



ENGLISH V. TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH LITERATURE INTO PERSIAN

ENGLISH

v. TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH LITERATURE INTO PERSIAN

In the period of French domination. The first texts translated from English into Persian were diplomatic exchanges and bilateral treaties. During the early decades of the 19th century very few Persians were capable of undertaking such translations, and most of those few had lived in India and worked for the East India Company (q.v.). An example is Ja'far-'Alī Khan Nawwāb (d. 1234/1819), who returned to Persia after an army career in India and settled in Shiraz, where he fathered a family that came to be known as Nawwāb-e Hendī. Male members of this family served the British as translators, embassy clerks, and consular agents for several generations (Fasā'ī, II, p. 122). Other early translators were Armenians and Assyrians who had traveled in the Levant and served as dragomans (a corruption of Ar. *tarjomān* "interpreter, translator"). One such dragoman was a certain Monsieur Jebra'īl, who accompanied Ḥosayn Khan Ājūdān-bāšī on his diplomatic mission to Europe in 1255/1839. Jebra'īl's counterpart in England was Mīrzā Ebrāhīm Šīrāzī (d. 1273/1857), professor of Persian and Arabic in the East India Company's training college at Haileybury; he had first gone to England at the urging of the



Anglican missionary Reverend Joseph Wolff, who had visited Persia in 1240/1825. Mīrzā Ebrāhīm was the trusted translator of the British Foreign Office in its contacts with the Persian diplomatic mission (Wright, pp. 95, 106; tr., I, pp. 95-96, 106).

Of the second group of Persian students sent to England to study, in 1230/1815, two engaged in translation work on their return. One was Mīrzā Šāleḥ Šīrāzī, whose diary of his stay in England is well known; he established one of the first printing presses in Persia, in Tabrīz, shortly after 1234/1819 (see ČĀP) and in 1253/1837 began publishing in Tehran a newspaper entitled *Kāḡaz-e aḡbār* (a calque of “newspaper”). The other was Mīrzā Reżā Mohandes (later Mohandes-bāšī), who became an army engineer and translated a few works from English into Persian, including Walter Scott’s *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (Bāmdād, *Rejāl* V, p. 96) and a portion of Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Books on history and geography were understandably in greater demand in 19th-century Persia than were works of literature. The establishment of Dār al-fonūn (q.v.) in 1268/1851 also generated a demand for European textbooks and scientific manuals, but most were translated from French or German.

It was during the long reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) that the first steps toward modernization were taken in Persia. The number of printing presses in the major cities increased, and a modest number of books were published, especially by the government printing and translation house (Dār-al-ṭebā’a wa dār-al-tarjama-ye mamālek-e maḡrūsa-ye Īrān, later Wezārat-e enṭebā’āt wa dār-al-tarjama-ye dawlatī). Moḡammad-Ḥasan Khan E’temād-al-Saltāna (q.v.), a learned courtier who had served in the Persian legation in Paris for three years, directed its operations for a quarter-century (1288-1313/1871-96), but most of the translations undertaken at his behest were nonfiction titles from French.

The shah was interested in learning about the history of neighboring lands and the lives of famous historical figures and also in travelogues, of which he commissioned translations. Although most were originally in French, a few were in English; once completed, the translations were copied by calligraphers and bound in leather before being presented to the shah. Most of these manuscripts have survived and are kept in the Golestān library in Tehran. One important translator, who worked for the government translation house for a decade before joining the Persian foreign ministry, was Āvānes (Hovhannes) Khan Mase’īān (1280- 1350=1310 Š./1864-1931), a French educated Armenian



who translated a number of works from English and French into Persian, notably Henry Morton Stanley's African journal *Through the Dark Continent*; *Sir Anthony Sherley; His Relation of His Travels into Persia*; *Persia and the Persians* by the first American envoy, S. G. W. Benjamin; and J. W. Kaye's *A History of the Sepoy War in India 1857-58*. He is also said to have translated a number of William Shakespeare's plays into Armenian. Several of his translations were published, and some have been reprinted in recent years. Another translator of merit in the Qajar period was Oxford educated Abu'l-Qāsem Khan Qaragozlū Nāṣer-al-Molk (1282-1306/1865-1927), a courtier who rose to high office, serving twice as a cabinet minister and briefly as prime minister, in September 1907. He undertook the challenge of rendering Shakespeare's *Othello* into Persian; although generally considered one of the pinnacles of literary translation in the Qajar period, this work remained unpublished until it was issued by his son Ḥosayn-ʿAlī Khan Qaragozlū in a limited edition in Paris in 1961. Nāṣer-al-Molk is reported also to have translated *The Merchant of Venice*, but the manuscript remains in the possession of the Qaragozlū family and is still unpublished.

French remained the dominant European language among the educated Persian elite until the end of World War II, and most translations were of French works. Even works originally in English became known to Persian readers first through translations from the French. One particularly noteworthy example was the translation by Mīrzā Ḥabīb Eṣfahānī (1252?-1311/1836-93) of James Morier's picaresque novel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* in the French version. This translation, universally considered brilliant, was first published in Calcutta in 1324/1905 (erroneously attributed to Shaikh Aḥmad Rūḥī on the title page) and then reprinted several times in Persia. The work has been widely circulated and read ever since its publication and has exerted a strong influence on writing in Persia. Other examples of translations of English works from the French are Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*, translated by R. Sayyed-Ḥosaynī, 1333 Š./1954; William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, translated by P. Nātel Kānlarī, (n.d., probably 1930s), *Much Ado about Nothing*, translated by ʿA. Nūšīn, 1329 Š./1950, and *Othello*, translated by M. Eʿtemādzāda (M. A. Behāḍīn), 1337 Š./1958; and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, translated by R. Mašāyekī, 1327 Š./1948. An oddity was the translation from a Russian translation of three stories by Arthur Conan Doyle by E. ʿAbd-Allāhzāda, *Ketābe Šerlok Koms*, 1323/1905.



The English language genres that achieved the most popularity in this period and were translated directly were thrillers and adventure stories for younger readers. Beside Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, translated by Moḥammad-ʿAlī Khan at an indeterminate date, Doyle's *The London Police* was translated into Persian by ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Mīrzā as early as 1322/1904; two decades later Edgar Rice Burroughs' series about Tarzan of the Apes and the exploits of a private detective called Nat Pinkerton by David Frome were translated and issued in weekly installments. Dabīḥ-Allāh Maṣṣūrī (1274-1365 Š./1895-1986), a freelance translator of pulp fiction from both French and English, also issued serialized renderings, often quite free, of detective stories by Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers in the daily newspaper *Kūšeš* and the twice-weekly *Kvāndanīhā*. He remained active for more than sixty years, and his phenomenal output continues to be reprinted even today (Emāmī, pp. 65-91).

The spread of English language translations. The outbreak of World War II and the subsequent occupation of Persia by Allied forces in 1941 caused more than political chaos in the country. It put an end to the dominance of French as the favored foreign language and the European language to be taught first in secondary schools. With British and American forces in the country, learning English acquired practical value, and later many Persian students went to England or the United States to complete their education. English thus replaced French as the foreign language of choice in Persia, and translations of literary works from English became more and more frequent. One American author whose works were translated in quick succession in the 1940s was Jack London, hailed as a proletarian writer by activists of the left. At least fifty Persian translations of his works are known (Mošar, *Fehrest* III, p. 174, s.v.). Favored in the same circles were Ernest Hemingway; the early works of John Steinbeck; and, among British writers, Charles Dickens.

During the war the Allies distributed a number of Persian-language publications in Persia; some were produced in India, but the intellectual quarterly *Rūzgar-e now* was published in London. Some of the most learned Persians who found themselves in England, like Mojtabā Mīnovī and Ḥasan Mowaqqar Bālyūzī (who also worked for the newly established Persian service of BBC radio), contributed translations from the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Lord Byron, and other Romantic poets. Mīnovī's famous Persian rendering of Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be" was first published in this journal, which was widely read and had a strong influence on a younger generation of literary translators.



After the fall of the prime minister Moḥammad Moṣaddeq in 1953 intellectuals turned more and more away from political involvement in literary activities, including translation. Some commercial publishers like Ṣafī-‘Alīšāh, Nīl, Ma‘refat, and later Amīr-Kabīr, all in Tehran, welcomed the efforts of younger translators of serious fiction into Persian, though much of the work was still from French. In the meantime a number of British- or American-educated Persians had returned home, and in addition two agencies contributed to an increase in the number of works of fiction translated from English: the newly established Royal Institute for Translation and Publication (Bongāh-e tarjoma wa naṣr-e ketāb, q.v.) and the Tehran branch of Franklin Book Program (q.v.), an American-based nonprofit organization dedicated to promotion of American books abroad. The combined efforts of these two agencies and independent publishers resulted in a significant increase in translation of Western classics and the better-known works by established British, Irish, and American writers over the next two decades (for a selected list, see below).

Hemingway became the most popular American writer among Persians; almost all his novels and short stories were translated. In fact, the short story “The Killers” has been translated by at least ten individuals; the earliest rendition was by Majīd Tehrānīān. Some plays by Eugene O’Neill (*Long Day’s Journey into Night*), Tennessee Williams (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), and Arthur Miller (*The Crucible*) were translated and performed in Tehran. The poetry of T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Walt Whitman, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was also translated. Unlike the ever-popular Manṣūrī, translators in this period tried to remain close to the original texts while rendering them into fluent Persian. The translations commissioned by Franklin and the Royal Institute were checked and edited before publication, and most are thus at least reliable.

In the 1960s and 1970s a new group of translators, most of them academics or upper-echelon civil servants, emerged. This group included the highly praised Ḥamīd ‘Enāyat (q.v.), Najaf Daryābandarī, and ‘Ezzat-Allāh Fūlādvand. They translated works of both fiction or nonfiction. During these two decades translations from English gained such dominance that many works in other languages (Greek, Latin, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, the Scandinavian languages, German, Italian, and Spanish) were translated into Persian through the intermediary of English. The best Persian translations of Plato and Aristotle, for instance, have been rendered from English translations, sometimes with consultation of French versions. Even today the stories of



Latin American novelists like Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes are rendered into Persian from English or French. This trend is equally noticeable in all fields of the humanities, including history, psychology, philosophy, and theology, where Persian translators draw on a variety of sources via English. Among the most noteworthy translations in this category are Niccoló Machiavelli's *The Prince*, translated by M. Maḥmūd, 1324 Š./1945, translated by D. Āšūrī, 1366 Š./1987; Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by D. Āšūrī, 1351 Š./1972, 1362 Š./1983, respectively; Plato's *Five Dialogues* and *Four Dialogues*, translated by M. Šanā'ī, 1334 Š./1955, 1336 Š./1957, respectively; Plato's *The Republic*, translated by F. Rūḥānī, 1335 Š./1956; and August Strindberg's *The Father*, translated by M. Forūgī, 1337 Š./1958.

Although British and American literary forms and genres have definitely influenced the works of Persian novelists, short-story writers, and playwrights in the 20th century, they have usually done so directly, rather than through translations: pioneers of modern Persian fiction like Šādeq Hedāyat (1280-1330 Š./1901-51), Šādeq Čūbak, Ebrāhīm Golestān, and Jalāl Āl-e Aḥmad (q.v.; 1302-48/1923-69) have themselves been familiar with one or more European languages and well able to read the works of Hemingway or William Faulkner in the original text. Nevertheless, the translations of these two writers have exerted some degree of influence on the style of younger Persian writers. The novels of Esmā'īl Fašīḥ, Šahrnūš Pārsīpūr, Ja'far Modarres Šādeqī, and 'Abbās Ma'rūfī all reveal familiarity with the works of these two American writers.

Following the revolution of 1979 the tempo of translation from English accelerated, as some translators were dismissed from their posts and had more time to devote to it; overnight they became full-time translators. In the earliest years there was an upsurge in the sale of books, generating much optimism in the publishing community. Both British and American works have been translated in this period. Interest in Virginia Wolfe, Graham Greene, and George Orwell has undergone a revival. A number of female writers have been translated for the first time, including George Eliot and Jean Rhys. Among the Americans Faulkner, Sinclair Lewis, and Norman Mailer have been translated afresh, and even James Joyce has found translators.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

(for cited works not given in detail, see “Short References”):

K. Emāmī, *Az past o boland-e tarjama: Haft maqāla*, Tehran, 1372 Š./1993.

Mīrzā Šāleḥ Šīrāzī, *Majmū‘a-ye safar-nāmahā-ye Mīrzā Šāleḥ Šīrāzī*, ed. E. Rā‘īn, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968; ed. ḡ.-Ḥ. Mīrzā Šāleḥ, Tehran, 1364 Š./1985.

D. Wright, *The Persians Amongst the English*, London, 1985; tr. K. Emāmī as *Īrānīān dar miān-e englīsīhā*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1364-65 Š./1985-86.