

Patrons and Cultures: A Socio-political History of Scientific and Philosophical Translation in Iran from Ancient to the Qajar Period

Abdullah Nowruzy^{1*}

¹PhD in Translation Studies, Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Abstract Translation serves as a powerful medium for transmitting knowledge, culture, and ideas from one culture to another. The efficacy of translation hinges on social, cultural, and political contexts. The transmission of scientific and philosophical concepts from ancient Greece to Iran sparked intellectual vitality and broadened perspectives on existence and the cosmos. Historically, translation in Iran has experienced cycles of flourishing and decline: during eras when cultural openness, patronage from rulers, or a collective thirst for knowledge prevailed, translation, and with it, philosophy and science, prospered. Conversely, in more culturally neglectful periods, translation and its influence waned. Exploring various socio-cultural and political conditions across epochs, this study demonstrates that external factors such as governmental support, societal demand, and a predisposition toward knowledge have shaped the translation of scientific and philosophical texts.

Keywords: *Ancient Iran, Dar al-Hikma, History of Translation, Wisdom and Philosophy*

*Corresponding Author: Abdullah Nowruzy
Email: ab.nowruzy@mail.um.ac.ir
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4449-0155>

© 2025 LTS.
All rights reserved

Please cite this paper as follows:

Nowruzy, A. (2025). Patrons and cultures: A socio-political history of scientific and philosophical translation in Iran from ancient to the Qajar period. *Language and Translation Studies*, 58(2), 61-82. <https://doi.org/10.22067/lts.2026.96862.1407>



© 2025 Nowruzy

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Societies need the comprehensive use of all available socio-cultural capabilities to achieve their ideal goals, and translation as an enriching tool seems to have always been playing an indispensable role in driving the cultural advancement of the communities. Translation in Iran, as a society with a rich cultural heritage, is by no means an exception. Throughout the country's socio-political epochs, translation has consistently played a pivotal role. However, its status and efficacy have not remained constant across these periods, with significant oscillations and fluctuations.

Specifically, the translation of scientific and philosophical texts, given the intrinsically rationalistic nature of philosophy and science and their prominent status among Iranian scholars, has played a critical role as a conduit for intellectual exchange with other linguistic communities. Like the general trend of translation, this specific domain has experienced fluctuations, partly due to socio-historical factors such as governmental or personal support that have influenced the overall translational trend and the translation of scientific and philosophical texts in particular. The susceptibility of the translation of these texts to social configurations is not merely confined to the rise and fall within the national cultural process. More precisely, the orientations, biases, and the very act of translation itself are, to a considerable extent, predicated upon these social considerations.

For those preoccupied with the critical analysis of Iran's cultural narrative, investigating the historical trajectory of translation as one of the great phenomena of global civilization has always been of great significance. Consequently, numerous studies have examined the history of translation across different periods and from various epistemological perspectives. Some studies have focused on translation in Iran as a cultural and communicative phenomenon, analyzing its development across distinct historical periods or tracing its evolution from the inception of writing to the contemporary era. A rather comprehensive study on this topic is [Azerang's \(2015\)](#) book, *The History of Translation in Iran*. He systematically investigates the history of translation from ancient Iran to the end of the Qajar dynasty. To this end, he divides the extensive timeframe into smaller, manageable periods, enabling a meticulously chronological and detailed analysis of the phenomenon. His

research, despite being comprehensive, examines the translation of scientific and philosophical texts sporadically, which is not enough for those with a special interest in translating these texts. Similarly, [Varzgar \(1994\)](#) explores the evolutionary phases of translation in Iran from ancient Persia up to the Mongol era.

The Translation Movement, a remarkable historical milestone in the annals of translation, has also been the main core of extensive scholarly studies. This movement was a massive intellectual undertaking from the middle of the second century to the late fourth century AH, during which a substantial corpus of scientific and cultural works was translated. Among the studies addressing this movement is the research conducted by [Hashemi et al. \(2010\)](#). Their research is divided into two stages. The first section reviews related research in this regard, examining the antecedents and motivations underpinning translation in this era, the key translators, the translated works, and the consequences of this movement. In the second section, it addresses contemporary translation dynamics, including modern translations into Arabic, translations into Turkish, Persian translation in the contemporary period, and translation into Arabic in the Western context. [Madkour \(1986\)](#), in addition to analyzing the initial translatorial efforts by Muslims, evaluates the contributions of the Abbasid Caliphate to this movement. He then discusses the Islamic translations broadly. [Mohaghegh \(1986\)](#) scrutinizes the role of translation and the sciences of foreign origin during the life of Imam Reza and examines their consequential impact. Drawing a distinction between open and closed societies and referring to the global affinity for knowledge and scholarly domains, [Fani \(1986\)](#) explores translation activities within the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma) and the specific methodological approaches employed there. [Hosseini \(1996\)](#) traces translation in the immediate centuries following the advent of Islam. Moreover, [Badavi \(1986\)](#) analyzes the translation and transmission of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world.

Considering this synoptic review of previous studies, a discernible research gap specific to the history of translating scientific and philosophical texts is evident. Consequently, this study tries to put translation within its

socio-cultural and political context, seeking to see what factors exerted influence on the translation of scientific and philosophical texts.

2. Method

This study tries to hold a socio-historical and systemic perspective with the main idea that translation of scientific and philosophical texts is not only a matter of linguistic transfer, but also the texts for translation and the very act of translation are context-embedded and under the influence of many social, cultural, political, and economic agendas. Accordingly, conducting this research requires considering the influencing socio-political and institutional systems, as well as individual activities. To this end, the researcher relied on the old and established theoretical considerations, such as [Even-Zohar's \(1990\)](#) poly-system theory, which is a robust descriptive research on cultural phenomena ([Heydel, 2024](#)), and [Venuti's \(2012\)](#) domestication and foreignization continuum. Moreover, a relational perspective in doing this research (see [Cantó-Milà et al., 2025](#)) helped the researcher see the dynamism, non-linearity, and emergent essence of text and knowledge transfer through translation.

A descriptive-analytical method is used to conduct this research, and all related library resources are scrutinized. To handle the investigation, this extensive historical period is delineated into smaller, distinct epochs. The rationale for the divisions lies in their influential and prominent status in the history of translation in Iran. The focus is on the remarkable periods in the history of cultural exchanges and translation activities. Such conceptual tools as support and patronage, cultural exchanges, relationship and power hold the guide-frame for the researcher.

3. Translation in the Pre-Islamic Era

The Iranian civilization has possessed a long-standing predilection for philosophy and wisdom. This intellectual tradition is not only attributable to the post-Islamic era and the consequent widespread expansion of literacy; rather, philosophy and wisdom were already prevalent in pre-Islamic Iran, particularly during the Sassanian era. The philosophical discourse that gained

prominence during this era was heavily influenced by the thought of Greek philosophers and sages. Therefore, to address the investigation concerning this period, it seems that the examination should start with the cultural and scientific exchanges between Greece and Iran, as some research reveals the bulk of scientific and cultural interactions (e.g., [Khosravi, Changizi Ashtiyani, & Amini, 2022](#); [Keshavarzi, Jafary Dehaghi, & Hasani, 2024](#); [Zarrinkoub, 2011](#)) with particular emphasis on the translation of Greek philosophy and wisdom.

During the Median period, cultural transactions were performed through translation, though primarily orally. This phenomenon is clearly evident in the Achaemenid era through extant inscriptions like the Behistun Inscription. However, during the Seleucid era, evidence of this phenomenon is scarce or, at the very least, no noteworthy records can be definitively identified. While the historical record confirms the phenomena of multilingualism and the promotion of the Greek language alongside broader Hellenization in Iran during this period, the specific impact of Hellenization on translation remains obscure and cannot be conclusively determined ([Azerang, 2015](#)). He describes the state of translation during the Seleucid era as ambiguous, suggesting that Iranian society in that period did not benefit from the Greek cultural and intellectual legacy, and that signs of cultural exchange were absent. This lack of interaction might be explained by the perception of the Seleucid community as foreign invaders, leading the Iranians to reject everything associated with them, including Greek thought and culture.

[Varzgar \(1994\)](#) asserts that Iranians were familiar with the Greek language and culture from the Achaemenid period, and even in the Naqshe Rostam inscription, a Greek translation was used alongside the Pahlavi language. The Parthians were not illiterate, but they possessed a limited inclination towards writing ([Rajabi, 2002](#)). This does not, however, imply that they did not engage with science and literature. The origins of many Iranian myths and narratives are traced back to the Parthian era ([Rajabi, 2002](#)). For instance, the primary source narrative of the *Shahnameh* can be traced back to the Parthian period ([Azerang, 2015](#)).

During this period, the extent of Parthian power and influence expanded, fostering vibrant interactions between Iranians and other nations, notably the

Greeks, Romans, and Chinese. Consequently, translation would have been an inevitable mode of communication and exchange. However, as [Azerang \(2015\)](#) notes, there is not any written records that would allow for a decisive commentary on the specific methods or scope of translation in that era.

With the establishment of the Sasanian dynasty, cultural exchange flourished, and translation activities intensified. Significant works like the Avesta were translated. It is well-documented that a wide spectrum of Greek scholars, including scientists, historians, travelers, philosophers, and physicians visited Persia, facilitating scientific and cultural interaction ([Sajjadi, 1994](#)).

The impetus behind this intellectual traffic and cultural and scientific exchange, of which translation was a crucial component, was rooted in the patronage of the ruling monarchs and the practical requirements of the contemporary society. However, perhaps the most critical factor driving the flourishing of translation during this time was the personal interest of the Sasanian kings and the support provided by the court and noble families.

The existence of several prominent educational institutions in Iran appears to have fostered an environment conducive to scientific and cultural exchange. These included the School of Nisibis, the School of Edessa, and the renowned Academy of Gondishapour (Jondishapour). The School of Nisibis fell under Persian control in 363 AD and served as a major center for instruction in theology, medicine, and philosophy ([Sajjadi, 1994](#)). Upon its eventual closure, the School of Edessa emerged as its successor, later attaining the status of an official “House of Knowledge” (Dar al-Ilm). Political developments and sustained academic interactions ensured that this center became a crucible for the convergence of ideas, witnessing the growth of philosophical thought and the translation of Greek texts into Syriac ([Azari Khakestar, 2021](#)). [Fakhry \(1983\)](#) states that the translations done in the cities of Antioch, Harran, Edessa, and Nisibis included not only theological works but also texts on logic. The necessity for translating these logical texts originated with the need for a deeper conceptual analysis of theological concepts and a desire to master the dialectical methods that had permeated the Christian religious debates of the time.

The cultural and scientific interaction under the governance of Khosrow Anoushirvan is a remarkable phenomenon in this period. In the early 6th century AD, Anoushirvan ordered the establishment of a hospital and a medical school at Gondishapur. The two centers became a nexus for the intellectual engagement of Greek, Syriac, and Iranian philosophers and physicians. It was during this period that Iranians were first exposed to the thought of Aristotle. The majority of the instructors at the school were Syriac (Corbin, 1994).

De Boer (1964) similarly notes that Khosrow Anoushirvan (531-579 AD) established an institution for the study of philosophy and medicine in Gondishapur. The main trainers of the center were Nestorian Christians. Since he was interested in logic, he showed leniency towards the Nestorians and Jacobites. The Syriac Christians excelled in medicine and achieved significant benefits from this environment.

Cultural treasures were subsequently channeled to the court of Khosrow Anoushirvan. Borzouye, the royal physician, went to India to collect and translate the texts on Indian science and wisdom into Persian (Goshtasb & Naderpour, 2014). Syriac Christians who enjoyed favorable conditions at the court translated the medical works of the Greek physician Galen into Persian (Browne, 2011).

The cosmopolitan nature of the scientific institutions is further highlighted by the contributions of Indian scholars. Varzgar (1994) reports that in Gondishapur, there was a fully equipped hospital where several Indian physicians collaborated. They, in turn, translated some Indian medical works into Pahlavi.

The intellectual ferment during the Sasanian era was significantly shaped by the movements of major educational institutions and key translators. Corbin (1994) refers to a famous school founded in Edessa. This school was established when Emperor Eumenes surrendered the city of Nisibis to the Persians. Subsequently, the Byzantine Emperor closed the school in 489 AD due to its Nestorian teachings. The masters and students who retained their Nestorian faith took refuge in Nisibis and founded a new school there, which became a center for philosophy and theology (Corbin, 1994).

Detailed information regarding all translators of this period is scant. However, one pivotal figure who can be identified with certainty is Paul the Persian (Jackson, 2003). Paul the Persian was reportedly among the tutors of philosophy for Khosrow Anoushirvan, and he is credited with translating Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Another attributed work is his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*.

Furthermore, it is recorded that seven Neoplatonic philosophers were expelled from Greece, and Khosrow Anoushirvan welcomed them in his court in 532 AD (De Boer, 1964). De Boer (1964) dates the beginning of the translation of Greek philosophical texts to the fourth century AD, saying that translating these texts persisted until the eighth century. He elaborates on the translations of this period and two highly distinguished translators: Prōbōs, a priest and physician in Antioch, and Sergius of Resh 'Aina (Sergius of Ra's al-'Ayn). Corbin (1994) supplements this account, saying that Sergius of Ra's al-'Ayn is a famous person of tremendous activity, who translated numerous works of Galen and the logical treatises of Aristotle into Syriac.

The scope of Sasanian intellectual interest was broad, yet focused. During the Sasanian period, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine were held in exceptionally high regard; especially the translation of books concerning mathematics, astronomy, and medicine is highly noteworthy (Varzgar, 1994). Recounting the efforts under Ardashir I, Varzgar (1994) states that Ardashir I dispatched envoys to foreign territories across the world to gather suitable collections of books for his libraries and had them all translated into Pahlavi. Furthermore, his son, Shapur I, ordered Greek physicians to be brought to Iran for medical instruction, and many Indian and Greek books were translated into Pahlavi and stored at Gondishapur. The personal engagement of the royalty underscores this intellectual value. According to Varzgar (1994), Khosrow Anoushirvan (531-579 AD) read the Pahlavi translations of the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle, and his predecessors, such as Shapur I, read Pahlavi translations of many works from Greek, Babylonian, Syrian, and Indian sources.

4. Translation after the Advent of Islam

To adequately analyze the socio-political and cultural factors that influenced the trajectory of translating scientific and philosophical texts, the post-Islamic period must be segmented. Here, I delineate two primary eras: The First Era, from the advent of Islam to the Mongol invasion, and The Second Era, from the Mongol invasion to the beginning of the Qajar dynasty.

4.1. From the Advent of Islam to the Mongol Invasion

The establishment of the first Islamic polity began with the Prophet Muhammad and continued under the Rashidun Caliphate (up to 661 AD). Following the Prophet's passing, the Umayyad Caliphate was founded in 661 AD and persisted until 750 AD.

The rise of Islam as a new religion and ideology was accompanied by various conflicts. Simultaneously, the Qur'an was progressively revealed, leading to the formation of a novel intellectual and cultural structure. The continuation of this faith necessitated the study of religious issues. Although the socio-economic conditions of the early Muslims were strained by frequent tribal and ethnic warfare, the propensity to learn increased. This was driven by a rise in literacy and, crucially, Islam's emphasis on reflection and the acquisition of knowledge.

In the initial period following the Prophet's death, intellectual debates and the pursuit of epistemological unknowns continued. One side of this intellectual spectrum was marked by an exclusive adherence to the Qur'an, asserting self-sufficiency from non-Qur'anic sources. The opposing view recognized the need to address profound ontological and cosmological questions.

The dogmatic adherence of some people to the Qur'an, restricting themselves to Qur'anic and Hadith sources, served as a barrier to translating non-Arabic works. The alleged destruction of the Library of Alexandria and other libraries is sometimes cited as a consequence of this mindset. According to one related account, the destruction of this library was commanded by Omar ibn Khattab ([Safa, 2005](#)), based on the premise of self-sufficiency from writings that either conformed to or contradicted the divine book ([Halabi, 1982](#); [Safa, 2005](#); [Ovdi & Ramadanipour, 2007](#)).

However, the eventual catalyst for scientific and philosophical growth in the Islamic world is widely considered to be the engagement with Western thought and sciences, notably that of the Greek philosophers. The establishment of the House of Wisdom and the systematic translation of Greek works led to an exponential intellectual efflorescence in Islam. In essence, at the advent of Islam, the sciences had not yet been fully dissociated from philosophy; philosophy encompassed various sciences and disciplines, and philosophers were often proficient in fields like medicine. Muslim scholars, by assimilating Greek philosophy and synthesizing it with Islamic teachings, established Islamic philosophy, which they continuously expanded. While the advancement of philosophy in the Arab world subsequently underwent a period of relative stagnation, it continued its maturation in Persia, evolving into various schools of thought.

4.2. The Abbasid Period

The most crucial span within this era is the Abbasid Caliphate (750 AD to 1258 AD). The Abbasid Caliphate was established in Harran in 750 AD. Its capital was subsequently moved from Harran to Baghdad, then briefly to Khorasan, and eventually back to Baghdad. This rule concluded in 1258 AD (656 AH) following the Mongol invasion of Iran. Between the third and fifth centuries AH (9-11th centuries AD, the Islamic community across the Middle East, Central Asia, North Africa, and Al-Andalus witnessed one of the most brilliant periods of cultural, philosophical, and scientific flourishing in human history. This intellectual dynamism persisted until the ninth century AH, effectively paving the way for the European Renaissance (Adalat, 2010). Such great scholars as Jabir ibn Hayyan, Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Razi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al-Birouni, Ibn Rushd, and Sohravardi collectively defined the golden age of science, civilization, philosophy, and rationalism.

Adalat (2010) argues that the essential phase of this scientific and philosophical efflorescence, which began with the Translation Movement under the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'moun, was primarily realized in Iran under the Samanid and later the Buyid dynasties. This phase coincided with the ascendancy of Persian culture, language, and literature, and the growth of Mu'tazilite rationalist philosophy, particularly among the Shi'a communities.

A crucial factor enabling the profound scientific and philosophical boost during this golden age was the politically open and intellectually pluralistic environment established at the courts of the Baghdad Caliphs and the Samanid and Buyid rulers. In this scholarly environment, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and even irreligious scholars collaborated and engaged in scientific and philosophical debates ([Adalat, 2010](#)). Zakariya al-Razi, for instance, despite his philosophical opposition to the doctrines of prophecy and religion, was not subjected to persecution. Instead, he was appointed to the headship of hospitals in Rey and Baghdad and held these responsibilities for many years ([Adalat, 2010](#)).

The scholars of Harran, from the third century AH onwards, embraced Greek wisdom with a favorable disposition ([De Boer, 1940](#)). Greek knowledge consequently reached the Muslims in the East via the pathways of Harran and Syria. The Syrians played a significant role by absorbing Greek Neoplatonic philosophy and transmitting it to the nascent Islamic intellectual centers.

Although this era marks the most extensive translational activity in the history of the world, culminating in the foundation of the House of Wisdom, it appears that the translation of works into Persian was not a primary focus, given the extensive scope of this period. Instead, this phase should be fundamentally understood as the era of translation into the lingua franca of the Islamic world, Arabic. Arabic served as the dominant medium for the transmission of scientific and philosophical knowledge across the vast Islamic empire.

The systematic translation of Greek sciences and philosophy into the Islamic world began under the Abbasid Caliphate, driven by the intellectual curiosity and direct patronage of the ruling elite. The beginnings of the Islamic philosophical school coincide with the first translations of the works of Greek scholars from Syriac or Greek into Arabic ([Fakhry, 1983](#)). Scientific and medical texts were among the very first compositions to be translated into Arabic. The Arabs and the Iranians, who played a substantial role in establishing the scientific and philosophical movement in the Islamic world, usually approached matters from a scientific perspective.

Al-Mansour (reigned 754–775 AD) was the first Abbasid Caliph who actively engaged in the process of transmitting Greek sciences into the Islamic sphere (Halabi, 1982). His interest in philosophy and astronomy led him to employ the greatest physicians, scientists, and translators (Fakhry, 1983). He had a deep attachment to Greek scientific and philosophical works and supported and encouraged translators' activities. Haroun al-Rashid (reigned 786–809 AD) also dedicated considerable attention to the advancement of science. His court physician, Youhanna (Yahya) ibn Masawayh, was the greatest scientific and literary figure of his time. Haroun appointed him as his personal physician and entrusted him with the task of translating ancient medical texts (Fakhry, 1983).

The peak of this translational activity was reached during the reign of Al-Ma'moun (833 AD), when books on philosophy, logic, and other rational sciences ('Oloum 'Aqliya) were translated into Arabic (Halabi, 1982). In 217 AH (832 AD), Al-Ma'moun founded the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, appointing Yahya ibn Masawayh as its director. Al-Ma'moun requested the Byzantine Emperor a selection of philosophical books from his imperial libraries, and then ordered their translation into Arabic (Corbin, 1994).

Inspired by Al-Ma'moun's initiative, some people of Baghdad provided funds for this translation, attracting major translators from Iran, Iraq, and Syria to the capital (Halabi, 1982). These translators rendered a wide range of philosophical and scientific works from Syriac, Persian, Greek, Sanskrit, and Nabataean into Arabic. Consequently, the most important works of the Greek philosophers were translated into Arabic during this time. Corbin (1994) similarly emphasizes that the bulk of this activity involved translation from Greek into Arabic.

The influx of translations had a profound effect, fostering intense scientific and cultural dynamism, including the emergence of Scholastic Theology ('Ilm al-Kalam) (Corbin, 1994). Fakhry (1993) dates the beginning of the Islamic philosophical school to the time when the first translations of Greek scholars' works were rendered from Syriac or Greek into Arabic.

The government's role was instrumental in promoting philosophical texts and spreading philosophy. Theoretical philosophy gained greater currency due to the personal inclinations of figures such as Al-Ma'moun and Ja'far

Barmaki, who were interested in ancient sciences in their Iranian, Indian, and Babylonian forms generally, and in their Greek and Hellenistic forms specifically (Fakhry, 1993).

In addition to Greek texts, the Translation Movement incorporated the works of philosophers from other civilizations. India holds a special place in this intellectual exchange. De Boer (1964) notes that India was regarded as the land of wisdom. According to him, the dissemination of Indian wisdom among the Arabs occurred primarily through trade routes during periods of peace. This transmission also intensified following the Islamic conquests. A substantial portion of this wisdom was translated during the reigns of Al-Mansour and Haroun al-Rashid. These translations were made either from Pahlavi versions or directly from Sanskrit.

Al-Ma'moun is recognized as the greatest patron of philosophy and science throughout the history of Islam (Fakhry, 1983). Although Al-Mansour and Haroun al-Rashid had taken the preliminary steps, Al-Ma'moun's pivotal contribution was the establishment of the Bayt al-Hikma in 215 AH (830 AD), formalizing it as an institution and library dedicated to translation and research. To fully equip the library with scientific and philosophical works, he dispatched envoys to the Byzantine Empire to search for books on the Ancient Sciences (Oloum al-Awa'il).

In the early Islamic period, while Arabic became the dominant scholarly language (i.e., lingua franca) for the massive translation of Greek works, texts were also rendered from Greek, Arabic, and other languages into Persian. The most prominent figure in the history of translating Greek philosophy and science was Hunayn ibn Ishaq (809–873 AD), who is credited with establishing the art of translation upon a scientific basis (Fakhry, 1983).

Following the establishment of Islamic philosophy in Iran, many philosophers actively composed original works in Persian. The shift toward Persian as a language of philosophical discourse is evident in the works of major Iranian thinkers. Sohravardi composed the majority of his works in Arabic, but also wrote some in Persian (Emam, 1974). Moreover, he translated some of his own Arabic works into Persian. Of 48, he composed 17 books in Farsi. Additionally, Omar Khayyam translated Ibn Sina's *Khutbat*

al-Ghurra into Persian (Nasr, 2010). He wrote several independent philosophical books in Persian.

Minovi (1953) suggests that after the initial massive translation of Hindu and Syriac books into Arabic during the early Abbasid period, scholars seemingly considered themselves sufficiently equipped and focused solely on deep reflection and elaboration upon the knowledge they had already acquired. In his view, with the exception of two or three translations mentioned by Abu Rayhan al-Biruni in his works and translations from Arabic into Persian by Iranians, there is a noticeable dearth of further translational activity within the Islamic world until the Mongol era. During the Mongol period, Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tousi initiated translations and studies, particularly in astronomy, incorporating a small body of astronomical knowledge into his own writings.

The sustained momentum of the Translation Movement was initially sustained by the Caliphs' specific interests and the financial backing of influential families. A distinguishing characteristic of most early Abbasid caliphs was the precedence given to astrological texts over other genres (Fakhry, 1983). This preference explains their interest in procuring and subsequently translating the ancient works of astrology. Other key patrons of science and philosophy were the members of the wealthy and influential Banou Mousa family. They generously provided the means for the translation of scientific and philosophical works (Fakhry, 1983). Varzgar (1994) also references other prominent families who encouraged translators and scholars to render beneficial works.

Although the Seljuk period (1037-1194 AD) saw a quantitative decline in the number of philosophical works in both Persian and Arabic, compared to earlier periods, it is considered the golden age of Persian literature and mysticism (Nasr, 2010). During this period, the greatest masterpieces of Persian Sufi prose emerged, such as Hujwiri's *Kashf al-Mahjoub*, Abu Saeed's *Asrar al-Tawhid*, and the Persian translation of Al-Qushayri's *Risalat al-Qushayriyah*. The appearance of Illuminationist Philosophy (Hikmat al-Ishraq) in the Persian language also occurred during the Seljuk era. A key feature of the intellectual landscape in Iran following the Translation Movement was a strong inclination toward composing original philosophical

works in Persian rather than translating. This inclination can be traced to Iran's intellectual leadership in science and philosophy. While many scientific texts continued to be written in Arabic (the *lingua franca* of the Islamic world), the preference for writing philosophical works in Persian became very noticeable among Iranian scholars. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi wrote several treatises in Persian, including *Jami' al-'Oloum*, *Osoul al-'Aqa'id*, and *Risalat al-Kamaliyah* on Kalam (Scholastic Theology). Baba Afzal Kashani composed thirteen treatises entirely in Persian. Nasr (2010) views this development as indicative of the subsequent expansion of Islamic philosophy in Persian, where various philosophical schools gradually began to synthesize.

The writing of Persian philosophical works did not cease even with the Mongol invasion of Iran. Throughout the Timurid era, numerous philosophical works were written in Persian (Nasr, 2010). Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tousi wrote several philosophical treatises in Persian, such as *Baqā' al-Nafs* (The Perpetuity of the Soul) and *Jabr va Ekhtyar* (Free Will and Predetermination).

With the emergence of the Safavid Dynasty, the use of Persian in the rational sciences (*Oloum Aqliyya*) declined. The reasons for this reduction and whether a decrease in Persian philosophical production led to a corresponding increase in translation are worthy of another scholarly investigation. A unique work of translation from this period is the *Tankusunameh Ilkhan dar Fonoun va Oloume Khata'i* (The Ilkhan Book of Treasures on Chinese Sciences and Arts), produced during the reign of Ghazan Khan. This work constitutes the translation of a section of Chinese medical and scientific texts into Persian (Minovi, 1953).

4.4. The Safavid Era

Shah Isma'il I established the Safavid dynasty, created a centralized government, and declared Shia Islam as the official religion of Iran. Despite several wars, this period is considered one of the most favorable in the Islamic history of Iran for the attention to religious sciences. The Safavid rulers created a political and cultural environment highly conducive to the compilation of biographies (*Sireh*) and merits (*Manaqeb*) of the Imams,

alongside other foundational Shia religious texts. Direct and indirect encouragement from the Safavid Shahs, particularly Shah Tahmasp I, and the socio-political and cultural preeminence of the Shia community led to the proliferation of many books on the lives and merits of the Twelve Imams (Hosseinzadeh Shanehchi, 2009). The expansion of Shia thought and religious studies fueled the development of eminent thinkers and philosophers such as Mir Damad and Molla Sadra.

The composition and translation of religious sciences surged dramatically. The titles of the translated books show that translators generally selected works of recognized scholarly value that would be acceptable to both Shia and Sunni people (Hosseinzadeh Shanehchi, 2009).

The Safavid court exerted an influence on the type and style of translation undertaken. The book *Kashf al-Ihtijaj*, for instance, was translated by direct order of Shah Tahmasp. Another version of this book was likely translated by Mulla Fath Allah Kashani. The book's preface cites the public's use of it as the rationale for its translation. Accordingly, the translator reduced the linguistic complexity and artifice in rendering the text from Arabic to Persian, adopting a language appropriate for the public's understanding (Hosseinzadeh Shanehchi, 2009).

The rendering of religious biographies into Persian is particularly significant because it marks a substantial increase in Persianization of the translations (Hosseinzadeh Shanehchi, 2009). Although the Safavids did not specifically champion poets and literati, their support for writing and translation into Persian played a crucial role in promoting Persian composition (Hosseini, 2014).

The history of translation is a history of patronage, the support or deliberate lack of support in different periods (Hosseini, 2014). The Safavid era marks the first period in which the translation of religious texts was undertaken in a systematic manner and attained the status of a movement, supported directly by the central government (Hosseini, 2014). Many Shia scholars (some of whom held high governmental positions) undertook the task of translating Shia works in the domains of Qur'anic sciences, Hadith, Kalam, and Jurisprudence into Persian, with the aim of promoting and disseminating Shia doctrine (Miri, 1998). The Safavid Shahs also encouraged

scholars to engage in writing and translating religious texts from Arabic into Persian. Qom and Isfahan emerged as the main centers for translating these kinds of books (Hosseini, 2014). Although the dominant trend in Safavid translation heavily favored religious texts, resulting in a clear focus of state-supported projects, works in other domains were also translated. Hosseini (2014) categorizes the translated works of this period into four groups: religious texts, scientific texts, texts pertaining to governance, and texts related to Western culture and civilization.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the key phases of translating scientific and philosophical texts in the social, political, and cultural context of Iran from its pre-Islamic origins to the beginning of the Qajar period. As this analysis makes it evident, the translation of scientific and philosophical texts in the pre-Islamic era flourished primarily due to royal court patronage, resulting in the translation of many works by Greek philosophers. In the brief period immediately following the advent of Islam, the translation of non-religious texts suffered a decline, partially due to the dominant ideology that led to the reported burning of libraries. However, this phase was overcome by a subsequent intellectual need among scholars to engage with Greek thought. This need led to the foundation of the House of Wisdom, where numerous sciences were rendered into Arabic, the lingua franca of the Islamic world at the time. The ruling apparatus's prominent role in supporting the translation of philosophical texts remained paramount. Following these comprehensive translations, Iran experienced a significant period of scientific and cultural advancement, which fueled the production of original science and philosophy in Persian. Concurrently, many philosophical works were also translated into Persian during this period.

Examining the trajectory of translating scientific and philosophical texts in Iran showed an interplay between intellectual curiosity, political patronage, and cultural identity. Lefevere (1992) states that translation is controlled by ideology, economics, and status, all of which are often embodied by a patron (e.g., an individual, institution, or social class). The Sasanian and Abbasid courts are good examples of patronage in the period under discussion, where

the direct support of rulers such as Khosrow Anoushirvan and Al-Ma'moun established the ideological and economic conditions for the flourishing of translation. This state-directed phenomenon, or the institutionalized translation in the Abbasid period (Zinhom, 2024), seems to be prevalent in the contemporary era, in which patronage has shifted from royal courts to research institutes and government funding bodies, supporting and determining what is translated and how. Historical evidence of such patronage reveals the power dynamics inherent in the production of knowledge, where the patron effectively determines which ideas enter the cultural system.

This study showed that linguistic and intellectual shifts occurred over the period under investigation. is evident. Linguistic shifts in translation activities from Pahlavi to Arabic, as the lingua franca of the Abbasid era, and back to Persian in subsequent periods signify a negotiation between global intellectual currents and local cultural identity. This resonates with the domestication and foreignization approaches in translation proposed by Venuti (2012) and Vieira (1999). The former can be interpreted as a need to absorb a global intellectual system, while the latter is the reemergence of Persian as a language of philosophy, asserting intellectual sovereignty. Moreover, the shift from relying on foreign sources through translation to producing new scientific and philosophical ideas and texts, translating can be explained by Even-Zohar's poly-system theory. According to Even-Zohar (1990), translated literature may assume a central or peripheral position within a literary system: in the early stages, cultures rely heavily on importing foreign works through translation, while, with the establishment of an intellectual current or system, translation is usually replaced by new original production within that culture. Producing a huge bulk of translations in the Abbasid Translation Movement, for example, represents the existence of such a phase.

Considering the aforementioned issues, one can conclude that the flourishing of the translation of philosophical and scientific texts and the subsequent production of new texts over the study period were the result of a convergence of several key factors and conditions. The most remarkable factor was direct governmental patronage (e.g., by the Abbasid caliphs),

which both politically and financially supported the institutionalized translation. Another significant issue is engagement with other cultures, which facilitated exposure to diverse bodies of scientific and philosophical knowledge and encouraged cross-cultural intellectual exchange. Moreover, the necessity and demands for advanced knowledge (e.g., medicine, astronomy, and philosophy) created a strong incentive to translate and expand on existing works. All these factors created a suitable environment for the translation, transition, adaptation, and generation of knowledge in Iran.

References

- Adalat, A. (2010). Farziyehye fajehzadegi: Ta'sire payedare faje'ye Moghol dar tarikhe siasi, ejtemaei va elmiye Iran [The catastrophe hypothesis: Lasting impact of the Mongol devastation on Iran's political, social, and scientific history]. *Bokhara*, 78,
- Azari Khakestar, Gh. R. (2021). *Namavarane madreseye Edessa* [Prominent figures of the School of Edessa]. *Roshde Amouzeshe Tarikh*, 77, 42–47.
- Azernag, A. (2015). *Tarikhe tarjomeh dar Iran: Az dorane bastan ta payane asre Qajar* [History of translation in Iran: From antiquity to the end of the Qajar era]. Qoqnoos.
- Badavi. (1986). *Fane tarjomeh va enteghale falsafehye Younani be jahane Eslam* [The art of translation and the transfer of Greek philosophy to the Islamic world] (E. Saadat, Trans.). In N. Pourjavadi (Ed.), *Darbareye Tarjomeh* [On translation] (pp. 57–87). Iran University Press.
- Brown, P. R. L. (2011). Parthians and Sasanians. In J. A. Boyle (Ed.), *Persia (RLE Iran A): History and Heritage* (pp. 24–30). New York: Routledge.
- Cantó-Milà, N. Roig-Sanza, D., Ashrafi, N., & Meylaerts, R. (2025). *Relational approaches and translation studies: An interdisciplinary dialogue*. *The Translator*, 31(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2025.2457878>
- Corbin, H. (1994). *Tarikhe falsafehye Eslami* [History of Islamic philosophy] (J. Tabatabaei, Trans.). Kavir.
- De Boer, T. J. (1964). *Tarikhe falsafeh dar Eslam* [The history of philosophy in Islam] (A. Shoghi, Trans.). Ataei.

- Emam, S. M. K. (1974). *Falsafeh dar Irane bastan va mabaniye hekmate eshraq* [Philosophy in ancient Iran and the foundations of Illuminationist wisdom]. Nouriani.
- Even-Zohar, I. (1990). Polysystem theory. In A. Lefevere (Ed.), *Translation, history and culture* (pp. 3-10). Routledge.
- Fakhry, M. (1983). *A History of Islamic philosophy*. Longman.
- Fani, K. (1986). *Bayt al-Hikmah va Dar al-Tarjomeh*. In N. Pourjavadi (Ed.), *Darbareye Tarjomeh* [On translation] (pp. 99-122). Iran University Press.
- Goshtasb, F., & Hajipour, N. (2013). Baztabe tamthiliye kohan dar dastane safare Borzuyeh be Hend [Mythical symbolism in the story of Borzuya's journey to India]. *Pazand*, 9(32-33), 51-57.
- Halabi, A. A. (1982). *Tarikhe falasefehaye Irani* [History of Iranian philosophers]. Zavvar.
- Hashemi, S. A., Fana, F., Kalbasi Ashtari, H., Fakhri, H., Sadgro, P. S., & Balem, Ch. (2010). *Nahzate Tarjomeh* [The translation movement]. Ketab Marja'.
- Heydel, M. (2024). The cultural turn in translation studies. In A. Lange, D. Monticelli, & C. Rundle (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of the history of translation studies* (pp. 233-248). Routledge.
- Hosseini, M. (1997). Tarjomeh dar nokhostin sadehaye Eslami va naghd o barrasiye an be ghalame yeki az daneshmandane an rouzgar (Jahez) [Translation in the early Islamic centuries and its evaluation by a scholar of that era (al-Jahez)]. *Literary Text Research*, 1, 51-65. <https://doi.org/10.22054/LTR.1997.6648>
- Hosseini, M. R. (2014). Nahzate tarjomeh be Farsi dar asre Safavi [The Persian translation movement during the Safavid period]. *Translation Studies*, 45, 31-45.
- Hosseinzadeh Shanehchi, H. (2009). Tarjomehye kotobe sireh va manaqebe emaman dar 'asre Safavi [Translation of works on the Prophet's biography and Imams' merits in the Safavid era]. *Historical Studies*, 45(2), 35-48.
- Jackson, A. V. W. (2003). *Zoroastrian studies: The Iranian religion and various monographs*. Kessinger.
- Keshavarzi, H., Jafary Dehaghi, M., & Hasani, M. M. (2024). The role of the Magi in scientific exchange with Greek and Babylonian civilizations in the fields of philosophy, astronomy, and medicine. *Journal of Social Political Studies of Iran's Culture and History*, 3(5), 285-299.
- Khosravi, A., Changizi-Ashtiyani, S., & Amini, S. (2022). The interaction between Hellenic and Persian pharmacology: What's the output? *The*

Open Public Health Journal, 15. <https://doi.org/10.2174/18749445-v15-e2208190>

- Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation, rewriting, and the manipulation of literary fame*. Routledge
- Madkour, A. (1986). *Nahzate tarjomeh dar jahane Eslam* [The translation movement in the Islamic world] (E. Saadat, Trans.). In N. Pourjavadi (Ed.), *Darbareye Tarjomeh* [On translation] (pp. 79–98). Iran University Press.
- Miri, A. (1998). Rouykarde olama be Farsinegari dar asre Safavi [Scholars' approach to Persian writing in the Safavid era]. *Hozeh*, 89.
- Minovi, A. (1953). Rouykarde olama be Farsinegari dar asre Safavi [Scholars' approach to Persian writing in the Safavid era]. *Hozeh*, 89.
- Mohaghegh, M. (1986). Nahzate tarjomeh va nashre 'olume biganegan dar zamane Hazrat Emam Reza (A) va payamadhaye an [The translation movement and dissemination of foreign sciences during the era of Imam Reza and its consequences]. *Faslnamehye Tarjomeh [Translation Quarterly]*, 4(1), 17–38.
- Nasr, S. H. (2010). *Sonnate aqlaniye Eslami dar Iran* [The Islamic rationalist tradition in Iran] (S. Dehghan, Trans.). Ghasideh Sara.
- Ovdi, S., & Ramazanipur, Gh. R. (2007). Emhaye ketabkhanehaye Iran va Eskandariye dar hamlehye Arab [Destruction of Iranian and Alexandrian libraries during the Arab invasion]. *Moskouyeh*, 8(2), 157–180.
- Reshad, M. (1986). *Falsafeh az aghaze tarikh* (Vol. 3) [Philosophy from the beginning of history]. Sadr Library.
- Safa, Z. (2005). History of intellectual sciences in Islamic civilization. Majd.
- Sajjadi, J. (1994). *Farhange maarefe Eslami* (Vol. 3) [Encyclopedia of Islamic teachings]. Komesheh.
- Varzegar, M. (1994). *Seyr va tahavvole tarjomeh, az dowran-e bastan ta asre hazer; Ghesmate awal: Az dorane bastan ta dowrane Moghol* [The evolution of translation from antiquity to the present; Part I: From antiquity to the Mongol era]. *Journal of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities*, 129, 339–356.
- Venuti, L. (ed.) (2012). *The translation studies reader* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Vieira, A. (1999). Liberating Calibans: Readings of Antropofagia and Haroldo de Campos. Poetics of transcreation. In S. Bassnett & H. Trivedi (eds.), *Post-colonial translation: Theory and practice* (pp. 95–113). Routledge.

- Zarrinkoub, R. (2011). Ancient Iran in Fragments of Iranian Studies: A Remembrance of Eternity and Knowledge. *Bokhara Quarterly*, 81, 632-640.
- Zinhom, (2024). Translation in the Arab-Islamic history. An avenue for the culture of tolerance and knowledge transfer worldwide. *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation*, 17(2), 104–124. <http://doi.org/10.33542/JTI2024-2-7>

About the author

Abdullah Nowruzy is a PhD in Translation Studies at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (FUM), where he teaches translation courses such as “Translation Editing” and “Media Translation” to MA and BA students. His research focuses on culture and sociology of translation.