

# The Influence of the Arab Century Translation Movement on Cultural Exchange

Mingwei Xi

Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Pancheng Street, Nanjing, China  
1628150048@qq.com

**Abstract:** *In the Middle Ages of the Arab Abbasid dynasty, the rise of the vigorous Arab translation movement. The century-old translation movement is a global language revolution with a large scale, a long duration, a wide range of influence and a fast transmission speed. Its far-reaching influence has exerted a profound influence on the development of Arab countries and other countries in the world. Born in a tolerant society and supported by many sources, it was the inevitable outcome of the historical trend of Arab society at that time. The century-old Arab translation Movement systematically and completely translated a large number of books from Greece, ancient India and other countries, disseminated a large number of excellent cultural knowledge, reflected different political and cultural interactions, made great contributions to Arab Islamic culture and Western European literature, and had an irreplaceable impact on world culture. Has made indelible brilliant achievements in history.*

**Keywords:** *The Arab Translation Movement, Cultural Communication, World Civilization*

## 1. The Reasons for the Formation of the Arab Translation Movement

Translation activities, as a cultural means of overcoming language barriers and promoting mutual communication among different cultural groups, have been widely present and widespread in various eras and regions of human history. However, this ordinary cultural activity evolved into a vigorous and far-reaching Cultural movement in the medieval Arab Caliphate. The large-scale Cultural movement played a huge role in promoting the prosperity of the Arab Caliphate and Islamic culture, and also had a significant and unique impact on the development of world culture. Why did this magnificent and unprecedented cultural activity occur? And why did it have such a huge historical impact? Next, we will analyze the reasons from the geographical location and political aspects of Arabia.

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. This movement was called the Arab Centennial Translation Movement, which enriched the cultural life of Arabs through this translation movement. It is well known that in the eighth to tenth centuries hundreds of Greek philosophical, medical, and scientific works were translated from Greek and Syriac into Arabic, mainly by Syriac-speaking Christians, in the Abbasid capital Baghdad [1]. On the basis of absorbing and drawing on the achievements of Eastern and Western civilizations, a prosperous Arab Islamic civilization was created.

Firstly, in terms of the geographical location of the Arab nation, during the establishment and expansion of the Arab Empire, each ethnic group formed its own unique and independent cultural and ideological system in terms of politics, economy, religious beliefs, and other aspects. They formed different styles and characteristics of each ethnic group and absorbed, integrated, and influenced each other to develop their own unique and excellent language and written culture, which is Arabic culture. The Arabian Peninsula and the subsequent Arab Empire were located in the central part of the Eurasian continent and connected to Africa. During the continuous expansion of the Arab Empire, Arabs had close contact and exchange with civilizations around the world. In the past, due to the long distance, limited geographical location, and complex political patterns between different regions, political civilization in each region tended to develop independently, without interference with each other, and communication was very limited. However, the establishment of the Arab Empire largely eliminated countries in East and West Asia, greatly eliminating the numerous obstacles to communication between different regions, and establishing long-term and stable connections between the East and West. As a result, Arabs have become "matchmakers" in maintaining communication between China and the West.

Secondly, in terms of the need for religious development. With the prosperity and stability of the country, religious life has gradually shifted from preaching and discourse to the study of religious theory. In the exchange and debate with religions such as Judaism and Christianity, Jews and Christians have become adept at using the powerful weapons of Greek logic and philosophy due to their cultural backgrounds. However, Arabs are deeply aware of the shortcomings of research methods. By translating their works, they can draw advanced logical thinking and philosophical methods from these classics.

Third, in terms of Arab countries, in order to consolidate their power and maintain their dominant position, the Arab Caliphate ruled other regions with prosperous culture as conquerors, and had to absorb the achievements of civilization in other regions through the Graeco-Arabic translation movement to blend with their own culture to better rule other nations. When the Arab Caliphate became increasingly prosperous and its development entered a stable period, the material prosperity of the Arab nation promoted its culture to a higher level. The Arab nation needs rich cultural food in spirit, and Arabs have had the custom of long-distance travel and cross regional trade since ancient times. Long distance travel has made them realize the vastness of the world, the diversity of civilizations, and the necessity of drawing on the strengths of others. The broad vision and broad mind enable the Arab nation to accept the achievements of foreign civilizations on a large scale and at a deep level, without too many narrow psychological barriers of isolation and exclusion. Compared with other civilizations of the same period, such as the closed medieval civilization of Europe, the Arab people's open and tolerant mentality appears even more valuable. This kind of mentality is the deep soil on which the Graeco-Arabic translation movement can be brewed and flourished. Therefore, Arab countries launched the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, which made Arab culture develop at a high speed and promoted the development of Egyptian civilization and Persian civilization. Enable cultural exchange and integration among various regions.

## 2. The Influence of Arab Translation Movement on Arab Culture

The Arab Centennial Translation Movement has opened a door for the exchange of world civilizations. During this period, scholars and translators from the Arab world translated important works from ancient Greece, Persia, and India into Arabic, allowing these knowledge to be widely disseminated in the Arab world. These translated works include works in various fields such as philosophy, science, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, etc. Through these translated works, scholars from the Arab world have gained knowledge from around the world and have conducted further research and innovation on this basis. In this century long translation movement, the Arab people have devoted themselves to translating a large number of foreign cultures over a vast period of time. This process has absorbed a large number of new vocabulary to meet the needs of socio-economic, scientific, ideological, and other aspects. By the end of the 10th century, Arabic had an unprecedented development. Arabic has been able to express various themes, including abstract philosophical ideas, profound scientific concepts, and various seemingly unreachable fantasies and concrete things. In terms of political diplomacy, Arabic has become a widely used language, and more and more people are able to express their thoughts using Arabic is shown in Figure 1.

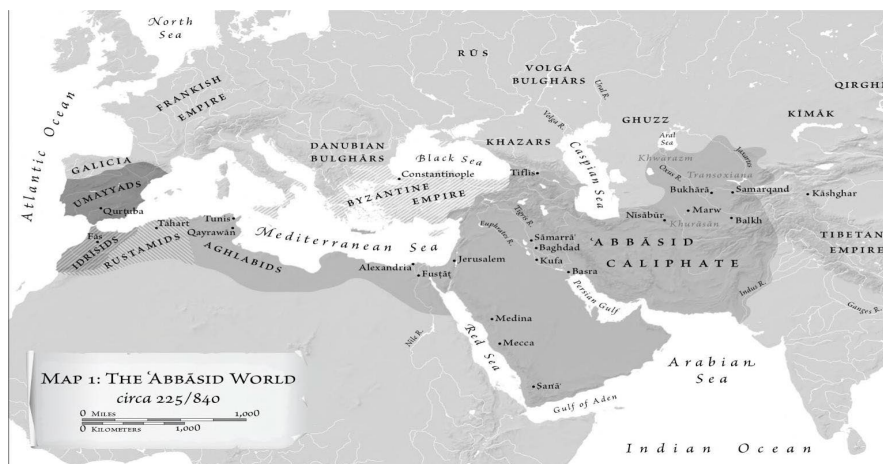


Figure 1: The Abbasid World[2]

The Abbasid collective mind was the one that transmuted translations in no small degree over the course of centuries together with many innovative and new contributions which were transmitted to Europe by way of Spain, Sicily and Syria that formed the basis of the canon of intellectuality which was dominant in medieval European thought [3]. In the Graeco-Arabic translation movement of the Abbasid dynasty, a large number of Persian books were translated into Arabic, which affected the development of Arab literature. A century and a half of Graeco-Arabic scholarship has amply documented that from about the middle of the eighth century to the end of the tenth, almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East were translated into Arabic [4]. On the one hand, Persians are proud of the glorious achievements of Persian history, committed to the excavation and organization of Persian ancient books and historical bibliographies, in order to preserve and showcase the essence of the Persian nation, and strive to promote Persian culture. On the other hand, it is also to improve the social status of the Persian nation. Therefore, as a kind of national literature, Persian literature has developed in Arab literature and become an important branch of Arab Islamic literature. For example, the book "Aynama", which records the governance strategies, administrative systems, and social styles of ancient Persia, has been repeatedly cited by historians and writers in the early Abbasid dynasty, fully demonstrating the value of its influence on Arab literature. It also includes constraints on moral codes of conduct, greatly affecting books related to moral etiquette in Arab literature. The grounding has influenced books on moral etiquette in Arab literature. In addition, during the translation process, the translator led by Hunayn, with a rigorous attitude, Arabicized loanwords without corresponding words through his own knowledge, greatly enriching the vocabulary of Arabic. Hunayn contributed to the foundations of scientific Arabic by creating much of the Arabic medical vocabulary from the Greek medical tradition, as well as by setting philological standards for the recovery and translations of Greek works into these two Semitic languages [5]. He also frequently explained his procedure, remarked on philological problems, and added material to fill gaps in the text or aid comprehension [6]. Arabic, as a language of religion, academia, and literature, gradually infiltrated from official language into daily life, gradually replacing the Persian, Greek, and other languages originally used in conquered areas, enhancing the applicability of Arabic. This century long translation movement undoubtedly promoted the development of Arab society, elevated the status of Arabic, and made an indelible contribution to Arab culture.

### 3. The Impact of the Arab Translation Movement on World Civilization Exchange

In world history, the "Arab Translation Movement" has had a profound impact on countries around the world. In the translation movement, I learned ancient Greek, Persian, and Indian medicine and widely applied it in my own country's practice, forming a medical theory belonging to Arabia, establishing a systematic medical structure, cultivating an endless stream of medical experts, and making indelible contributions to the world's medical industry. These scholars are immersed in natural science research, based on objective reality, using rational attitudes and scientific methods to study the micro world of the human body, and applying this scientific and objective attitude to viewing the macro world, providing a new ideological path for people to understand themselves and the world from religious theology to science. This is a huge progress in human history. After being translated and spread to Europe, medical works such as the "Al-Qanun fial-Tibb" became medical textbooks for various European universities. Ibn Sina's book Al-Qanun is one of the best medical books. As its author was one of the most brilliant Muslim physicians, not only in his time, but in the entire Islamic civilization. Also, the book Al-Qanun is considered one of the most important and best medical books by Ibn Sina [7]. It is even revered as the "medical guide" by the medical field in Europe. It covers anatomy, pharmacology, surgery, and more in his works. Showing his scientific attitude and practical experience in meticulous clinical observation of various diseases, including important scientific methods and medical laws. The "Al-Qanun fial-Tibb" not only provides guidelines on medicine, but also presents a new worldview, that is, people can not only recognize and understand natural laws, but also utilize laws through the conditions and forms under which they occur to seek benefits for themselves and humanity. This concept gradually expands and can even extend to the scientific understanding of nature, the whole world, and the entire universe, reflecting the development of human rational spirit in scientific research, promoting revolution in the field of human thinking, promoting human understanding of their own creativity and rational spirit, and deepening various scientific research. Sulayman al-Bustani's monumental translation of the Iliad, with its extensive introduction and commentary, and Ruhi alKhalidi's historical critical work with extensive translations, entitled 'The history of the science of literature among the Europeans, the Arabs, and Victor Hugo', both published

in 1904 in Cairo, illustrate the ancient and modern poles of the process of translation that brought Arabic into world literature by bringing world literature into Arabic [8]. For the Renaissance in Europe, Arabia had sophisticated observation instruments, advanced astronomical theories, and a wealth of astronomical data at the forefront of the world in the field of astronomy. For example, when Copernicus discussed the rotation and precession of the sun in his articles, he often cited the observation records of Bethany. In European astronomy, most of the names of constellations were derived from Arabic. Abstract concepts such as time and distance can be identified by actual data, and the research and development of Arab astronomy, geography, and other disciplines have made Arabs far ahead in academic status at that time. The Arab people's understanding of humanity and their view of nature, viewing the universe as an object of cognition, exploration, and research, and the world as an unknown field that can be understood and described in a scientific and systematic manner, demonstrate their strong thirst for knowledge and rational exploration spirit, as well as their rigorous scientific attitude of daring to question. These ideas have become the foundation for the development of modern Western natural science thinking in the future.

The Thousand and One Nights is a collection of Arab, Persian, and Indian folk tales. After The Iliad and The Odyssey, it can be considered as the ancestor of the great imaginative and romance literature of the Mediterranean world. This is the result of the open-mindedness and curiosity that Arab thought has shown in its interactions with the cultures of neighbouring as well as more distant civilizations [9]. The rise of Arab philosophy is also closely related to the century long translation movement. Philosophy was no exception to this. Arabs extensively searched for ancient philosophical texts from Greece, Rome, and other places and conducted extensive translations. And provide annotations, comments, etc. during the translation process. For example, Plato's works "The Republic" and Aristotle's "Logic" have all been translated into Arabic, entering the view of the Arabs. Many Arab philosophers were influenced by the philosophical ideas of Plato and Aristotle, and published many works on commenting on Greek philosophers. It can be said that Arab philosophy inherited Greek philosophy and developed on this basis. Among them, Arab philosophers actively promoted the separation of philosophy and religion, freeing philosophy from the shackles of theology. They strive to restore the value and significance of human self-existence, restore the intellectual ability of human understanding, and make philosophy a loving existence of human wisdom. Ibn Tufail (1105 AD) is an illuminist philosopher who developed his theory of mind in his book (Hayy ibn Yaqdhan), which is based on moving from the bottom to the top, from the sensory to the abstract and from the multiple to the one. He thought that knowledge has two paths: the first is rational, while the second is traditional [10]. In Ibn Tufail's classic work on Arab philosophy and literature, 'Hayy ibn Yaqdhan,' he depicts how new life exists in a new environment. Firstly, through the awakening of rational consciousness, secondly, through practice, the mysteries of nature and human bodies are discovered. Finally, through the understanding of Allah, it is believed that people who also believe in religion can communicate and understand each other, and that reason and faith can coexist, triggering rational thinking about life, the world, and the universe. Arabs not only engage in translation practice, but also rely on a scientific and rigorous attitude, unleashing their rich imagination, to understand, annotate, and supplement the translated text. Through the translation movement, Arabs have absorbed excellent cultures from various fields around the world and integrated them with Arab culture, becoming a part of excellent world culture. This century long translation movement, whether as a bridge to spread civilization or a cultural achievement created through the use of national wisdom, has immeasurable value and contribution to the cultures of various countries around the world.

#### 4. Enlightenment

The Arabs had early realized that translation is a universal need for all nations at any time or in any place. They proved that translation activities are indispensable in all ages between nations [11]. The Arab Graeco-Arab translation movement is a great movement that spans the long river of history. The Arab culture and thought in the past 100 years have profoundly influenced the world culture. From the perspective of cultural exchanges around the world, the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arab translation movement has developed from sporadic individual behavior into a powerful official movement, which has made cultural exchanges have a scale and become a great cause. It has promoted the spread of knowledge in academic exchanges and cultural collisions, which is rare in the feudal closed Middle Ages. Through their huge translated books in different fields, Arab translators have helped in the development of this world civilization to reach our contemporary technological civilization. This translation movement was unprecedented in the transmission of knowledge in the whole history of humankind [12]. It reminds us of the importance of cultural exchange and the open and inclusive

dialogue between different cultures. Today, world multipolarity, economic globalization, social informatization, and cultural diversity are deepening. In this context, translation is indispensable. China is conducting comprehensive opening-up, exchange and cooperation with the outside world, understanding the language, culture, and civilization characteristics of various countries, understanding the challenges faced by each country in the process of economic globalization, understanding the social, economic structure, historical and cultural traditions and characteristics of each country, understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by the world in the construction of scientific and technological civilization, and striving to promote Chinese culture, so that the Chinese story can go global [13-15].

## References

- [1] Treiger, A. (2019). *Greek into Arabic in Byzantine Antioch: 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl's 'Book of the Garden' (Kitāb ar-Rawḍa). Monks, Merchants and Artists*. 227.
- [2] Zadeh, T. (2017). *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation and the Abbasid Empire*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- [3] Algeriani, A. M. A., & Mohadi, M. (2019). *The House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah), an Educational Institution during the Time of the Abbasid Dynasty. A Historical Perspective*. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 27(2).
- [4] Gutas, D. (1998). *Greek thought, Arabic culture: the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and early 'Abbāsid society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)*. Psychology Press.1.
- [5] Vidro, N. (2020). *A Book on Arabic Inflexion According to the System of the Greeks: A Lost Work by Hunayn b. Ishāq*. *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik*, 72, 26-58.
- [6] Vagelpohl, U., & Sánchez, I. (2022). *Why Do We Translate? Arabic Sources on Translation*. In *Why Translate Science?* (pp. 254-376).
- [7] Ahmed, M. A. (2023). *Doctors' compilations on Ibn Sina's book" Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb" in the seventh century AH*. *Journal of the University of Anbar for Humanities*, 20(1).
- [8] Noorani, Y. (2019). *Translating World Literature into Arabic and Arabic into World Literature: Sulayman al-Bustani's al-Ilyadha and Ruhi al-Khalidi's Arabic Rendition of Victor Hugo*. *Migrating Texts*, 236.
- [9] Corm, G. (2020). *Arab political thought: past and present*. Hurst & Company. 21.
- [10] Alwali, A. K. (2021). *The Entity of Man and Efficiency of Mind in Arab Culture*. 2636.
- [11] Meng, F., Zheng, Y., Bao, S., Wang, J., & Yang, S. (2022). *Formulaic language identification model based on GCN fusing associated information*. *PeerJ Computer Science*, 8, e984.
- [12] Rababah, H. A. (2015). *The Translation Movement in the Arab World: From the PreIslamic Era Until the End of Umayyad Dynasty (Before 610–750 AD)*. *International journal of language and linguistics*, 3(3), 122-131.
- [13] Kong Linghua. *The Formation of Arab Islamic Culture and Its Impact on World Culture*. *Qinghai Ethnic Studies*, 2007 (3): 151-154
- [14] Pan Xiaohan. *The Hundred Year Translation Movement of the Abbasid Dynasty*. *Journal of Arab Studies*, 2020 (01): 75-86.
- [15] Wang Xueming. *Pragmatism Translation Norms of the Arab Centennial Graeco-Arabic translation movement—Ehounai's Example*. *National Translation*, 2021 (02): 54-62.