



QAZI, MOHAMMAD

QAZI, Mohammad (Moḥammad Qāzi, b. Mahābād, Kurdistan, 3 August 1913; d. Tehran, 14 January 1998), noted translator.

Qazi's childhood was fraught with tragic events. His father, 'Abd-al-Kāleq, died when he was five years old. A year later his mother, Āmena, remarried and Qazi was sent to live with his paternal grandparents. After their death, he lived for a short time with Mirzā Sa'id, his uncle, who was assassinated a few months later. Being left without a guardian, Mohammad went to live with his mother in a village near Mahābād, where he was taught reading and writing in a traditional elementary school (*maktab*; see [EDUCATION iii](#)).

After a few months, however, his younger uncle, Javād Qāzi, who was working with Oskar Mann (1867-1917), German scholar of Kurdish dialects and folk tales and the author of *Kurdische-Persische Forschungen die Mundarten der Mukri-Kurden* (Berlin, 1909), among others, invited Qazi to live with him in Germany. Qazi set off for Mahābād, where he planned to join a Persian merchant on his way to Germany, but missed him by a few days. He settled in Mahābād, where he finished his elementary education in 1928, under the patronage of Qāzi 'Ali, the father of Qāzi Moḥammad (1893-1947), founder of the Kurdish Democratic Party and head of the Republic of Mahābād, who was executed by hanging in 1947.

A year later, since Mahābād did not have a high school, Qazi went to live in Tehran with his brother Javād, who had returned from Germany. Qazi enrolled in the [Dār-al-fonun](#) where he developed a lasting love for literature



and became proficient in the French language, which he had already started to study in Mahābād (Qāne'i-Fard, p. 33). He began to earn his living in 1939 by translating works from French (Qāzi, 1992, pp. 149-52). He first translated the famous picaresque novel, *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), through its French translation; and this was followed by Victor Hugo's (1802-1885) short story, *Claude Gueux*, in 1939, entitled *Kelod-e velgard* (Qāzi, 1994, p. 1).

Qazi graduated from Tehran University's Faculty of Law in 1939. After completing the mandatory military service, he began working for the Ministry of Finance, serving mainly in the Ministry's Legal Division. Throughout these years he also worked as a freelance translator for foreign companies operating in Iran (Qāzi, 1992, pp. 134-42, 330).

A decade later, Qazi completed the translations of *L'île des Pingouins*, by Anatole France (1844-1924), and *The Call of the Wild*, by Jack London (1876-1916). As he was relatively unknown, his several attempts to find a publisher proved unsuccessful. Moṣfeq Hamadāni, a translator himself, undertook the task of publishing Qazi's translations, which appeared, respectively, as *Jazira-ye panguanhā*, and *Āvā-ye vaḥš* in 1949 (Qāne'i-Fard, p. 55). In his observations on the art of translation, Najaf Daryābandari, noted translator and critic, has referred to the 50s and 60s as remarkable decades in the history of translation in contemporary Iran, and to Qazi's translation of *L'île des Pingouins* as one of its landmarks (Qāne'i-Fard, p. 230).

The publication of these books earned Qazi great recognition. His translation of Pearl S. Buck's (1892-1973) highly acclaimed novel, *Mother*, was published in 1966 and went through twenty reprints in less than a decade (Mir'ābedini, p. 412). Thereafter, Qazi translated many masterpieces of world literature into Persian. His translations were instrumental in introducing outstanding Western literary figures to the Iranian public. His appreciation of classical Persian literature and his deliberate strategy to remain loyal to the original text and to convey, as far as possible, the author's original narrative style in a clear and flowing language, earned him high critical acclaim. He is praised, in particular, for his skillful rendition of texts with a satirical bent, such as *Don Quixote* and *Zorba the Greek* (Ziā'i, p. 236).

Although Qazi was familiar enough with English, French remained his language of choice. Considering himself "unfit" for scientific and philosophical translations, he concentrated on translating works of fiction (Qāne'i-Fard p.



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After retiring from the Ministry of Finance in 1976, Qazi worked for a couple of years with the Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Kānun-e parvareš-e fekri-e kudakān va nowjavānān), where he translated into Persian, among others, *The Young Adventurer*, by Jacques Cervon, as *Mājarāju-ye javān* (1973), and a collection of short stories, entitled *Panj qeşsa az Andersen* (1979), by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1885), Danish author and poet who is most famous for his fairy tales.

Qazi also wrote poems, of which a few were published in *Kāterāt-e yek motarjem* (The memoirs of a translator, pp. 157-94), and in *Selsela-ye nur o nastaran* (A chain of light and sweetbrier, pp. 121-47). He was also the author of *Zārā* (Tehran, 1940), a love story, inspired by the Kurdish lore. The revised version of the novella, which had been expanded from the original 50 pages of the first edition to 130 pages, was published in 1991, and went through five reprints in two years. It was also translated, in 1977, by Maḥmud Ra'uf Morādi into the Sorāni Kurdish dialect.

Qazi's autobiographical account of his experiences as a translator, with explanatory notes on some of his translations, appeared in 1992, entitled *Kāterāt-e yek motarjem*. In *Sargodašt-e tarjomahā-ye man* (The story of my translations, 1994), he provides introductory notes, as well as excerpts from 68 of his published translations. A selection of his interviews on Persian prose and poetry, as well as his experiments in translation techniques are published in *Selsela-ye nur o nastaran* (pp. 149-251), and *Dami bā Qāzi va tarjoma* (A moment with Qazi and translation, pp. 127-228).

Several members of Qazi's immediate family were involved with Kurdish autonomy movements and lost their lives in the struggle. His formative years were thus fraught with a distrust of the central government in Tehran. The rhetoric of dissent in Iran's political landscape in the 1950s was marked to a considerable degree by association with left leaning causes. Qazi, too, partook of left-leaning political discourse, to a certain extent, but unlike most of his contemporaries, his sympathy with leftist ideals did not translate into political action. He refrained from political activity and did not join any political party (Ziā'i, p. 241). Although imbued with Kurdish pride, he did not espouse Kurdish separatist ideologies (Ābedi, p. 23).

In 1943 Qazi married Irān Simči, and had two children: a daughter Maryam



and a son Farhād. He was diagnosed with throat cancer in 1976 and remained dependent on a voice synthesizer for the rest of his life. His loss was widely reflected upon in literary circles. He was remembered as a “distinguished man of letters” (Navā'i, p. 274) and as a translator, “irreplaceable for many years to come” (Žiā'i, p. 234).

(For a comprehensive list of Qazi's translations and works see *Rahāvard* 12/47, 1998, pp. 279-81).

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