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SYSTEMATISATION AND MARGINS OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE SCIENCES OF THE ANCIENTS INTO ARABIC¹

SISTEMATIZACIÓN Y MÁRGENES DE LA TRADUCCIÓN AL ÁRABE DE LAS CIENCIAS DE LOS ANTIGUOS

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Abstract

This article presents a critical study of the systematisation and the margins of the transmission of the sciences of the ancients into Arabic during the Middle Ages. To address this analysis, we will first focus on the dream of Caliph al-Ma'mūn that gave rise to the first translation project in the Arab-Islamic world. Secondly, we will examine the unpublished translation theories that al-Jāhiz placed at the service of al-Ma'mūn's project. Thirdly, we will explore the close relationship that these theories had with the Mu'tazilī doctrine adopted by the political institutions to accelerate the process of transmission of the Greek scientific legacy to Arabic. Finally, we will analyse the ideological causes of the decline of translation in Eastern Islam and how the translation heritage became the raw material for the translation circle created in the Islamic West to transmit the scientific knowledge of the ancients to the Latin world.

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Keywords: Translation. Ancient sciences. Ideology. Mashriq. Al-Andalus.

Resumen

En este artículo nos planteamos estudiar críticamente la sistematización y los márgenes de la transmisión al árabe de las ciencias de los antiguos durante la Edad Media. Para abordar este análisis, en primer lugar, nos centraremos en el sueño del califa al-Ma'mūn que dio lugar al primer proyecto de traducción en el ámbito árabe-islámico. En segundo lugar, exploraremos las teorías traductológicas inéditas de al-Ŷāhiz puestas al servicio de dicho proyecto. En tercer lugar, examinaremos la estrecha relación que estas teorías guardaban con la doctrina mu'tazilī adoptada por la institución política para acelerar el proceso de transmisión al árabe del legado científico griego. Finalmente, analizaremos las causas ideológicas del ocaso de la traducción en el islam oriental y cómo el acervo traductor pasó a ser la materia prima del círculo traductológico creado en el occidente islámico para transmitir al mundo latino el conocimiento científico de los antiguos.

Palabras clave: Traducción. Ciencias de los antiguos. Ideología. Mashriq. Al-Ándalus.

1. Introduction

When Islam appeared on the Arabian Peninsula, Muslims took on the mission of carrying their new religion into other lands where the customs and languages were different. More specifically, they came into contact with new civilisations with wide-ranging philosophical and scientific traditions that had inherited the wisdom of the ancient world. At the same time, the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1259) grew into a major empire and it became necessary to bolster its might with the many branches of sciences that were then in existence, both in the *dār al-islām*² or 'abode of Islam'³ and in the *dār al-ḥarb* or 'abode of war',⁴ in order to maintain the caliphate's own stability

2. Arabic phonemes are transliterated into English phonemes throughout the paper. As far as possible, the English transliterations reflect the exact form of various signs, words and proper nouns that come from the Arabic sources consulted in the preparation of the paper.

3. For more information on this term and the term in footnote 4, see Sarah Albrecht (2018), 'Dār al- Islām and dār al-ḥarb'.

4. The translation of Arabic excerpts and titles cited in the paper is provided by the author, except in the case of published translations that are noted in the bibliography.

and exert military and ideological control over its conquered territories. In these circumstances, the Abbasids also needed sciences that they did not possess at the time in order to resolve certain issues of Islam that, according to ‘Omar Farrūj (1947: 94), called for calculation and evaluation. Accordingly, the caliphs insisted, above all, on the transmission of mathematics and astronomy books into Arabic. In addition, medicine was another important need, since Arabic medicine at the time was grounded solely in traditional experimentation.

Much later, the very same impetus would develop into an urgent requirement for the resolution of religious controversies that sprang up among the Muslims themselves, on one hand, and between the Muslims and the inhabitants of the newly conquered territories, on the other hand. According to Ramadan al-Sabbāg (1998: 75-76), rationalist proofs and arguments were needed to defend the new religion. Muslim leaders appreciated the wealth of scientific and philosophical heritage among foreign peoples and in the conquered lands. Indeed, they were convinced that the transmission of the sciences of the Ancients⁵ would eventually play a key role in the development of religious thought and in future interpretations of Islam’s holy text, despite the disagreements that were sparked among different religious groups in different Islamic capitals. As a result, the main drivers of the transmission of the sciences of the Ancients into Arabic were not only the expansion of the caliphate’s empire and the need for Muslims to grasp the sciences involved, but also the advancement of Islam as a political-religious discourse.

From the second half of the eighth century onwards, the culture of the *Salaf*,⁶ whose development was grounded in Islamic tradition, strove to be the only source of knowledge in the Arab-Islamic world. Against this backdrop,

5. According to J. Samsó (2011: 14), the Arabs typically divided the sciences into Arabic-Islamic sciences (relating to their own religious or literary and linguistic tradition) and the ‘sciences of the Ancients’ (*‘ulūm al-awā’il*), which came out of foreign cultures such as Indo-Iranian and particularly Greek culture. The sciences of the Ancients included the exact and physical–natural sciences, medicine, some kinds of mechanical engineering (*‘ilm al-ḥiyal*) and, of course, philosophy.

6. The name *Salaf* was given, respectively, to the first three generations and to subsequent generations of the Muslim community. The sunnah, which establishes some of the most characteristic aspects of the Islamic view of history, lays out an a priori idea of history that begins with a golden age to be followed ineluctably by a period

the writers and scholars of *Salaf* culture – not only the Arabic *fuqahā'* but also the Persian linguists, translators and historians and the Syriac translators – would open a new battlefield in the intellectual struggle to assert their own hallmarks of identity within the Umayyad and Abbasid states. Indeed, while translating the sciences of the Ancients into Arabic proved useful for some in the Islamisation of the cultural record,⁷ it also served others in the fight against Islamisation by means of strategies of inclusion – through translation – of their own intellectual heritage within the dominant Arabic culture.

The situation carried on in this way until the close of the tenth century and even stretched into the beginning of the eleventh century when the cultural record was taken to be complete and, as a result, the Arabic translation movement purportedly came to an end. Given this reality, the present paper sets out to study the normalisation of translation and to define its boundaries in the transmission of the sciences of the Ancients. For the purposes of the analysis, we will focus first on the symbolic importance of a dream that came to the caliph al-Ma'mūn and gave rise to the earliest translation project in the Arab-Islamic world. Second, we will look carefully at the unprecedented translation theories of al-Jāhīz that were put to the service of the caliph's project. Third, we will examine the close relationship that existed between al-Jāhīz's theories and the Mu'tazila doctrine adopted by the political establishment to speed up the process of translating Greek scientific heritage into Arabic. Lastly, we will analyse the ideological causes for the decline of translation in the eastern Islamic world and how the stock of Arabic translations then became raw material to feed into the translation circuit arising in al-Andalus to transmit the scientific knowledge of the Ancients into the Latin world.

of weakening, waywardness and division. For more information, see E. Chaumont (1965: 930-331).

7. According to al-Jābirī (2009: 63), this period is called *'aṣr al-tadwīn* in Arabic and covers the eighth and ninth centuries. Indeed, it represents the frame of reference for Arab-Islamic culture in the past and present alike. The editing and classification of books – al-Jābirī adds, citing Šams ad-Dīn adh-Ḍhahabī (d. 1348) – began in Mecca, Medina, Greater Syria, Basra, Yemen and Kufah.

2. The dream of al-Ma'mūn

During their reigns, the Abbasid caliphs – especially al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775), al-Mahdī (r. 775-785), al-Rašīd (r. 786-809) and al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833) – took an interest in translation⁸ for both pragmatic and personal reasons. For example, al-Manṣūr pushed for the translation of medicine and astrology because, according to Aḥmad Amīn (2011 [1928]: 245-246), he suffered from stomach pains, which triggered an interest in medicine, and he had a belief in astrology, which encouraged him to bring astrologers into his orbit. As for al-Rašīd, the Barmakids taught him to appreciate science, a vocation that he later handed down to al-Ma'mūn. From that point onwards, medicine and astrology were essential disciplines in the Abbasid state and their transmission into Arabic was an issue pursued at the highest echelons of the political hierarchy. Nevertheless, it was the dream of al-Ma'mūn that, despite its mythological meaning, became the top reason for the prompt undertaking of the translation project, which was rolled out under the personal supervision of the caliph himself.

Al-Ma'mūn's dream has been the subject of various critiques and interpretations by a range of specialists. Before turning to their contributions, however, we will first look at the dream itself. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995/998) recounted the dream in his work *al-Fihrist*, or 'The Catalogue', in a section on why books of philosophy and other ancient sciences were plentiful in those lands:

Once upon a time, al-Ma'mūn had a dream of a white man with reddish skin, a high forehead and bushy eyebrows, a bald head, blue eyes and handsome features, who was seated upon his bed. Al-Ma'mūn asked him: 'Who are you?' The man replied: 'I am Aristotle.' Al-Ma'mūn said: 'Oh wise man, I would like to ask you something!' The man said: 'Ask me!' Al-Ma'mūn said: 'What is good?' The man said: 'Whatever is good according to reason.' Al-Ma'mūn said: 'What else?' The man said: 'Whatever is good according to religious law [sharia⁹].' Then Al-Ma'mūn asked him: 'And what else?' The man said: 'Whatever is good according to society.' Al-Ma'mūn asked: 'What else?' And the man said: 'Nothing else. [...]' This dream was the main reason

8. The process had already begun in the Umayyad period. See the first three sections of the book by George Saliba (2007: 1-129).

9. The holy laws of Islam that cover all parts of a Muslim's life (*Cambridge Dictionary*).

for the delivery of the *books of the sciences of the Ancients to the translators* (Ibn al-Nadīm n.d.: 339). (The use of italics is the author's own.)

But is the story a legend or simply a dream? We will not seek to answer that question in order to establish the extent to which the dream of the caliph al-Ma'mūn actually occurred. Rather, our aim is to analyse the historical, ideological and political context that is transmitted to us here by Ibn al-Nadīm, a key figure in the historiography of translation into Arabic. The document in question is a historical text that lays out the key rationale behind the extensive translation movement that took place during the reign of al-Ma'mūn, when the translation of Aristotle¹⁰ triggered a growing interest in translation more broadly. The dream appeared in Ibn al-Nadīm's work *al-Fihrist* roughly a century and a half after the death of al-Ma'mūn. Its appearance was notable in a society that believed in 'true dreams' and 'metaphysical visions'. Such beliefs, which dated back to archaic times, had been inherited by Islam from the other Abrahamic religions. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 1373), key exegetes of the Qur'an, noted that 'the dreams of the prophets can turn into revelation' according to the interpretation of the prophet Joseph mentioned in the Qur'an (12/4). As the Islamic chronicles tell us, the prophet of Islam was, at one and the same time, both a religious man and a statesman. Except for revelation, the later caliphs of Islam strove to take on the same religious and political duties during their reigns. Their dreams would, therefore, also be regarded as true and taken as a good omen for Islamic society. As a consequence, the fact that the caliph of the Muslims had seen Aristotle, described thus in his dream, took on a peculiar value. This is what al-Jābirī was talking about in his book entitled *Naqd al-'aql al-'arabī I: takwīn al-'aql al-'arabī*, or 'Critique of Arab reason: the construction of Arab reason', in which he addresses the same dream:

Clearly, he who has written down this dream has expressly used a 'rhetorical' style to describe Aristotle. This reminds us of the famous hadith about the archangel Gabriel appearing in human form before the Prophet and his companions. Gabriel asked the Prophet questions and the Prophet answered him; when he had finished with his questions, he left and the

10. For more details on the translation and translators of Aristotle, see Ibn al-Nadīm (n.d.: 345-352).

Prophet turned to the believers present and told them: ‘That was Gabriel, who came to teach you your religion.’ Now the aim of remembering this image in the ‘dream’ of al-Ma’mūn was clear: give the maximum credibility to the dream so that it would rise to the level of ‘trustworthy visions’ and hence grant the religious legitimacy needed for what al-Ma’mūn and his State undertook to import the books of the Ancients and translate them (al-Jābirī 2009: 223).

In his analysis, al-Jābirī paraphrases the words of the prophet Muhammad in order to associate them with the point of al-Ma’mūn’s dream. The main purpose, in his view, was to give the utmost religious legitimacy to the Abbasid caliph’s translation project. From there, we can deduce that al-Ma’mūn marked a decisive turning point in the state’s approach to the transmission of the sciences of the Ancients into Arabic. If the aim of the translation project under al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī and al-Raṣīd was pragmatic and focused on medicine and astrology, its aim under al-Ma’mūn was essentially philosophical and ideological in order to control religious interpretation in a state living through momentous times.

The debates that arose in the midst of this situation were held in the *Bayt al-Ḥikma*, or ‘House of Wisdom’, which was a scientific institution that came into being during the reign of the caliph Hārūn al-Raṣīd and went on to reach its greatest splendour in the reign of his son al-Ma’mūn. The institution focused on the issues of translation into Arabic from Syriac, Hindi, Greek and Persian. The translation project focused primarily on philosophy, astrology, medicine and the natural sciences. Accordingly, the ‘House of Wisdom’ became the leading scientific centre in the Islamic world after the disappearance of the school of Alexandria and the academy at Gundeshapur. For instance, it served as a home to prominent Syriac translators, such as Yūḥannā Ibn al-Baṭrīq, Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq and his nephew Ḥubayš Ibn al-Ḥasan, Qusṭā Ibn Lūqā and Mattā Ibn Yūnus, to name but a few. According to G. Yebra (1985: 53), it was thanks to this circle of translators that the following works were translated from Syriac or Greek into Arabic: Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*, *Categories*, *Physics* and *Magna Moralia*; Galen’s anatomy in seven volumes; Plato’s *Republic*; Hippocrates’ writings on medicine; and Pedanius Discorides’ botanical works. According to Salama-Carr (1990),

many of the leading figures in translation went on to found an important school of translation led by Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq in the second Abbasid period.

Along the same ideological lines and returning to the thread of al-Ma'mūn's dream, Georges Tarābīšī contradicted the thesis of al-Jābirī and instead argued as follows:

First, it was a dream and dreams in the medieval religious imaginary were one of the means used to persuade people, because they entailed what was called at the time 'trustworthy visions'. Second, the dream prioritized reason over religion, and underscored the supremacy of both elements over the consensus of society; which was a consolidation of elitist Mu'tazila rationalism¹¹ led by al-Ma'mūn himself (Tarābīšī 2006: 44).

A comparison of this citation with the prior one shows that both intellectuals concur on a number of points regarding the interpretation of al-Ma'mūn's dream. First, they both assert that dreams in the Middle Ages were a tool used to 'convince people'. Second, they both point to a historical context that fostered a belief in the veracity of dreams. Third and last, they both agree that the dream gave enough religious legitimacy for al-Ma'mūn to undertake the translation of Greek philosophy, according to the thesis of al-Jābirī, and to consolidate Mu'tazila rationalism as the state ideology, according to the thesis of Tarābīšī. The two scholars, however, conclude their respective interpretations of the dream with two different focuses. Al-Jābirī (2009: 222) thinks that the dream per se, if it were true, would be the consequence of the interest shown by al-Ma'mūn in the translation project and not a motive for carrying it out, whereas Tarābīšī (2006: 43) takes the view that the dream was invented and can only be interpreted post hoc, not ex ante. That is, 'even if the dream as fact was unreal, it would still be true from the viewpoint of its meaning' (*ibid.*). Consequently, al-Jābirī sees the dream as

11. The word comes from *Mu'tazila*, the name of a religious movement founded in Basra in the first half of the eighth century by Wāṣil Ibn 'Aṭā' (d. 748), which promptly became one of the most important schools of theology in Islam. The word *i'tizāl* signifies being in a neutral position between two opposing factions. The institution was the first free-thinking school in Islam; it held an important place in Arab-Islamic thought in the eighth and ninth centuries, including in the production of translations. Its theoretical foundations rested on reason and contemplation, while always taking into account the principle of divine unity. For more information, see D. Gimaret (1992: 785-795).

an outgrowth of the caliph's preoccupations with the translation project, not as grounds to undertake the project. Yet Ṭarābiṣī, by contrast, boils down his conclusion to the artificiality of the dream, which was intended for later interpretation by the public and, yet even so, the dream was real from the viewpoint of meaning.

For his part, Dimitri Gutas (1998: 100) thinks that '[t]he dream signals to the contrary the effect which the translation movement, begun long before al-Ma'mūn's time, had on shaping intellectual attitudes by then. The dream is the social result, not the cause of the translation movement'. As can be seen, the position taken by Gutas is closer to al-Jābirī's stance, since both men argue that the dream was the immediate consequence of the translation movement, which had already begun in Arab society prior to al-Ma'mūn's reign, and not the driving force behind the movement. The same point is stressed by A. Amīn, who explicitly notes that the translation movement followed a natural course and reached its peak during the reign of al-Ma'mūn. As Amīn argues:

These and other similar stories need not be a reason for the translation that appeared on obviously natural grounds [...]. It would have been impossible for al-Ma'mūn never to have heard of Aristotle until the latter spoke to him in a dream, saying: 'I am Aristotle.' And if the account of Ibn al-Nadīm were true, we might consider the dream to be a natural reflection of what al-Ma'mūn actually thought (Amīn 2011 [1928]: 246-247).

As a consequence, the dream once more was not linked to the translation movement, but was instead an accidental occurrence or, better yet, a mythical thing. It was probably recounted and edited in such a way that it gave a significant socio-religious value to translation as a subject. For this reason, Gutas (1998: 96-97) cautions that 'dreams must be taken seriously [...]. Their emotive content makes them preferred means for the communication and diffusion of attitudes, ideas, positions – indeed for propaganda – in most societies, and certainly in Greek and Arab'.

Consequently, as al-Ma'mūn's dream was recounted and edited, making use of highly pertinent rhetorical resources, it soon became a tool of communication able to reach a great many of the public. Written in the form of a precise, concise dialogue, it began with a description of Aristotle, the caliph's interlocutor, who has a better physical appearance and enjoys the respect

of al-Ma'mūn himself, the second figure in the dream. Then, their conversation kicks off with a question that is key not only to the dream itself, but also for an entire age going through a process of cultural construction: '*Mā al-ḥusn?*' Or in English: 'What is good?' This question is then followed by a series of questions and answers with a persuasive purpose. As for choosing Aristotle and not some other Greek philosopher, it does not appear to be precisely because of the indisputable value of Aristotle's contributions to world philosophy. Rather, his appearance in the dream was simply a way to define the caliph al-Ma'mūn's interlocutor so that he could implicitly stand for all of Greek philosophy from Plato to Aristotle. By extension, therefore, the transmission of Greek learning would become the driving force behind the translation project launched by al-Ma'mūn – a project that would come to mark the present and future of the Arabic cultural record from the viewpoint of form and content.

In addition, the account of the dream also mentioned some conditional parameters that determined the various replies to the main question related to 'good discourse'. Taken from the Mu'tazila doctrinal order, they involved reason, religion and consensus, which showed that the Mu'tazila movement introduced the use of the intellect into the heart of Arab-Islamic culture so as to assist in interpretative efforts undertaken in an area marked by theological controversies in relation to the createdness or 'uncreatedness' of the Qur'an.

Lastly, the final touch in the account of the dream draws on the use of a peculiar absolute negation; literally, it says 'later but not later' to draw the conversation to a close and set boundaries on what 'good discourse' should be under the reign of al-Ma'mūn.

3. Some theoretical caveats of al-Jāḥiẓ

There is no doubt that major efforts were made to translate the sciences of the Ancients, despite the countless difficulties that confronted the politicians and scholars of the Abbasid state. First, prior to translation, it was necessary to convince the public of the utility of science, wherever it came from. According to two sayings attributed to the prophet of Islam: 1) 'Wisdom is the believer's focus; he must seek it even among those who do not believe in Islam'; and 2) '[l]ook for science even in China.' Second, the translator

had to master a complex, nearly impossible craft, according to al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868/869), who is regarded as the normaliser of Arabic prose and the first ideologue or theorist of translation in the Arab-Islamic world. As al-Jāḥiẓ wrote, ‘The translator will never succeed in transmitting the writings of the philosopher [...]. Ibn al-Baṭrīq, Ibn Nā‘ima, Ibn Qurra, Ibn Fihriẓ, Tīfīl, Ibn Wahīlī and Ibn al-Muqaffa’ – may the mercy of God Almighty be upon them – when were they like Aristotle? When was Jālid like Plato?’ (al-Jāḥiẓ 1965: 75-76). Apparently, al-Jāḥiẓ wrote those words to reiterate the impossibility of translating philosophy or, at least, to assert that the source text and the target text would never attain the same level. And he was certainly right, given that the leading translators of his era never managed to translate Aristotle or Plato precisely or faithfully. But was it the intention of al-Jāḥiẓ to treat the translators with disdain? Certainly not, because on another occasion he was full-throated in his acknowledgement of the efficiency and expertise of Mūsā Ibn Sayyār al-Uswārī, a prominent translator and interpreter of Persian into Arabic and vice versa. In this regard, he noted in his *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, or ‘The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration’, that:

[Al-Uswārī] was one of the finest translators and interpreters of the age. He was brilliant both in Arabic and in Persian rhetoric. In his famous council, the Arabs sat on his right and the Persians on his left. He would read out an ayah of the Qur’an and explain it in Arabic to the Arabs, then turn to face the Persians and explain it to them in Persian. It was hard to know which language he was more eloquent in (al-Jāḥiẓ 1998: 368).

Was Al-Uswārī really the only ideal translator in the eyes of al-Jāḥiẓ? If we pay close attention to the extract above and paraphrase the commentary offered by Kīlīṭū (2002: 28-31) in relation to the same words of al-Jāḥiẓ, we can see that al-Uswārī was explaining the ayahs, or verses, of the Qur’an to the Arabs and Persians alike. And yet why would this interpreter be the sole exception, bearing in mind that al-Jāḥiẓ did not have enough mastery of Persian to be able to assess al-Uswārī’s rhetorical interpretation in the language? In ‘The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration’, religious translation is made to sound impossible, just as the translation of Greek philosophy is made to sound in ‘The Book of Animals’. However, the exception of al-Uswārī cannot be arbitrary. Rather, it must be understood as a key point in asserting that translation from within two integrated cultural systems – in this case,

the Arabic and Persian cultural systems – was viable because, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, the translator was able to understand and make himself understood by others. Yet, translation did become almost impossible when the translator stood between two cultural systems that were distinct not only from the strictly linguistic standpoint, but also from the ideological and cultural standpoint. That is the reason why the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic drew a good deal of criticism, since the work of translating it was carried out via Syriac or Persian. On the other hand, al-Jāḥiẓ warned that:

The translator must have the same level of eloquence in his translation and in his knowledge of the subject of his translation. Thus, he must be proficient in the source language and the target language to the point that he achieves an equivalence between them. Also, when he speaks two languages, he is engaged in an exercise that confuses meanings, because each language attracts the other [...]. The more difficult and narrow the gateway to knowledge [...], the more complex becomes the translator's task and the more likely it becomes that he will falter (al-Jāḥiẓ 1965: 76).

Perhaps, the ideas of al-Jāḥiẓ were more correct and fitting for the criticism or the theory of translation in his own time. To us, however, he appears to go too far. That is, his ideas exaggerate or overdo the degree of rhetorical expertise required of a translator in a discipline that was completely absent from the Arab-Islamic cultural tradition at the time: philosophy. Moreover, Arabic, which was the target language, was still undergoing its own development and canonization. As a result, how could the translator play the role of mediator between two languages and avoid succumbing to any confusion in meaning? And why did al-Jāḥiẓ take so much interest in translation after all? On one hand, he did so because it was a linguistic discipline that he himself sought to include in the rhetorical project set out in his volume 'The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration'. On the other hand, he did so because he had a particularly strong interest in Greek philosophy and he was a proponent of Mu'tazila ideology. Yet the only way for him to gain access to Greek philosophy was through its translation into Arabic since, as several consulted sources attest, he was able to read only in Arabic.¹² In another paragraph not far from the one cited above, the author of 'The Book of Animals' pushed on

12. See, for example, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Muṣṭafā (1978: 44).

with the debate, this time posing a handful of rhetorical questions: ‘What does the translator know of arguments and sub-arguments? What does he know of the stars? What does he know of hidden boundaries? What does he know of the slippages of language and the mistakes of scribes?’ (*ibid.*: 78). Accordingly, he once again underscored the translator’s knowledge of the subject area such that the latter would be able to disentangle the boundaries of direct and indirect arguments and illuminate obscure areas in the language of the translation. Once these steps had been successfully overcome, the remaining test was more complex, difficult to smooth out, and perhaps the key step to take prior to the act of translation.

Specifically, al-Jāhīz advised translators that they must establish the critical edition of books before translating them into Arabic. The preparation of a critical edition, however, was a complex undertaking that called for an interdisciplinary effort between the author and the scribe, or copyist, of a given document or book prior to its delivery to the translator. However, to what extent was a scribe able to reproduce an author’s words fully and accurately? What political and religious circumstances played a part in the activity? What type of censorship was imposed on the scribe’s undertaking? We pose these questions based on the cited comments of al-Jāhīz because the aim here is to shine a spotlight on the status quo of cultural life at the time. The same political and religious factors that could have had an effect on the author–scribe relationship could also have had an impact on the translator’s task, which is ultimately grounded in the production of the author and the reproduction of the scribe. Against this backdrop, J. Vernet (1999: 130) held that the value of translation depended on the quality of the original in the translator’s hands and that his innate tendency was to collect the largest number of accessible texts or translations of the work on which to base his efforts. Moreover, his efforts must, if possible, surpass previous versions. In effect, therefore, the translator’s task is not merely an undertaking that is done once and for all, but rather an entire process that involves a number of stages. Beyond the critical edition and the establishment of the text, there is also the chronology and the timely comparison of any previous translations of the text set to be translated, so that each translation becomes a reference document for the advancement of later philological or translation studies. Hence the proposal for retranslations in the future.

4. Arab reluctance to translate Greek literature

During the period of the cultural record and the translation project, scholars excluded works of Greek literature from their undertaking. In reality, after all, their main aim was to translate the sciences and philosophy. But why was the translation of Greek literature systematically neglected? If Euclid, Aristotle and Plato were translated into Arabic, then why not also translate Homer, Hesiod, Pindar and Sophocles? To answer these questions, we will start by setting out the subjective reasons and then turn to the objective grounds for the neglect of Greek literature in the Arabic translation project of the Early Middle Ages.

Since two centuries before the advent of Islam, literature for the Arabs was synonymous with poetry and poetry was their medium of choice. As they put it, poetry was ‘the Diwan of the Arabs’. That is, poetry reflected ‘the Days of the Arabs’ and illustrated their conduct as a whole. In short, Arabic poetry was to become an information source of utmost importance until the final stage of the cultural record. All of these factors lead us to the conclusion that the scholar–translators of the Abbasid state shrugged off any need to translate Greek poetry because they already had their own poetry, which had been written in accordance with their own exclusively formal standards; if a poem failed to live up to any of those standards, it would lose its authenticity. It would also lose its authenticity whenever anybody attempted to translate it into another language. In this framework, the opinions of al-Jāḥiẓ appear to have been much more radical than his opinions on religious or philosophical translation. In the case of the latter disciplines, his views were expressed as caveats about the complexity of the translation task. For him, translation had to be carried out by illustrious translators who were proficient in the various fields of knowledge required for the area of translation in which they worked. It was also necessary to keep in mind the issue of *al-tawḥīd*, or ‘the divine unity’, the first doctrinal principle of Mu‘tazilism, as an essential condition of the translator’s expertise. But what happened in the case of poetry translation? Offering an appraisal of translation into Arabic in his time, al-Jāḥiẓ noted:

Indeed, the books of India, of Greek wisdom, and of Persian literature were transmitted into Arabic. Some of these translations fulfilled the translator’s

duty, while others took on an even more beautiful aspect. However, if the intention had been to translate Arabic poetic wisdom, then its metrical genius would have been lost. And if Arabic poetry were translated, there would no longer be anything found in it that the ‘*ajam*’¹³ had mentioned in their books (al-Jāhiz 1965: 75).

The above excerpt appears to contradict the caveats that al-Jāhiz had issued to translators engaged in the translation of Greek, Indian and Persian thought into Arabic. On one hand, the excerpt acknowledges that translation was an actual fact. On the other hand, it takes the view that some translations achieved the required level of beauty and fulfilled their role of transmission. However, what stands out are the two final conditional statements that reflect a context not directly related to the task of translating into Arabic. We have seen how al-Jāhiz immediately shifts the debate toward translation in the opposite direction because he wishes to raise another caveat involving the impossibility of translating Arabic poetry. All the while, we appear to have been running into a contradiction in al-Jāhiz’s opinions on translation. In one paragraph, he refers to ‘the nearly impossible translation of Greek philosophy’. In another, not too distant paragraph, he refers to ‘the fulfilment and beauty of the translation’. Lastly, he writes about ‘the uselessness of translating Arabic poetry’. Nor does the matter end there. Rather, he adds that ‘poetry is an exclusive virtue of the Arabs and those who know Arabic. It cannot be transmitted, nor must it be translated. If it is translated, its poetic structure will come undone, it will lose the originality of its metre, beauty and poetic wonder’ (*ibid.*: 74-75).

However, the poetic virtue that al-Jāhiz remarked on was not a characteristic exclusive to the Arabs. Rather, it belonged to practically every culture. That is, it was a serious challenge to translate not only Arabic poetry, primarily because of its formal and metrical aspects, but also Greek poetry, which was long considered to pose an insurmountable problem for translators working into Arabic. In this context, the Persian philosopher Abū

13. People affected by ‘*ujma*’, which is an obscure and confusing way of speaking that affects pronunciation and language. The ‘*ajam*’ are non-Arabs, characterised above all by an incomprehensible way of speaking. For the Greeks and Arabs alike, the quintessential ‘*ajam*’ were their Persian neighbours. For more information, see F. Gabrieli (1960: 212).

Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. 1000) noted that ‘Stephen translated a portion of his poetry [by Homer] from Greek into Arabic. And it is well known that poetry loses much of its beauty when it is translated. Moreover, the meanings become defective when their original form changes’ (1974: 193). Also prominent here is an aspect of translation that al-Jāḥiẓ had earlier underscored. Both scholars insisted on the importance of metre and form in poetic texts and they stressed translation’s influence on the metrical features that were representative of poetic identity in each language culture. However, as founders of Arabic rhetoric, both figures appear to be stressing the genius of Arabic poetry – its metre and its form – in order to criticise its lack of rhetorical content.

Even so, how can an author like al-Jāḥiẓ contradict himself as he does in the examples above? He can because, in reality, there is no contradiction. Rather, the examples reflect the constant presence of his digressive style. It was impossible for him to focus on only one matter at a time. This is apparent in both ‘The Book of Animals’ and ‘The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration’. At the level of literary criticism, we can say that the reading given by ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Kīlīṭū to this characteristic phenomenon of al-Jāḥiẓ was the most accurate, because it was meticulously based on an analysis of the same text as al-Jāḥiẓ. In his work entitled *Lan tatakallama lugatī*, or ‘Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language’, Kīlīṭū addresses the issue in a chapter entitled ‘*al-Turjumān*’, or ‘The Translator’. In it, he raises a host of questions in an attempt to resolve the dilemma that is supposedly encapsulated in al-Jāḥiẓ’s views:

How did al-Jāḥiẓ arrive at this belief? Why did he think that poetry was a craft exclusive to the Arabs? Clearly, he did not completely exclude the ‘*ajam*, since they could also create poetry as long as they had mastered the Arabic language [...]. From this perspective, therefore, poetry was not linked exclusively to the Arabs as a race or ethnicity, but rather to the Arabic language (Kīlīṭū 2002: 36).

In effect, poetic virtue consisted in composing verses in Arabic, regardless of the poet’s identity. Kīlīṭū pursues his readings in search of the thread that leads to the origin of the supposed contradictions noted earlier in al-Jāḥiẓ’s opinions. In reality, he claims, the views were not contradictory. Rather, they reflected a host of voices that crop up in al-Jāḥiẓ’s text. In this vein, Kīlīṭū

(2002: 38) notes that the remark on the complexity of translating philosophy was a judgement that should have been attributed not to al-Jāḥiẓ, but rather to another anonymous figure. This is also the case with the paragraph in which we read that ‘the virtue of poetry was exclusive to the Arabs’. These words do not necessarily convey the opinion of al-Jāḥiẓ because he put the verb ‘said’ before them, making them someone else’s words.

In addition, it is very likely that al-Jāḥiẓ used the same method to attribute words and sayings to various interlocutors concocted by him to conduct the debates that characterised his writings in general. Thus, discussion became a tool by which to give voice to contrary opinions and achieve some degree of impartiality in his discourse. Since al-Jāḥiẓ was a proponent of Mu’tazila doctrine, we think that the inclusion of opposing views was the principal rationale by which to develop translation theories and, at the same time, express his own opinions on other ideological matters. In keeping with Kīlīṭū, therefore, we find that it is a character in ‘The Book of Animals’ who voices the opinion that ‘the translation of Greek philosophy was nearly impossible’ and who would therefore deny credit to the translators. Similarly, another character voices the opinion that poetry could not be translated but was ‘a virtue exclusive to the Arabs’. In reality, however, the two characters are actually criticising the translation of philosophy and poetry. On one hand, a great deal of attention is given to the complexity of translating Greek philosophy. On the other hand, Arabic poetry is criticised in that, if it were deprived of metrical form, it would lose its originality and its translation would therefore be impossible. Such poetry would be useful for the Arabs and useless for the *‘ajam*. But then, is it not an implicit criticism of Arabic poetry itself to note that it lacks content and focuses solely on form? Could it be a strategy pursued by al-Jāḥiẓ himself to spur on the translators to translate the content of Greek poetry? This is probably the case, because translating only the science and philosophy of other countries while excluding literature would leave the translation project, which was then being carried out under the supervision of the Abbasid caliphs, partial and incomplete, resulting in shortcomings that would prove hard to fix. Yet, why was it the translation of Greek poetry that led to this particular situation? According to Kīlīṭū, Greek poetry had been excluded from the Abbasid translation project for the following reasons:

In other circumstances, the conflict can take a more radical turn: I refuse to be read, to be translated; you shall not read my literature, nor shall you have access to my intellectual treasures, especially the texts that I consider sacred [...]. To oppose the spread of one's own culture is sometimes to oppose the spread of foreign cultures. You shall not read me, I shall not read you; you shall not translate me, I shall not translate you' (Kilito¹⁴ 2018: 55).

The excerpt above shows how Kīlītū speaks of culture as a human phenomenon that is sometimes treated as if it were a hard obstacle for the reader. If, in keeping with Raymond Williams (2001: 17), we consider that 'the word *culture* formerly signified a state or habit of the mind, or the accumulation of intellectual and moral activities', attained and expressed on an ordinary basis by an individual at a given time and in a given space, then it is here that we shall come to a halt in our quest for knowledge in the face of the hermetic, personalised culture to which Kīlītū refers. As a result, the refusal to spread one's own culture may be tantamount to a refusal to receive knowledge from other cultures. When this happens, cultures run the risk of turning into a set of isolated, cut-off behaviours that stymie the circulation of ideas – one's own ideas and the ideas of others – through translation. But why is it that such centripetal movements arise between cultures in times of profound change and impede the task of transmission? According to Adonis (1979: 45), Arabic poetry in the pre-Islamic era and at the dawn of Islam was the 'miracle of the Arabs' because it was impossible for them to create anything similar. Along the same lines, when the Qur'an challenged pre-Islamic poetry, it challenged the highest epitome of Arabic. This is the reason why the Arabs found nothing similar to compare with the Qur'an except for Arabic poetry. Therefore, the high rhetoric of the Qur'anic text and its sanctity, together with the symbolic and rhetorical value of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, offered two weighty arguments by which to assert that, within the context, the translation of the word of God and the translation of poetry were both impossible.

As a result, the refusal to allow certain kinds of translation entailed the imposition of limits on the flow of translations from other cultures and, of course, involved dispensing with the translation of Greek poetry into Arabic.

14. This surname has not been subjected here to the rules of transliteration, but has been kept as it appears in the Spanish translation of the cited work.

In reality, the realisation that it was impossible to translate one's own cultural symbols may also be another indirect factor to explain why the translators of the Abbasid state ceased to translate the main cultural emblems of Greek poetry, for example, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In my view, therefore, linguistic and metrical resources were not the only resources to make translation impossible. Rather, the social conditions that characterised each culture also played a role. While philosophy and the sciences sought to be universal on the basis of logic and reason, literature in the same context did not seek to be universal. Literature is a discourse linked directly to society. It is faithful to a society's tastes and inclinations in terms of identity. This matter was especially plain to see in classical Arabic poetry, because the poet not only composed verses, but also played the role of spokesperson for the tribe that he or she represented. This situation had come about before the dawn of Islam, but afterwards the role of poetry spread to the religious arena and spun off in a new direction that – according to Adonis (1994: 141) – involved the subjection of poetry to the spiritual and moral foundations of Islam. In particular, it was made subject to the characteristics of the language of *jāhiliyya*,¹⁵ thereby laying the groundwork for the theory of compromise between Islamic morality and pre-Islamic rhetoric.

5. The decline of translation in Islam

5.1. Pragmatic reasons

A host of written sources in Arabic and in other languages indicate that the translation movement at the heart of Arab-Islamic civilisation came to an end in the early eleventh century. For example, Ṭarābīšī (2006: 57) strongly asserted that no new book was rendered into Arabic between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries. In particular, he specified in a footnote on the same page that only two books were translated from Persian into Arabic. The first one was the book of al-Gazālī (d. 1111) entitled *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, or 'Counsel for Kings', whose translator was one of the author's students, while

15. According to Ignaz Goldziher (1965: 393), this is an abstract term that is applied to the period when the Arabs had not yet come to know Islam and the divine law. It can be translated literally as 'ignorance'.

the second one was *Šāhnāma*, a compendium of epic poetry that was written by al-Firdawsī (d. 1020/1025) and translated in the twelfth century after failing to reach the scribes of the writer's own time. Moreover, the long period of reversal and decline in the translation movement was viewed by al-Jābirī (2009: 44) as a 'lost cultural circle' for Arab-Islamic civilisation. In the same context, al-'Arwī (1995: 13) held that translation witnessed no continuity whatsoever and that 'it stopped just when it had got going'. According to his view, al-Ma'mūn's translation project was an initiative that lacked concrete results. He wrote: 'We are very proud of the project of the caliph al-Ma'mūn when he took the decision to Arabize the Greek philosophy heritage. But we hardly study this question in depth to find out what the final outcome was' (al-'Arwī 1995: 11). Similarly, Gutas concurred with these opinions on the beginning of the end of the translation movement. In this vein, he said that 'all our information indicates that after a vigorous course for over two centuries, the translation movement in Baghdad slowed down and eventually came to an end around the turn of the millennium' (Gutas 1998: 151). It is important here to underscore Gutas' notion that the translation movement slowed down before it stopped, that is, that translation carried on into the eleventh century and gradually fell into decline purportedly because of the decadence of political and cultural life in Baghdad.

Broadly speaking, translation projects between different cultures have always been pursued on pragmatic grounds at the scientific, philosophical, economic, social and economic levels. Such projects tend to proceed through four overarching stages: launch, development, a period of ups and downs and, lastly, total or partial decline. In this context, it is interesting to look at the fourth stage through the lens of the following question: what were the pragmatic reasons behind the decline of the translation movement in the Arab-Islamic cultural world? According to Gutas (1998: 152):

In most fields, the crucial main texts had long before been translated, studied, and commented upon, and as a result, each discipline had advanced beyond the stage represented by the translated works. The Greek works thus lost their scholarly currentness and the demand was now for up-to-date research. Patrons commissioned increasingly not the translation of Greek works but original Arabic composition.

Gutas' statements sought to clarify that the overall stock of translations from Greek to Arabic had reached a point of saturation and that a need had grown for urgent action to bring the functional mechanisms up to date. In the absence of updating, the Greek works appeared to become obsolete. Moreover, Abbasid patronage called for an ever-greater production of original works written in Arabic, as if inexorably moving nearer to the moment of cultural transition that would mark the passage from translation to authorship. Indeed, in line with Gutas (1998:152-153), some scholars did write a number of early works that 'revolutionised science', even before the total decline of the translation movement. In this context, a number of prominent figures should be noted: 'Alī Ibn 'Abbās al-Majūsī (d. late tenth century) and Avicenna (d. 1037) in medicine; al-Battānī (d. 929) and al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) in astronomy; al-Jawārizmī (d. circa 850) in mathematics; Ibn al-Hayṭam (d. 1040) in physics; and al-Fārābī (m. 950) in philosophy. All of the works by the figures above came in response to the demand of patrons, and they helped to turn the existing stock of translations into a genuine transformation of scientific knowledge. That said, however, it was not the case that no Greek works remained to translate, only that the first steps had been taken on the path toward authorship. And this cultural autonomy, which was an outgrowth of the translation movement, was dependent on Baghdad's central power in spite of the decentralised nature of the Abbasid state at the time. In particular, the parallel between intellectual life and political autonomy was aimed at consolidating the culture of the *Salaf* in line with the politico-cultural canon of the first three generations of the forebearers of Islam.

5.2. *Ideological reasons*

During the Abbasid period, the lion's share of the Greek sciences was translated into Arabic through Syriac¹⁶ or Persian or directly from Greek. Indeed,

16. In this context, it is necessary to emphasise the controversial role that Syriac translators played in the translation of the sciences of the Ancients into Arabic. For more information on the subject, see the works of Monferrer Sala (2000) and Tagourramt El Kbaich (2020), which address, respectively, the polemical work of the eastern Christians and their contribution to the spread of knowledge in the Muslim east and, on the other hand, Arabic translation as a phenomenon straddling linguistic mediation and the challenge of cultural assimilation.

Arab thought was knitted out of the intermediation of such translations. At the same time, there is no doubt that the Greek legacy was subjected to Christianisation when it was transmitted into Syriac, just as it was subjected to Sasanian culture when it was rendered into Persian. In the wake of those two labours of knowledge appropriation came a final phase, which consisted of the Islamisation of the Greek legacy within the Arab-Islamic tradition. Ibn Khaldun (n.d.: 531-532) informs us that Muslim scholars had gained in-depth knowledge of the science of the Ancients, avoiding some of Aristotle's theories and holding onto others. Since there was a translation and intellectual crisis in Islam at the time, the scholars proposed going back to the original sources of the forebearers in search of solutions to the state of discord in which the Muslims found themselves. In the Mashriq, they searched through the *Salaf* legacy that had been recovered and accumulated during the process of the cultural record – a legacy that depended, practically speaking, on tradition, thereby ruling out any role that reason might play in understanding the world. In the Maghrib, they also searched through the religious sources, but keeping in mind that reason was the only way to acquire original knowledge unbound by imitation, as Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) had maintained. Consequently, the two approaches amounted to two models of thought that proved to be similar from the methodological viewpoint but different from the standpoint of aims. The methodology in question was specifically to go back to the religious culture of the forebearers in one case and to the 'philosophical *Salaf*' in the other case, while understanding the latter as the sum of all philosophical knowledge acquired through translation from its origins back in the Umayyad state through the Abbasid period after the reign of al-Ma'mūn. In other words, the eastern intellectuals defended the traditional model, while their western counterparts sought for a renewal of Arab-Islamic thought by way of a return to original sources that addressed all fields of knowledge, including the translation output relating to the sciences of the Ancients.

This is the world in which Averroes (Ibn Rušd,¹⁷ d. 1196) emerged to take up the work of exegesis and commentary on Aristotle, especially the

17. Ibn Rušd was not the only person in al-Andalus to undertake a review of eastern translations of Greek philosophy. Back in the time of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, there had

parts related to logic and reason because they proved the most difficult to understand. According to al-Jābirī (2000: 508), the difficulty stemmed from ‘the confusion of the language of the translators, or the ambiguity of some expressions of Aristotle himself’. Accordingly, there was a need to go back to polish and analyse earlier translations of the Greek philosopher into Arabic in order to lay the groundwork for new readings and interpretations of his texts and seek out points of connection between religion and philosophy. In such a context, it is important to recall the account given by the *faqīh* Abū Bakr Bundūd Ibn Yaḥyā al-Qurṭubī of a dialogue between himself and Ibn Ṭufayl that was later cited by Abū Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Ibn ‘Alī al-Murrākuṣī (1949: 243):

One day Abū Bakr Ibn Ṭufayl said to me:

Today the emir of the believers¹⁸ has expressed his discontent – regarding the confusion and ambiguity of the texts of Aristotle translated into Arabic – and he said: ‘If there is anyone who is able to summarise and transmit these books after having assimilated them well, it would help the people to understand them [...]’

Abū al-Walīd replied:¹⁹ ‘This is the reason why I decided to synthesise what I had already summarised from the books of Aristotle.’

The instructional task that is entrusted to Ibn Ruṣd by the Almohad caliph – in the high period of Maliki doctrine – marked a turning to philosophical sources in order to disencumber them of the Mashriq imitations of the philosophers. Along the same lines, the twofold task to which the Arab Andalusian philosopher dedicated himself was, first, to prepare a critical reply to the work of al-Gazālī (d. 1111) that was entitled *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, or ‘The Incoherence of the Philosophers’, which set out to consolidate traditional religious ideology and to characterise the philosophy of the Ancients as wrong and contradictory, above all the part that dealt with divine science. In reply,

been a review in Córdoba of eastern translations of medical subjects written by Pedanius Dioscorides. The effort to review eastern translations was also a motivation for the drafting of the great medical encyclopaedia (*Taṣrīf*) of Abū al-Qāsim al-Zahrāwī in the tenth century and the *Iṣlāḥ al-Majisī* of Jābir ibn Aflaḥ in the twelfth century.

18. The phrase ‘emir of the believers’ is a reference to Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf Ibn ‘Abd al-Mu‘min (d. 1184), the second Almohad caliph.

19. The reply is made to Ibn Ruṣd.

Ibn Rušd wrote *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, or 'The Incoherence of the Incoherence', to show 'that man [al-Gazālī] was mistaken about sharia and philosophy alike' (1987: 578). He also wrote a treatise 'On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy' to demonstrate that the practice of philosophy was compatible²⁰ with the dogmas of Islamic sharia. He sought to work out the differences that separated the metaphysical theories of the ancient Greeks transmitted by the Arabs, but always understanding philosophy as an interdisciplinary subject that transcended logic and metaphysics, unlike al-Gazālī, who held that the only part of the philosophy of the Ancients that could be used to understand the purposes of sharia was the practice of logic. Nevertheless, the two figures – who had pushed the controversy between the Islamic east and west to a climax by embracing conflicting notions of the utility of the philosophy of the Ancients – did come together on some points. These points could be regarded as key factors in the role played by philosophy in the development of Arab-Islamic thought, even if by different routes. In my view, the points of divergence and convergence between al-Gazālī and Ibn Rušd come down to their respective readings of Aristotle in translation. Both scholars explicitly noted their misgivings about the translation work carried out in the time of the cultural record, ultimately leading them to press for the review and analysis of the translations in question. Ibn Rušd could see ambiguity in the translation of Aristotle and therefore took the decision to polish the texts, while al-Gazālī, for his part, had already warned of errors in the translation of Aristotle and held that:

The translators of Aristotle did not stop twisting and changing the words [...]. Prominent among the most trustworthy who undertook the transmission and the critical edition are two philosophers of Islam: al-Fārābī Abū Naṣr and Avicenna. Let us limit ourselves, therefore, to a refutation of what they have selected and considered to be true in accordance with the doctrine of their teachers [...]. Let it be known that I shall limit myself to responding to their doctrines in accordance with the transmission of the

20. Along the same lines, Dominique Urvoy (2005: 10) notes that Ibn Rušd sought the following: '[J]ustifié légalement la philosophie, exposé sa conception de la théologie et récusa les attaques contre l'aristotélisme faites par le principal docteur sunnite, Ghazālī.'

two men so that the discussion does not spread as a function of the spread of the doctrines (al-Gazālī 1966: 77-78).

It is worth underscoring the critique that al-Gazālī targeted at the philosopher-translators, particularly al-Fārābī and Avicenna, who he claims expressly distorted the original texts in the context of established doctrines. In order to curb the phenomenon, he decided to refute any doctrines that he considered erroneous, to which end he supported his arguments with the transmissions of both philosophers. In other words, the author of *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* did not refute all of the philosophy of the Ancients, nor did he refute everything transmitted by al-Fārābī and Avicenna. Rather, he once again made an exception of reason and logic, provided that the two disciplines did not seek to take on metaphysical questions, above all the divine unity posed earlier by al-Jāhīz. Thus, al-Gazālī's critique of the legacy of the translated sciences of the Ancients was not aimed at any retranslation or review of what had already been translated. Rather, it was aimed at pursuing a sustained, systematic critique of the philosophers using logic to shine a light on the contradictions in their theories.

By contrast, Ibn Rušd defended a position contrary to that of al-Gazālī. He sought to take stock of the studies of Aristotle based on earlier translations in order to free the philosophy of the Ancients from the traditional intransigence of the Islamic east. It was therefore necessary to create a new method that would turn the production of translations, especially in relation to Aristotle, into a fully-fledged transformation of scientific knowledge so as to liberate philosophy from the science of debate (*kalām*) based on logic. The realisation of such a project had already begun during the reign of al-Ḥakam II (961-976), the second Umayyad caliph of Córdoba; that is, roughly a century after the death of al-Ma'mūn and a century and a half before the major controversy that would erupt between al-Gazālī and Ibn Rušd; or put another way, between the Islamic east and west. This historical framework, which was decisive for the evolution of intellectual life in al-Andalus, was to give rise to a number of important intellectual figures, such as Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Rušd himself, Avempace and many others. According to Šā'id al-Andalusī (1912: 66), al-Ḥakam II prepared the ground well for the future of intellectual life in al-Andalus, bringing major books and works on the ancient and modern sciences from Baghdad, Egypt and other places in the Mashriq. In

total, he would ultimately collect the same number of copies as the Abbasid caliphs had collected over quite a long span of time.

The scientific resurgence that characterised the reign of al-Ḥakam II set an important precedent for the subsequent start of the translation movement that was to transmit the science and philosophy of the Ancients into Latin²¹ via the ‘Semitic route’, to borrow the expression coined by García Yebra (1985: 33). The Semitic route, which prominently featured the systematic translation efforts undertaken in Toledo, always drew on the scientific knowledge of the Ancients preserved²² in translated Arabic sources. All of these efforts took place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when Arabic philosophy, in the words of Renan (1866: II-III), achieved a genuine originality. The cultural splendour of al-Andalus, which Menéndez Pidal (2001: 15-53) sees as a link between Christendom and Islam, would carry on into the European Renaissance, which was able to take up the scientific and philosophical heritage gathered in the Arabic translations and put them at the service of a new era, marking a clear before and after in the life of the peoples of Europe.

6. Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, the main aim of this paper was to study the systematisation and limits involved in translating the sciences of the Ancients into Arabic. We have broken down the subject into four principal sections. The first examines the dream of al-Ma'mūn as the driving force behind the initial translation project, while the second focuses on the theoretical and translation framework established by al-Jāḥiẓ and the third turns to the cultural circumstances that torpedoed the translation of Greek literature into Arabic. Lastly, we explored the pragmatic and ideological factors that brought down the curtain on translation into Arabic in the Mashriq and

21. For more information on translation from Arabic to Latin, see V. García Yebra (1985: 56-102) or J. Vernet (1999: 167-196).

22. According to Salama-Carr, translation from Arabic to Hebrew and Latin has also enabled the preservation of a host of works that were originally written in Arabic and then lost as a consequence of the climate of intolerance that existed in Muslim Spain at the start of the Almohad dynasty in the twelfth century.

gave rise to translation in the opposite direction. The starting hypothesis was that Muslims, at the advent of Islam, were faced with the need to translate the sciences of the Ancients for the scientific and ideological consolidation of their state. We have also considered that the critical study of the transmission into Arabic of the sciences mentioned may have contributed very important aspects for our perception of how Arabic culture was woven together in its classical phase, thanks to the intense contact of Islam with other millenarian cultures through translation.

The analytical perspectives of the dream examined in the paper can be characterised at times by their divergence and at other times by their convergence, in keeping with the development of different hypotheses. Needless to say, there is no reason for the viewpoints to be identical since they apply different methods to arrive at their respective approximations. For instance, A. Amīn conducts his reading of al-Ma'mūn's dream from a socio-historical perspective; al-Jābirī takes an epistemological approach; Ṭarābīṣī begins from a critical standpoint; and Gutas draws on the historical level of translation. All of their approaches, however, have been useful in encapsulating and confirming that the driving forces behind the translation of the sciences of the Ancients into Arabic were largely political, ideological and scientific in nature. They were political and scientific because the Abbasid state had grown into a vast empire after the Muslim conquests and the Arabs were discovering new arts and crafts from a host of non-Arab peoples – contributions that would have a large-scale impact on the internal and external management of the state. And they were ideological thanks to the emergence of groups of *kalām* who devoted themselves to debating the existential issues necessary to argue with and convince an adversary. The philosophical dialogue transmitted in al-Ma'mūn's dream reflected the passion of the Abbasids for Aristotelian logic, while never failing to adhere to the purposes and foundations of Islamic sharia.

As for the theoretical and translation framework that al-Jāḥiẓ strove to build, we have noted that the author of 'The Book of Animals' was interested in establishing a doctrine of translation and, later, integrating the reception of the sciences of the Ancients into the Arab-Islamic cultural canon in line with the status quo of the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn. At the same time, he was even more concerned to save what remained of the ideology of the

intellectual and political elite. We must remember that this is the beginning of the end of Mu'tazilism and apparently the very end of the translation movement in the Islamic east. Al-Jāhiz sought to establish a certain degree of order in the exercise of translation activity so as to reconsider the Mu'tazila ideology and put it at the service of efforts made to achieve harmony and to bridge reason and religious discourse. Even so, it was perhaps already too late because the closure of the 'gate of *al-ijtihād*'²³ was drawing ever closer, heralding a disruption of intellectual life and a discontinuance in the activity of translation. However, if the closure of the gate was taken for granted in the Mashriq, nonetheless a new gate opened in al-Andalus for *al-ijtihād* to carry on, building on the foundation of the culture of the first Arab-Islamic *Salaf*, including the translated heritage of the sciences of the Ancients.

As for the reluctance of the Arabs to translate Greek poetry, it appears to have been due to the characteristics of their monotheistic religion and the morality of Arab-Islamic society, which could not be harmonised with the polytheistic society of the Greeks. By contrast, Persian literature was translated more frequently into Arabic because it was regarded as closer to Arabic tastes. In other words, when there is a greater integration between two cultures that profess the same religion, not only does literary translation become possible, but also any gaps that exist can be bridged even to the point of successfully merging the source text with the target text, as was done by Ibn al-Muqaffa', a founding figure in literary translation and a specialist in translating Persian into Arabic.

In relation to the decline of translation in eastern Islam, we can say clearly that the phenomenon was a result of ideological reasons and that it was linked very closely to the development of intellectual life more broadly. In this context, the defeat of reason had already taken place in the Mashriq, but in al-Andalus there was now a new reconstruction of Arab-Islamic thought and it was using the interpretative lens of the translations of the scientific heritage of the Ancients to reconsider reason and logic as essential pillars for the understanding of religion. This scenario gave rise to one of the greatest disagreements ever to emerge in Islam, between two sides

23. This refers to the interpretative effort undertaken by Muslim scholars in search of answers to religious questions.

headed by the figures of al-Gazālī, the Persian theologian, and Ibn Rušd, the Arab Andalusian philosopher. Their books or *tahafut* – as it were – were incorporated respectively into the dominant tendencies of their eras. Indeed, their respective works bring us face to face with the triumph of dialogue between the Islamic east and west and between philosophy and religion: in short, between translation and authorship. The translators' confusion with the language of the sciences of the Ancients served, first, to spur a systematic reply to the philosophers and, second, to make an organised appeal to them in order to put forward a new reading of the translation sources rather than imitating the philosophers of the Mashriq. This state of affairs coincided with the political divisions emerging in the Mashriq and the Maghrib, and heralded the beginning of the end of the translation of Greek heritage into Arabic and the beginning of translating the same scientific heritage in the opposite direction, that is, *from* Arabic. The result was the first step in what became a major historical paradox: the translation movement from Arabic begins to play a wide-ranging role, this time in the fabric of post-medieval European thought.

Lastly, if the translation movement came to an end in the world of eastern Arabic culture for the ideological reasons noted above, the activity of renovation that sprang to life in Europe nevertheless proved to be systematically and quantitatively without parallel. The new direction in translation would lead to the reconstruction of the very Greek scientific tradition that had been Christianised by the Nestorians and Islamised by the Muslims, to say nothing of the intermediate task of transmission played by the Jews.

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