

... Among those who exerted efforts to obtain books from the Land of the Greeks were Muhammad, Ahmad, and al-Hasan, the three sons of Shakir the Astronomer. ... They paid enticing fees. Hunayn ibn Ishaq and others were sent by them to the Land of the Greeks, and they brought them wonderful books and rare works on philosophy, geometry, music, arithmetic, and medicine. Qusta ibn Luqa al-Ba`labakki had also brought some books with him. He translated some, and some were translated for him.

Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani, the Logician said: "The Sons of the Astronomer used to pay a group of translators, including Hunayn ibn Ishaq, Hubaysh ibn al-Hasan, Thabit ibn Qurrah, and others a monthly salary of five hundred dinars (about \$24,000) for translating and continual study. (F 303-4)

Exercise VII. Answer the following:

1. Explain how al-Ma'mun's dream is related to the translation movement.
2. Where and how did translators get books to translate?

The Names of the Translators from Various Languages into Arabic

1. Stefan the Ancient, who translated books on alchemy and other topics for Khalid ibn Yazid ibn Mu`awiyah.
2. Al-Bitriq, who was active during the reign of al-Mansur, and whom he commanded to translate some ancient books.
3. His son, Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn al-Bitriq, who belonged to the group of al-Hasan ibn Sahl.
4. al-Hajjaj ibn Matar, who wrote commentaries [on scientific works] to al-Ma'mun. He is the one who translated the *Almagest* [Ptolemy's work on astronomy] and Euclid [i.e., Euclid's *Elements*, on geometry].
5. Ibn Na`imah, whose name is `Abd al-Masih ibn `Abd Allah al-Himsi al-Na`imi.
- 6-7. Sallam and al-Abrash, among the early translators in the days of the Barmakids [a Persian family of viziers under the early Abbasid rulers. [Aristotle's] *Physics* has been preserved in their translation. This has been reported by our Master, Abu al-Qasim Isa ibn Ali ibn Isa, may God support him.
8. Habib ibn Bahriz, the prelate of Mosul, who wrote commentaries on several books for al-Ma'mun.
9. Zaruba ibn Majuh al-Na`imi al-Himsi.
10. Hilal ibn Abi Hilal al-Himsi.
11. Tudhari (?)
12. Fithun, Abu Nasr ibn Bari ibn Ayyub.
13. Basil the Prelate.

14. Abu Nuh ibn al-Salt.
 15. Astath (?)
 16. Jirun
 17. Stefan son of Basil.
 18. Ibn Rabbitah.
 19. Theophilus.
 20. Shamla (?)
 21. `Isa ibn Nuh.
 22. Quwayri, whose name is Ibrahim, and whose patronym is Abu Ishaq.
 23. Tadhrus al-sungul. (?)
 24. Dari` the Monk.
 25. Hayabithun.
 26. Saliba
 27. Ayyub al-Ruhawi.
 28. Thabit ibn Qumma`.
 - 29-30. Ayyub and Sam`an, who wrote a commentary on the astronomical tables of Ptolemy for Muhammad ibn Khalid ibn Yahya ibn Barmak, and other ancient books besides.
 31. Basil, who used to serve Dhu 'l-Yaminayn.
 32. Ibn Sahdi al-Karkhi, who translated poorly from Syriac to Arabic. Among that which he translated is the Book of Fetuses by Hippocrates.
 33. Abu `Amr Yuhanna ibn Yusuf the Scribe, one of the translators. He translated Plato's book on the education of children.
 34. Ayyub ibn al-Qasim al-Raqqi, who translated from Syriac into Arabic. Among the works he translated is the Eisagoge [the Introduction, on logic].
 35. Mar Lahi, in our time. He has an excellent knowledge of Syriac but is clumsy of expression in Arabic. Working with Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Dahaki, he translates from Syriac into Arabic, and Ibn al-Dahaki revises his translation.
 36. Dad Yasu`, who used to translate for Ishaq ibn Sulayman ibn `Ali al-Hashimi from Syriac into Arabic.
 37. Qusta ibn Luqa al-Ba`labakki ... excelled in translation. He was eloquent in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. He translated some works and corrected many translations.
 - ...
 38. Hunayn.
 39. Ishaq.
 40. Hubaysh.
 41. `Isa ibn Yahya al-Dimashqi.
 42. Ibrahim ibn al-Salt.
 43. Ibrahim ibn Abd Allah
 44. Yahya ibn `Adi al-Nafisi.
- We will provide an exhaustive account of these later on, God willing, because they authored their own works as well.

The Names of Translators from Persian into Arabic:

1. Ibn al-Muqaffa`, who has been mentioned in his place.
2. Most of the members of the Nawbakht family, who have been mentioned or who will be mentioned later on, God willing.

4. What kind of people worked as translators?

5. Of the languages mentioned, besides Arabic, which appear to have been most important? What is your evidence?

Exercise IX: Questions for discussion:

1. Is translation still important? Why? What purposes does it serve?

2. What are some of the difficulties translators face?

3. How would you go about translating a biography, a chemistry textbook, a computer manual, an email message, a private letter, a children's book?

4. Do you know of any works that have been translated recently, either to or from English?

Euclid

The author of *geomatria*, which means geometry. ... He is the inventor of geometry and the outstanding scholar in that field. He was earlier than Archimedes and others, and was one of the philosophers and mathematicians.

His Book on the Principles of Geometry

Its title is *Stoikheia*, which means the "elements" of geometry. Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf ibn Matar translated it in

two versions, one known as the Haruni [from the name of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid], which was first, and a second, the Ma'muni [that is, for the Caliph al-Ma'mun], which is known as al-Ma'muni. People rely on the latter version. Ishaq ibn Husayn also translated it, and Thabit ibn Qurrah al-Harrani corrected it.

Abu `Uthman al-Dimashqi translated several chapters, and I saw the tenth of them in Mosul in the library of `Ali ibn Ahmad al-`Imrani, and in the possession of one of his servants, Abu al-Saqr al-Qabisi, with whom people study the *Almagest* [Ptolemy's book on astronomy].

Eiran (?) translated this book and solved its ambiguous points.

Al-Nayrizi wrote a commentary on it.

A man named al-Karabisi, who will be mentioned below, has a commentary on it.

Al-Jawhari has a commentary on this book from the beginning to the end, and an account of al-Jawhari will follow.

Al-Mahani authored a commentary on the fifth chapter of the book.

Nazif the doctor, may God give him strength, related to me that he saw the tenth chapter of Euclid in Greek, and that it adds forty diagrams to the text that is in the hands of the people. What is in the hands of the people has 109 diagrams. He had planned to translate this text into Arabic. Yuhanna the priest stated that he saw the diagram which Thabit claimed belonged to the first chapter and claimed to have in the Greek version. Nazif mentioned that he had showed it to him.

Abu Ja`far al-Khurasani the librarian, who will be mentioned later on, authored a commentary on the book of Euclid.

Abu al-Wafa' authored a commentary on this book, but did not complete it.

A man known as Ibn Nahawayh al-Arrajani translated the tenth chapter.

Abu al-Qasim al-Antaki translated the entire book, and it was published.

Sanad ibn `Ali had translated it, and Abu `Ali saw nine chapters of [this translation] and some of the tenth.

Abu Yusuf al-Razi also translated the tenth chapter excellently for Ibn al-`Amid. Al-Kindi reports in his treatise on the purposes of the Book of Euclid that this book was originally written by someone named Apollonius the Carpenter, who divided it into fifteen discourses. When, however, long eras had passed from the time it was written and it became neglected, one of the Alexandrian kings became enthusiastic about learning the science of geometry. Euclid lived during his reign. He ordered [Euclid] to correct and explain this book. Consequently, he did so, and the book became known as his. Later on, Episcleaus, the student of Euclid, found two chapters, the fourteenth and the

fifteenth. He gave them to the king, and they were added to the book. All of this was in Alexandria.

Among the books of Euclid are: *The Book of Apparent Things*; *The Book of Differences of Views [on Optics]*; *The Book of Givens*; *The Book of Melody*, known as *Music*, wrongly attributed to him; *The Book of Division*, corrected by Thabit; *The Book of Benefits*, wrongly attributed to him; *The Book of the Canon*; *The Book of Heaviness and Lightness*; *The Book of Composition*; *The Book of Analysis*, wrongly attributed to him.

(F 325-26)

Exercise X: Answer the following, based on the text above.

1. How important was Euclid's *Elements* for scholars in the Islamic empire? what is your evidence?

2. Why would more than one translation of a single work be necessary?

3. What were some of the problems that faced mathematicians who were trying to work with Euclid's text?

Exercise XI: Read the following passage and answer the questions.

The first who composed tales, wrote collections of them, and preserved them in libraries, making some of them on the tongue of animals, were the ancient Persians. Subsequently, the Ashghanian (Parthian) kings, who are the third dynasty of Persian kings, became obsessed with such books. This practice increased and became more widespread during the reign of the Sassanian kings [the fourth dynasty]. The Arabs translated them into Arabic, and eloquent and skillful writers took them up, arranging them nicely and presenting them in elegant prose. They also wrote similar stories along the same lines. The first book of this type that they made was the book *Hezar Afsan*, which means *One Thousand Tales*. The cause of this was that one of their kings would, whenever he married a woman and spent the night with her, kill her the next day. Then he married a girl who was the daughter of a king and endowed with reason and intelligence, called Shahrazad. When she was in his presence, she began to tell him stories, and at the end of the night she would leave off the tale at a point that would induce him to spare her and ask her to complete the tale the following night. This continued until she had survived one thousand nights. ... She gave birth to a son by him, which she showed to him. She revealed her trick to him, and he

considered her very wise, took a liking to her, and decided to spare her. The king had a housekeeper called Dinarzad, who was complicit with her in this strategem. It has been said that this book was written for Hamani, the daughter of Bahman, but others have given a different report about it. (F 363)

Questions

1. Can you identify the work ibn al-Nadim describes? What do we call it?

2. What do we learn from this passage about the translation of non-scientific works?

Bibliography:

The *Fihrist* has been translated into English by Bayard Dodge under the title *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970. This translation includes many hundreds of errors, primarily due to Dodge's misrendering of technical terms, but it is nevertheless the best available rendering in any language other than Arabic itself.

The edition of the *Fihrist* I have used is that of Rida Tajaddud, published in Tehran, 1971.

Other useful works on the translation movement and related matters are the following:

Bloom, Jonathan M. *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)*. London: Routledge, 1998.

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