely used as an oral language, and classical Arabic, commonly spoken as a colloquial tongue, was used in writing and reading for centuries. The clergy and the Jewish scholars spoke the native Romance dialect from which Castilian Spanish emerged (Wikipedia 2022). This rich linguistic and cultural tapestry facilitated the exchange of knowledge and ideas, further enriching the intellectual heritage of the region with the help of translation.

During the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, the community of translators in Andalusia was divided into two main groups. The first group consisted of translators who worked on translating texts from Arabic to Latin and vice versa. Here, the Jewish scholars who were well versed in Arabic, philosophy, and other human sciences predominantly used Latin, being the language of the Church. The second group, known as the Alphonsian translators, was associated with Alfonso X (the Wise). Alfonso X initiated a significant translation project during his reign in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the lack of bilingual and specialized dictionaries, translators of that era relied heavily on teamwork and collaboration with experts across various disciplines. Their efforts resulted in translations that were remarkable in both quantity and quality (Akasoy 2011:95).

The Toledo School of Translators flourished in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century AD, beginning with the reign of Alfonso X of Castile and Leon, who died in 1284 AD. Known for his passion for science and translation, Alfonso X earned the title “Alfonso the Wise” or “the Learned”. The Toledo School of Translators entered a new phase with the arrival of the Italian translator Gerard of Cremona in 1167 AD. He sought out Ptolemy’s *Almagest*, one of his most renowned translations from Arabic into Latin (Wikipedia 2020). This work memorably contributed to the scientific knowledge of the time and exemplified the high quality of translations produced at the Toledo School of Translators. Moreover, Gerard of Cremona collaborated with Muslim scholars and Mozarabs,<sup>6</sup> translating around eighty books. A key figure during this period was Yehuda ben Moshe, the Rabbi of the Synagogue of Toledo and personal physician to King Alfonso X.

King Alfonso X’s dedication to translation led him to establish an Institute of Oriental Studies in 1250 AD to promote the study of Arabic and Hebrew and benefit from Islamic heritage. He also founded a school for mathematics and astronomy in Murcia, appointing the Muslim scholar Alruqayṭī as its head. The Andalusian translators played a crucial role in translating Islamic heritage into Latin. The Toledo School of Translators was a diverse network of translators from various religious and cultural backgrounds, working together to translate Arabic and Islamic knowledge into European languages.

Historically, translation from Arabic into other languages experienced significant growth in Andalusia, especially in Toledo during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Translators in the Iberian Peninsula, including those at the Toledo School of Translators and other cultural centers like Cordoba, Seville, Granada, and the Kingdom of Aragon, included individuals proficient in Arabic, such as John of Seville and various Jewish translators. These scholars translated books and treatises directly from Arabic into Latin. However, some translators, particularly those from Italy, England, France, or the Low Countries, like Gerard of Cremona and the British, Robert of Ketton, did not master Arabic properly. These translators often relied on Arab, Jewish, and Mozarab intermediaries who translated from Arabic into Castilian or Romance before rendering the texts into Latin.

## 8. Translation and the civilizational dialogue between the Arab world and the West

Language, the primary tool for communication, facilitates the exchange of ideas. However, interactions between people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds require a

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<sup>6</sup> The Mozarabs were Iberian Christians, including Christianized Iberian Jews, living under Muslim rule in Andalusia after the Umayyad Caliphate’s conquest of the Christian Visigothic Kingdom.

medium. Translation plays a crucial role in disseminating information, knowledge, and ideas across cultures. According to Mildred L. Larson (1998: 3), translation involves understanding the meaning of a text and creating an equivalent text in another language. It conveys the source text's message in the target language. Beyond its communicative function, language embodies people's identity, reflecting their values and worldview. Therefore, translation necessitates an understanding of different cultures. Unlike the political and economic realms, the cultural sphere is inherently diverse. It unites individuals from various cultural backgrounds, fostering mutual discovery. This realm of ideas is particularly conducive to mutual dialogue between different peoples. This notion became clear during the reign of Muhammad 'Alī Bāshā, the ruler of Egypt (1805–1848 AD) who supported the translation of European cultural, literary and scientific heritage into Arabic even though he was of Albanian origins.

In a related context, globalization has fostered cultural diversity, making it a fundamental aspect of human society. This new reality heightened the interconnectedness among diverse countries and cultures, necessitating inter-civilizational dialogue for global peace and shared prosperity. A lack of communication is a primary cause of issues such as racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and even clashes of civilizations. Therefore, the focus of civilizational dialogue has expanded from political, military, social, and economic fields to the cultural domain, which is more conducive to exchange and mutual learning.

As discussed above, the West was culturally dependent on the treasures of Arab Islamic cultural heritage since ancient times until the collapse of the Muslim civilization in Andalusian in the fifteenth century. In the twentieth century, things turned upside down and the Arabs and Muslims headed westward seeking for science, knowledge, and cultural nourishment. In the first half of the twentieth century, Muslim Arab writers and thinkers, such as Tawfiq Alḥakīm and Ṭaha Husayn,<sup>7</sup> due to local deterioration on different levels, called for a cultural engagement with the West. Ṭaha Husayn and other enlightened Arab intellectuals called on Arabs to integrate into the Western civilization and emerge from the historical ghetto of the Middle East. Ṭaha Husayn (1938: 4), who received his education in Paris, illustrated that Arab culture was not only Islamic, but had deep roots extending to the Mediterranean civilizations, especially the Greek and the Phoenician civilizations.

Ṭaha Husayn was convinced that through mutual interaction and cultural entanglement with the contemporary Western civilization, the Arab world could rediscover itself by restoring what the Arabs gave to the West during the golden age of Islamic civilization. Husayn also argued that if the Arabs were unable to establish an Eastern civilization in the twentieth century, they should follow the example of Turkey and simply affiliate themselves with Europe (Husayn 1938: 2). In other words, Husayn (1998: 3) pointed out that the Arab-Islamic civilization came under the influence of Western heritage and the impact of Mediterranean countries and their culture for a long time; therefore, it is inevitable to build bridges with Europe. Husayn was part of the educated Muslim Arab elite, who defended Western cultural and scientific knowledge as well as European achievements demanding the translation of Western intellectual and cultural heritage into Arabic.

In the aftermath of World War II, there was a massive translation of Western literature into Arabic with focus on the works of American and European writers. Thanks to the translation initiative in the Arab world, the anti-West stance in Arab thought, traceable back to the era of the European Crusades in the Middle Ages, disappeared after dominating

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<sup>7</sup> Tawfiq Alḥakīm and Ṭaha Husayn are two prominent writers and scholars who studied in the West.

the Arab literary and cultural chronicles from the late nineteenth century until the 1940s. In many Arabic literary works written at that time, the West was depicted as the dominant current of brute force against which the Arab writer should resist in order to assert his/her cultural and national identity. It was a glaring irony that the West's influence on the Arab world due to the translation movement and other factors reached its peak in the post-colonial era at the height of the Arab nationalism movement.

Consequently, the state of hostility towards the West and Western civilization that formed the main themes of many Arab literary works, in the pre-World War I era, faded away and replaced by the tendency to participate in the Western cultural project. Thanks to translation, an inter-cultural dialogue was revitalized between East and West. Translation opened the eyes of Arab intellectuals and readers to the human and democratic values embedded within the folds of Western cultural heritage regardless of the political conflicts resulting from the colonial era. In addition to the translation movement, there were various reasons that pushed Arab intellectuals towards Europe in the wake of the decolonization phase, including the state of stagnation that prevailed in Arab culture for many decades and the state of despair for change that hung over the Arab cultural scene.

In the wake of World War II, the miserable cultural situation and deteriorating political conditions in the Arab world prompted a young generation of Arab writers to head toward the West in order to break the state of cultural isolation and seek integration with Western civilization. The post-WWII generation of modernist Muslim Arab writers came under the influence of Western humanistic and civilizational values by reading Western cultural and literary heritage in Arabic translation. Most of the Arab-Islamic writers were not fluent in foreign languages; therefore, they largely depended on translated works. Evidently, modernist Arabic literature played a major role in demonstrating the tolerance of the Arab Islamic East and its acceptance of the culture of others and the openness of Muslims to European civilization and their intention to become part of a universal civilization different from their identity, heritage and religion. Thanks to translation, Arab modernist poets were able to access the European literary heritage, reflected in the poetry of Badr Alsayyāb, Abdul-Wahhab Albayātī, Salah 'Abd alṣṣabūr, Mohamed Almāghūt, and other Arab modernist writers.

Due to the acquaintance with the translated Western cultural heritage, Arab-Muslim modernist poets were able to form a civilized dialogue with the Western Christian literary heritage. They wrote for an overridingly Muslim Arab audience employing Western Christian heritage to serve local Arab-Islamic political issues. In this context, the majority of modern Arab-Muslim poets were inspired by T. S. Eliot's masterpiece "The Waste Land." The devout American/British Catholic poet wrote an epic poem overwhelmed with Christian discourses about sin, crucifixion, salvation and other Judeo-Christian narratives. In "The Waste Land", Eliot employs seasonal imagery and Christian symbolism to convey themes of death, fertility, salvation, and resurrection, which are central to his artistic vision. He writes: "April is the cruelest month, breeding/lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/memory and desire, stirring/dull roots with spring rain/winter kept us warm, covering/earth in forgetful snow, feeding/a little life with dried tubers/summer surprises us" (Eliot 1980: 37). While Eliot uses the seasonal cycle and the crucifixion narrative to express his religious and moral views, Alsayyāb, in "Christ after Crucifixion", repurposes these elements as objective correlatives to convey a different political and ideological message. Alsayyāb transforms Christ into a symbol of Arab nationalism and resistance against oppression and tyrannical regimes. He said: "The eyes of suns devour my road/In which fire dreams of my crucifixion/whether made of iron or of



flames/the gaze of my people is like the light/of the heavens, of memories and love/they hear my burden and moisten my cross/How small is my death and yet how great” (Bishai 2001: 57).

Reading the “The Waste Land” in Arabic translation, eminent Arab-Muslim poets wove from it many Arabic poems with Eastern Islamic flavor that spoke of Arab tragedies, internal divisions, and the Palestinian tragedy. Thanks to the translated version of “The Waste Land,” Alsayyāb wrote his most expressive poems, such as “The Song of the Rain” making allusions to Christian and Biblical narratives. Commenting on the use of Christ as a central symbol in the poetry of Alsayyāb, Shmuel Moreh (1976: 247) illustrated that “the favorite symbol is Christ to symbolize the poet who sacrifices himself for his country and people. Other symbols connected with the crucifixion ritual are used, such as Christ bearing the cross, which stands for the burden of the sacrifice on the way to Golgotha – the long path of suffering along which the Arab poet has to pass”. In his renowned poem “Christ after Crucifixion,” Alsayyāb intertwines images of suffering and salvation from the crucifixion narrative, aligning Christ with Iraqi political refugees, exiled in the post-colonial era, due to their ideological beliefs. Despite the poem’s religious overtones, it envisions geo-political transformation during a pivotal moment in modern Iraqi history. From the outset, Alsayyāb transforms into a Christ-like figure bearing the cross’s burden. He expresses his loneliness, longing for someone to take him down from the cross, to fend off the birds of prey from his wounds and remove the crown of thorns. Despite enduring immense pain and suffering, the crucified poet remains alive: “After they brought me down I heard /the long wail of winds sweeping through the palms /and footsteps growing more distant / the wounds, therefore, on which they have kept me /nailed all through the evening, have not killed me” (Bishai 2001: 53).

In Arabic modernist literature, Western religious symbols turned into icons around which many themes with nationalistic and liberationist dimensions were woven. Notable poets such as Alsayyā, Albayātī, ‘Abd Alṣṣabūr, and others wrote poems in which the narratives of the Bible are mixed with the stories of the Qur’an using intertextuality and allusions. Therefore, Arabic modernist literature constituted a microcosm of the dialogue of civilizations and the marriage of cultures between East and West. This literature is an extension of similar dialogues that have characterized the relationship between the Arab East and the Christian West throughout the ages. Most modern Arab-Muslim writers saw the necessity of openness to Western culture. Thereupon, they drew inspiration from Western cultural symbols and mythology, as well as religious rituals related to sin, resurrection and salvation. Arab-Muslim writers integrated these Western narratives with the Arab-Islamic heritage in a context that does not differentiate between religions or beliefs.

These Arab-Muslim poets were inspired by the grand narratives and cultural icons of the Western Christian, Jewish, and pagan heritage, and ancient Greek and Roman myths, which were integrated into contemporary Arabic poetry, presenting a hybrid poetics to readers living within traditional and Islamic societies. Most of the critics and the reading public accepted the new literature, which integrated religious narratives embedded in Christianity and Judaism into Islamic contexts. This kind of literature opened a new window and a view of a world that has human values that we share together. Therefore, Arab modernist literature is the best ambassador for Islamic tolerance beyond borders, as it represents a microcosm of the dialogue of cultures and civilizations between Islam and Christianity as well as religious tolerance between East and West.

Thanks to translation, Arab-Muslim poets who wrote their poems under the influence of Western literature, translated into Arabic, were able to cross borders and spread the ideas and beliefs of the Islamic East among readers, critics, and orientalists in the European West and North America. Ironically, the poems of the Muslim poets, inspired by Western heritage, in Arabic translation, were translated into European languages. The translation of Arabic literature into Western languages revealed Arab tolerance towards the others and the search for unifying human values, in which the symbols of the crucifixion of Christ are mixed with the symbols of the martyrdom of Alḥusayn Ibn ‘Alī, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, assassinated by Muslim rivals due to political differences. Unlike other literatures written in indigenous languages, in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, which disrupted Western Christian narratives as the heritage of the ex-colonizers to construct local national and cultural identities, the Arab writers/poets integrated Western cultural mythology into their writings. The geopolitical and cultural situation in the Arab world in the post-World War II era pushed modernist Arab poets towards the West in an endeavor to develop a hybrid poetic mechanism capable of confronting the challenges emerging in the region. Thanks to a number of translations published for the first time in the late 1940s of the most famous Euro-American literary works, Arab poets were able to access the treasures of Western thought, including trans-civilizational traditions and human values.

## 9. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there are historical and cultural ties as well as other common humanitarian factors linking the Christian West to the Islamic East and serving as foundations for dialogue between these two civilizations. Since ancient times, translation played an important role in promoting an inter-cultural dialogue between the Arab world and its ex-colonizers. The translation movement in the Arab world in the postcolonial era reflected the complex relationship characterizing the view of Arab-Muslim elites and intellectuals towards the Christian West. When the colonial forces of Europe conquered Arab countries in the eighteenth century, especially during Napoleon Bonaparte’s campaign against Egypt, local intellectuals, writers, and the rest of the literary elite treated the French as invaders who occupied their lands, therefore they had to resist them. At the same time, the Egyptians expressed their admiration for the new sciences, arts, and cultures the invading colonists brought to the East. Despite the disadvantages of colonialism, the colonizers contributed to the development and hybridization of the Arab-Islamic cultural infrastructure with the knowledge and literature they brought from the West. Consequently, the Egyptians and the Arabs began the process of the translation of Western literatures into Arabic, which reached its peak in the post-colonial era. At this historical juncture, a dual view of the colonial West grew in the Arab world, between hatred for its military might and admiration for its civilizational achievements.

This view remained prevalent for a long time, and Arab intellectuals and elites oscillated between hostility towards the West on the one hand and admiration for its sciences, arts and literature on the other hand. In the first half of the twentieth century particularly after WWII, famous educated figures such as Rifā‘ah Alṭṭaḥṭāwī, Sheikh Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Ṭaha Husayn and Tawfīq Alḥakīm emphasized the necessity and urgency of fostering civilizational communication with the West. Moreover, distinguished groups of Arab-Muslim writers and thinkers – in the postcolonial era – called for renouncing hostility with the West.

Many scholars and thinkers emphasize the importance of drawing from modern Western civilization to reclaim and build upon the scientific and intellectual contributions that Muslim Arabs made to the West during the Middle Ages. During the peak of Islamic civilization in Al-Andalus, there was a remarkable exchange of knowledge, particularly in fields such as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy. This period was characterized by a vibrant culture of translation and intellectual collaboration, which significantly influenced the European Renaissance. Therefore, an engagement with contemporary Western advancement would provide an opportunity to revive and further develop the rich legacy of scientific and cultural achievements that originated in the Islamic Golden Age. This approach not only honors historical contributions but also fosters a renewed spirit of innovation and cross-cultural dialogue.

On the literary front and thanks to the translation of Western literature into Arabic contemporary Arab-Muslim poets incorporate Christian and Jewish traditions from Western culture and literature into their works, which primarily targeted Muslim audiences. This approach challenged Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations narrative and highlighted the efforts of Arab writers and poets – in the aftermath of WWII – to engage in cross-cultural dialogues with Western literary figures such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and others. Apparently, Arab-Muslim poets from formerly colonized countries sought to build bridges with the West by creating a poetics centered on the cultural and religious traditions and phenomenology of their European colonizers. Unlike writers from other ex-colonies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the West Indies, who often reconstruct Western iconic texts to subvert them, post WWII Arab writers integrated the religious heritage of what was considered as an alien or hostile civilization into the Arab-Islamic literary canon.

Owing to translation, an intercultural dialogue, which extended throughout ancient history, recurred in Arabic literature in the beginning of the twentieth century reaching its peak in the literature of Arabic modernism, whose pioneers of Arab-Muslim writers – in the post-colonial era – sought to build cultural bridges with the Christian West. This civilizational dialogue, which transcended the drawbacks of the colonial era, manifested itself in the writings of the majority of Arab-Muslim modernist writers. Great poets such as the Iraqis, Alsayyāb and Albayātī as well as 'Abd Alṣṣabūr from Egypt in addition to the Syrian poet, Muhammad Almāghūt and other prominent Arab-Muslim poets who highly estimated the Christian West and its civilization after reading the translations of Western literary masterpieces. A close examination of the modernist literary works of these Arab poets, significantly influenced by the translation of European literature into Arabic, revealed the longstanding engagement of the Arab Islamic East – both writers and readers – in a civilized and humanitarian dialogue with the Christian West and its cultures since ancient times. These poets agreed with the opinions of Arab-Muslim intellectuals who called for the translation of Western literary, cultural and scientific heritage as a pre-test of establishing a civilizational dialogue with the West.

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