

Notes on the Hungarian Translation of Literary Works in Arabic

a report commissioned by the Next Page Foundation

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The last century and a half have brought about radical changes in the field of the translation of literary products: the space previously dominated by the classical literary erudition are being gradually filled by translations of a wealth of works originally produced in countless languages of the world. On the bookshelves of our more and more integrated world library - be they located in Budapest, Tunis, La Puebla, Mumbai or Hong Kong - one finds works of various origins translated into the same language, an unprecedented phenomenon up to now.

This transformation can be observed in the literary output translated into the Hungarian language too. While previously the main goal tended to be the production of ever new versions in Hungarian of the Greek and Roman classics, the last one hundred and fifty years have seen the Hungarian educated class, who paid attention to developments in Europe, displaying a growing and unceasing interest in the immediate translation and circulation of outstanding contemporary works appearing in other languages. As the representatives of Hungarian culture came to participate in the processes taking place in Europe and made the programme of 'catching up' with Western Europe paramount in their agenda, literary works appearing in Hungarian translation have elevated the Hungarian cultural scene to the level of contributing to principal developments in the West. Contemporary foreign authors became familiar to the domestic reading public, and at the same time Hungarian writers also took part in the renewal of European literatures. Their names were noted by journals and periodicals, while European authors were willing, and glad, to the invitations of Hungarian literary editors and publishers to contribute to their publications, as one could observe, in the period between the two world wars, in the case of Ferenc Molnár, Sándor Márai on the one hand, and Thomas Mann on the other.

In accordance with the global trend of the period, the notion of 'world literature' did not go beyond the limits of the 'known literatures', an observation especially valid for the Hungarian cultural scene with its close attention to developments in German, French, English, Italian, and perhaps also Russian, culture. Interest in Oriental literatures was sporadic at best, and it rarely relied on knowledge of the language in which the works had been originally produced, but on primary translations into European tongues instead. The Hungarian version of the Arabian Nights, for example, bore the hallmark of the German translations as well as the paraphrasings of the age of Romanticism. It was an all-European phenomenon that the literatures of the colonized regions, despite all the high aspirations of Romanticism, reached the European readership only in abridged versions and either scholarly or amateur paraphrasings. Colonization itself played a prominent role in this, as the European empires, focusing on their own economic, military and political interests and their *cultural mission* - had less interest left for the cultural traditions of the colonized peoples. An even more important factor may have been the opinion of mainstream Orientalism that tended to view Oriental literary products merely as sources of philological, linguistic, historical, or geographical information, and had little regard for the aesthetic value of those

works. Rare exceptions include the inspired translations of Fr. Rückert, while Fitzgerald's translations of Omar Khayyam circulated all over the literary salons of polished Western society.

After the end of the colonial period, the new situation (namely the cold war, the opposition of the Soviet bloc and the West) again resulted in non-literary factors defining the kind of works singled out for translation. The Left supported politically committed literatures; the Soviet bloc preferred to finance literature that displayed a tendency of quasi-messianic mission. The literatures of the previous colonies were given the label of 'Socialist realism', which left the door wide open for works of crude political propaganda. The situation in Hungary was affected to some extent by the fact that the leading Orientalist of the time (Abdalkarim Julius Germanus), more of a teacher than a scholar, spared no efforts to bring Arabic literature closer to the Hungarian reading public. His anthology, replete with careful annotation and lively anecdotes, was a real breakthrough, as it was the first to give the Hungarian reader, in 1961, a comprehensive historical overview of the whole of Arabic literature, even though his volume of selected Arabic works in translation suffers from a lot of shortcomings in both its form and content. Still, a breakthrough it undeniably was.

The following period, an era of growing and improved contacts between Hungary and the Arab world, witnessed the committed efforts of an editor (Robert Simon) that led to the appearance of a series of the best modern Arab novels (Taha Husain's *The Stream of Days /Ayyam/* – an autobiographical novel, Taufiq al-Hakim's *Diary of an assistant magistrate*, Naguib Mahfouz' *The Beginning and the End*, and *The Sin /al-Haram/* from Yusuf Idris) as well as the most outstanding works of contemporary Arabic short prose (Mahmoud Taymour, Yusuf Idris, Naguib Mahfuz, Tayeb Salih etc.) a famous novel on the Palestinians' tragedy (Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*), and some great works of medieval Arabic prose including the philosophical treatises of Ibn Tufayl (*Hayy ibn Yaqzan*) and Miskawayh. In the years immediately preceding the fall of Communism, there appeared the first complete Hungarian version of the Quran with full scholarly apparatus (*Korán – A Korán világa*, transl. Robert Simon, Helikon Kiadó, Budapest 1987). Meanwhile, readers would encounter the works of some better-known Arab poets or writers in Hungarian journals, and there also was the occasional special number dedicated to the presentation of a selection of works by various contemporary Arab authors (*Contemporary Arab Poets* ed. Andras Tokai in *Nagyvilág* 1986). In addition to political considerations, the intrinsic literary value of a work came to be an important factor in the choice of particular Arabic works for translation. The fluidity of the situation was highlighted, however, by the fact that the laudation and appraisal in Hungarian of the oeuvre of Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz of 1988 did appear relatively soon after his international success, and yet no Hungarian publishing house published any of the novels of the celebrated Egyptian writer.

The fall of Communism in 1989-1990 was a clear dividing line. While the 60s and 70s were characterized by a translation activity more or less state-approved and planned, this relatively intense activity was already diminishing in the 80s. As the economic and political relations between Hungary and the Arab world dwindled, almost to the point of extinction, in the early 90s, the number of translations also decreased. For years, it was practically impossible to find any new translated

Arabic works in bookshops or literary periodicals. This in a period when sensationalistic low-quality literature and pulp fiction (mainly written in English) was abundant to provide the readers with a distorted and manipulated image of the Islamic world, with its stock figures of princesses in purdah, oppressed womenfolk, and similar trash.

Nevertheless, an independent and disinterested view of Arabic culture came to be a tangible possibility in the Arabic studies, as it was no more colonization or political considerations but interest in the intrinsic value of Arabic culture, as well as a more and more evident interest in Islam, that became the driving force behind the production of new studies and translations. A new generation of Orientalist experts in the West and even in Hungary went beyond a documentaristic approach to Eastern literatures, preferring to examine the aesthetic value of any old or new literary work.

The publication in this period of an exquisite translation of the complete text (Calcutta edition) of the Arabian Nights, a project undertaken by a newly established scholarly publishing house in Budapest (*Atlantisz Kiadó*), is a good indication of those changes. New editions (like Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* by the Palestinian Embassy, or Yusuf Idris's *The Sin* by Non-profit Books, Serdian Publishing House) Internet databases (for example *Terebess Online* (<http://www.terebess.hu/konyvkiadas>) e-libraries (like the Széchényi National Library's special collection (<http://mek.oszk.hu/>), of previous publications also started to appear. (A Hungarian monograph on Naguib Mahfouz was published; various dissertations at Hungarian universities were dedicated to aspects of modern Arabic literature; and a journal (*Kalligram* XVII, January 2008, pp. 43-80) has recently made a survey of the authors of modern Arabic literature who have attained more or less classic status (like Adonis, Naguib Mahfouz, Yusuf Idris, etc.). Simultaneously, the small Hungarian Muslim community began to translate Islamic religious literature. New translations of the Quran have appeared, in addition to small publications devoted to familiarizing Hungarians with the structure, values, and religious life of Islam. In Hungary as elsewhere in the world, the specialized literature on the fight against terrorism has received much attention and cast a shadow, again and again, on the Arabo-Islamic world, which seems to have introduced once again factors external to literature itself into the production of translations, and given those factors an important role.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the following bibliography will be divided into four categories:

- 1) translations of the Quran
- 2) works on religious theory and praxis
- 3) belles-lettres
- 4) works of general cultural heritage

1) translations of the Quran

Korán – A Korán világa, transl. Robert Simon, Helikon Kiadó, Budapest 1987. (2nd revised edition 1994. 3rd ed. 1997. 4th ed. 2001.)

Kuran – The Holy Qur'an (Arabic – Hungarian bilingual edition), transl. Mihaffy [Mihalyfy!] Balazs. Karachi, Rahbar, 1994.

A kegyes Korán értelmezésének fordítása: 29-30. fejezet. Főszerk. Adel Ahmad Alsahabil. Ford. ifj. Karasszon Attila, Iszlám Egyház Fordító Iroda, Budapest 2004.

A kegyes Korán értelmezésének fordítása: 1-3 fejezet. Főszerk Adel Ahmad Alsahabil. Iszlám Egyház Fordító Iroda, Budapest 2006.

2) works on religious theory and praxis

Hashimi, Muhammad Ali, al-, *A muszlim személyisége: a Korán és a Szunna megfogalmazása szerint.* Ford. Abdul-Fattah Munif. Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza, Budapest 2007.

3) Belles lettres

9 arab elbeszélés / [ford. Boga István, Várady László, Prileszky Csilla]. [Budapest] : [Serdian], [2005].

Anwar, Hamed, A fájdalom kövei Budapest : [Serdian], 2004.

Az Ezeregyéjszaka meséi : az eredeti arab szöveg első teljes magyar fordítása / [ford. Prileszky Csilla] ; [a versek műfordítását ... Tótfalusi István kész.] ; [... a jegyzeteket ... írta Simon Róbert]. Budapest : Atlantisz, [1999-2000]. 7 db ; 24 cm. 2nd ed. Budapest : Atlantisz, [2007]-.

Ben Jelloun , Tahar, A rasszizmus, ahogy a lányomnak elmagyaráztam / [ford. Takács M. József]. Budapest : Ulpius-ház, 2003 .

Haddad, Tahar, Gondolatok; [ford. Lőkös István]. Szeged : JATEPress, 2006.

Ibn Battúta, Utazás . Ford. Boga István [Budapest] : [Serdian], 2005.

Idrís, Júszuf, A bűn ; [ford. Chrudinák Alajos]. [Budapest] : [Serdian], [2005].

Kanafáni, Ghasszán, Lángoló ég alatt. [ford. Prileszky Csilla]. Budapest. 2003.

Sāni', Raja' 'Abd Allāh, A rijádi lányok ; [ford. Bartók Ágnes]. Budapest : Ulpius-ház, 2007.

Tamer, Zakaria, Fekete haj halála és más arab elbeszélések /; [... vál. és ford. ... Soós Tamás ...] ; [az illusztrációkat Kárpáty János kész.]. Gyöngyös : Pallas, 2005.

Ufkir, Malika, A hercegnők útja : húsz év egy sivatagi börtönben / Michèle Fitoussi közreműködésével ; [ford. Jancsó Júlia]. Budapest : Ulpius-ház, 2006.

Uszáma Ibn Munqidz, Intelmek könyve : egy szíriai emír memoárja a keresztes háborúk korából /; ... ford., a jegyzeteket és az utószót írta Simon Róbert. Budapest : Corvina, 2006.