

***Translations from Arabic in Lithuania, 1990-2010
a study by the Next Page Foundation***

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November 2010***

Next Page Foundation series of studies on translation flows
in partnership with "Translating in the Mediterranean" project of Transeuropéennes and the
Anna Lindh Foundation

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Introduction

Today's translation market in Lithuania seems to be colorful, as books are being translated from almost all European languages. However, the situation with Oriental languages, including Arabic, is different. This is rooted in the lack of translators, specializing in Oriental languages, also in few opportunities of training to become a translator.

The first thing one must know is that no titles were translated into Lithuanian directly from Arabic. All titles of the Arabic literary heritage, which are present now, have been translated through a third language. The aim of this article is to unfold the presence of Arabic literature (both written in Arabic, or by Arab authors in other languages) in Lithuanian translations in the independence era (1990-). A second goal is to give an explanation of the current situation.

Publishing and translations market in Lithuania

Lithuania's publishing market has changed radically after the independence. In Soviet Lithuania the whole publishing area was divided between 6 governmental publishers. The number of publishers that have published at least one title in 2009 was 547, while a total of 2108 publishers is registered. The number of titles printed per year has almost doubled from 2500 in the 1980-s to the figure of 4500, seen in recent years. The second important difference is the rapid fall in press runs. In the Soviet era some books could be published in 100,000 copies. The average print-run in 1990-1992 was still relatively high – 13,000 copies. This number has decreased over the years, being around 1535 in 2009. These figures do not necessary mean that Lithuanians read less, as there are several reasons for such a decline. First of all, the majority of books, published in the early 1990-s, were re-prints. Secondly, the print technology, left after the fall of of USSR, was much cheaper, although the quality was low, comparing to today's standards.

As we can see from the first table, the number of books has been rapidly rising in the beginning of the independence era. The amount of titles published annually was more or less the same in the last decade. The number has radically decreased by 608 in 2009 due to the economical crisis, which has affected all areas of business in Lithuania, including publishing.

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Number of titles issued	2499	2482	2361	2224	2885	3164	3645	3827	4109	4097
Number	30255.	34586	30954	19242	19626	14114	14914	14617	13433	12970

r of runs (thousand of copies)	4	.9	.0	.3	.5	.4	.8	.7	.3	.0
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Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of titles issued	3709	4402	4859	4559	4226	4223	4548	4567	4580	3972
Number of runs (thousand of copies)	11017.5	10131.9	8117.1	8822.7	7923.4	7760.1	8227.9	8041.3	7258.1	6104.6

1. Books published annually in Lithuania. Source: Lietuvos Spaudos Statistika

If fiction books composed around 25% of published books from 1993 to 2002, in the later period fiction constituted approximately 40% of all yearly published books. For example, 1522 belles lettres were published in 2009, which is 38% of the over-all figures.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Titles published	4226	4223	4548	4567	4580	3972
Of which belles lettres	1153	1304	1545	1675	1686	1522
For adults	765	827	949	1107	1216	1162
Of which originally Lithuanian	473	272	332	553	604	451
For children and youth	388	477	596	568	470	360
Of which originally Lithuanian	199	205	264	248	210	176

2. *Belles lettres – Lithuanian and translated, published in Lithuania. Source: Lietuvos Spaudos Statistika 2004-2009*

According to statistics, one third of books in Lithuanian are translations from other languages. For example, 1171 books, published in 2009, were translations. If the dominating language of translation in the Soviet Era was Russian, English has taken its place in the independence period. More than half of translations are made from English, which is followed by German, Russian and French. A peculiar fact about translations in Lithuania is that the number of copies of originally Lithuanian books is statistically two times lower than that of translations [in 2009: 1200 vs 2300].

Engl ish	Ger man	Rus sian	Fren ch	Polis h	Esto nian	Itali an	Spa nish	Swe dish	Nor weg ian	Lati n	Port ugu ese	Latv ian	Dani sh	Jap ane se	Anci ent Gre ek	Finn ish	Oth er
689	122	90	69	39	32	26	24	17	11	6	6	5	4	4	4	4	19

3. *Translations into Lithuanian in 2009. Source: Lietuvos Spaudos Statistika 2009*

Translations of Arabic literature into Lithuanian in the Soviet Era (1940-1990)

According to the information, provided by the LIBIS system, there was a total of 24 titles of Arabic literature, published in Soviet Lithuania. All of them were translated from Russian or Polish. Most of the books published were compilations of Arabic tales, taken from different Russian and Polish editions of *Tales of One Thousand and One Nights*. However, several novels (both of them social) were also published in the Soviet Era, including *Medžiai... ir Marzuko nužudymas* (*Trees... and the Killing of Marzuq, Al-ashjar wa-ghtyal Marzuq*) by Abdul Rahman Munif and *Beirūto malūnai* (*Death in Beirut*) by Awwad Tawfiq Yusuf. A compilation of Lebanese short stories was translated from Russian and published, bearing the name *Deimantinės vestuvės* (*Diamond Wedding*). Two works of Medieval Arabic literature (apart from children stories) were published – *Balandės Karoliai* (*The Ring of the Dove, Ṭawq al-Ḥamāmah*) by Ibn Hazm, and *Šykštuolių knyga* (*Book of Misers or Avarice & the Avaricious, Kitab al-Bukhala*) by Al-Jahiz. Additionally, the book of an Algerian writer Kateb Yacine *Nedžma* (*Nedjma*), originally written in French, was translated directly from the original and published in Soviet Lithuania.

Translations of Arabic literature into Lithuanian (1990-2010)

Religious literature

Contrary to the prevailing beliefs in Europe, Lithuania has a long history of Muslims, living on its territory. First Muslim settlements in Lithuania can be observed in XIII-XIV ages. The rulers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were tolerant towards Tatar people, with whom the country had close connections. Some of the Tatar settlers were war captives, while some of them were mercenaries that served in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Nowadays, along with 4000 ethnic Tatars, a noticeable number of Muslims (from Turkey, Lebanon and other countries) that came here after the independence for studies and work is present in Lithuania.

It is notable that all religious activity was under strict control during the Soviet Era. Thus, no Islamic literature was published in Lithuanian from 1940 to 1990. The bigger part of Islamic publications (a total of 21 titles) in the period of independence is credited by *Lietuvos musulmonų jaunimo bendrija (Union of Lithuania's Muslims)*. According to the information, received from them, most of the translations were conducted from English, while some of the translations from Russian. However, some of the titles are originally written in Arabic, although translated into Lithuanian with the help of the English translation. Particularly, these are *Kas leistina ir kas draudžiama Islame (The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam)* by Jusuf Al-Karadawi and *Bendras įvadas į islamą (A General Introduction to Islam)* by Ali Al-Tantawi. Two books of the Baha'i faith are listed to be written originally in Arabic and Farsi, but were translated into Lithuanian from English. The representative of Lithuania's Baha'i provided me with the information that writings of Baha'u'llah are usually translated into other languages from the English translations, thus to avoid any misleading interpretations, which might occur translating from the original.

In 2008, the Qur'an was published in Lithuanian for the first time. The full title of the Lithuanian translation is *Koranas: literatūrinį prasmių vertimas (Qur'an: the translation of literary meanings)*, which shows that the translator perceives the Qur'an more as work of poetry than a holy book. The source of the translation is not noted, presumably it was conducted from several Russian printings of the Qur'an. The translation itself was performed by Sigitas Geda, a well-known Lithuanian poet. The information, provided by the publisher for the literary magazine "Literatūra ir menas" states that Geda used not only the Russian (most notable Krachkovsky's), but also the Latvian translation. The translation was criticized both by scholars and readers, the main point of criticism being the fact that Sigitas Geda had no knowledge of Arabic. The first Lithuanian pressing of the Qur'an was claimed to be "amateurish", "incorrect" and "bearing a lot of flaws". Several months after the book appeared on the shelves, a fatwa banning Lithuania's Muslims to use the translation as a source of knowledge was published anonymously on the Internet. No official representative of Lithuanian Muslims has approved of the fatwa. A second edition, bearing a lot of corrections, made by Romas Jakubauskas, a Lithuanian mufti, was published in 2010. This edition is officially approved by the Muftiat of Lithuania. It is also notable that the second editions print quality is really high.

An interest with Islam can be called high in Lithuanian society. This can be explained not only by islamophobia and anti-islamophobia, seen in the media. One of the reasons is the activity of various Muslim religious organizations that publish books, organize cultural events, lectures, etc. As for the books published, along with the theological, a scientific view on Islam is also represented. In the last decade, several introductory books on Islam by A. Schimmel, J,

Hämeen-Anttila, F. Déroche were published. *Islamo žinynas (Distionary of Islam)* was written by a Lithuanian researcher and Islam specialist Egdūnas Račius. If such a tendency continues (which is very likely to happen), more titles on Islam are to appear.

Belles lettres and non-fiction

The only piece of Arabic literary heritage present in pre-Soviet, Soviet and independent Lithuania is *The Tale of One Thousand and One Nights*. First editions were conducted from the almost canonical source for translations into European languages – Galland's French translation. Several tales were translated from Russian Česlovas Navakauskas in 1993, but the series was never completed. A bigger amount of tales was included in the translation of Nida Rutkauskienė. In 1994-1996 a complete 8 volume edition of *The Tale of One Thousand and One Nights* (translated from the Russian printing of 1960) was published. All other editions are not full, usually including several paraphrased tales, translated from Polish, English or Russian sources. For these reasons they are not included in the bibliography.

The Lithuanian reader is familiar with the following Arab authors: E. Said, K. Gibran, A. Maalouf and Y. Khadra. All of their works (except for two of Gibran's) translated into Lithuanian were originally written not in Arabic. This can be explained by the fact that most Lithuanian publishers tend to deal with translations made directly from the original language. A world-famous book, credited to a woman named Souad, *Burned Alive: a Victim of the Law of Men*, was published in Lithuanian. It is notable that Gibran's book *The Prophet* was published 8 times, which is to say rather rare for a translated title. We can say that Gibran is the best known Arab writer in Lithuania with a total of 5 titles published. Three Maalouf's titles were published, including one historical book. A book by an Algerian author Yasmina Khadra *Kabulo kregždės (The Swallows of Kabul)* was published in 2010, being one of many titles in Lithuanian, concerning Afghanistan¹. The critically acclaimed *Orientalism* by Edward Said is read by university students in the field of humanities.

Why are there no translations from Arabic?

If we are willing to understand the problem, we need to find its root. An interest in Oriental languages and cultures can be seen in Lithuanian academic circles as early as in the beginning of the XIX century. In Vilnius University the Center of Oriental Languages was established in 1810. A separate Institute of Oriental Studies was opened twelve years later, in 1822. Teaching Mongolian, Armenian, Turkish, Arabic and Persian was meant to be a part of the Institutes's curriculum. However, due to unknown reasons, the project was not successful and admitted students had to go abroad in order to pursue their academic goals. Arabic and Persian were taught in the period from 1822 to 1832, when the University was shut down by the Tzar's will.

¹Lithuania still has its troops in Afghanistan.

Translating literature directly from Oriental languages does not have a deep-rooted history in XX century Lithuania. Due to Lithuania being a part of the Soviet Union, most of the translations from Oriental languages that appeared between 1940 and 1990 were made using Russian as an intermediary language.

One of the main reasons why Lithuania lacks qualified translators from Oriental languages is the complete absence of Oriental language tuition in Soviet Lithuania. A new wave of enthusiasm began right after the independence, when the Oriental Center was established at Vilnius University in 1993. Various language and culture-related courses were open for the university public since then. In the year 2000 the Center began the *Comparative Asian Studies* study program, which provides BA studies in Indology, Sinology, Japanese, Arab, Persian and Turkish studies. An MA program is also available from 2006 and a language school is open from 2002. Apart from Vilnius Universities, Oriental languages are available in all major universities (as a separate subject, which can be chosen by students of any field) and language schools. However, only Vilnius University provides the possibility to major in Arab studies.

The Oriental Centre had to face a huge problem at the beginning – a serious lack of Arabic language tutors. Two first generations of BA in Arab studies students had to change several tutors through the course. According to the profile of the OC, a small number of people is admitted. That is why less than 10 people have graduated from the two first courses of Arab studies. None of them had become translators, although training translators is not a goal of the faculty, because the BA and MA courses provided are classified as “ethnology/culturology”, not philology. In 2010, a new (third) course of BA in Arab studies was gathered, with a total of 14 students admitted. Re-launching the Arab studies programme became possible after Maritana Larbi, a new Arabic lecturer, started working in the faculty. She is also currently working on the first Arabic course book for Lithuanian students, which is planned to be published after several years.

To conclude my research, I want to repeat one of the statements, which has been recurring in the article. There is virtually no specialists in Lithuania, qualified to make translations from literary Arabic or its dialects. I have already explained the difficulties faced by people, who desire to gain a proficiency in Arabic. Moreover, Arabic studies in Lithuania are not funded by overseas governments, as are, for example studies of Japanese, Chinese and Hindi. This is, of course, influenced by the political situation – Lithuania does not host any embassy of an Arabic-speaking country on its territory. Then again, few ties bond Vilnius University with universities of the Middle East, but new contracts are to be signed for the benefit of Arabic studies in OC. It might seem that I emphasize the Oriental Centre too much, but in fact it is the only place in Lithuania, from where we can expect new specialists.

Appendix

The bibliography of translations from Arabic to Lithuanian in the period 1989 – 2010

Belles lettres (of which the original language was Arabic)

Džibranas, Kalilis *Meilės laiškai : Kalilio Džibrano meilės laiškai Mei Ziadah*, transl. Darius Kaunelis, Kaunas: Dajalita, 2002. 206 p. ill., translated from English (*Love Letters: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran to May Ziadah*);

Džibranas, Kalilis *Ašaros ir juokas*, transl. Jolanta Kriūnienė, Kaunas : Verba vera, 2009, 134 p., translated from English (origin. Arabic: *Dam'ah wa ibtisāmah*, English: *Tears and laughter*);

Tūkstantis ir viena naktis (1-3), transl. Nida Rutkauskienė et al., Vilnius: Alma littera, 1994. 3 volumes. Ill., translated from Russian *Kniga tysjači I odnoj noči* orig. Arabic: *Alf laila wa-laila*, English: *The Tale of One Thousand and One Nights*);

Tūkstantis ir viena naktis: 1-19 naktis transl. Česlovas Navakauskas; Vilnius: Lukas, 1993. 134 p., translated from Russian: *Tysjača i odna noč* (orig. Arabic: *Alf laila wa-laila*, English: *The Tale of One Thousand and One Nights*);

Tūkstantis ir viena naktis: 19-38 naktis transl. Česlovas Navakauskas; Vilnius: Lukas, 1993. 166 p. ill., translated from Russian: *Tysjača i odna noč* (orig. Arabic: *Alf laila wa-laila*, English: *The Tale of One Thousand and One Nights*);

Tūkstantis ir viena naktis transl. Irena Aleksaitė, Jonas Strielkūnas; Vilnius : Alma littera, 1994-1996, 8 volumes; translated from Russian: *Tysjača i odna noč* [orig. Arabic: *Alf laila wa-laila*, English: *The Tale of One Thousand and One Nights*];

Belles lettres (written by Arab authors in other languages)

Džibranas, Kalilis *Klajūnas: palyginimai ir posakiai*, transl. Zigmantas Ardickas, Kaunas: Gardenija, 1998, 78 p., translated from English (*The Wanderer*);

Džibranas, Kalilis *Pranašas*, transl. Zigmantas Ardickas, Vilnius : Taura, 1991, 95p., translated from English (*The Prophet*);

Džibranas, Kalilis *Pranašas; Pranašo sodas; Jėzus, žmogaus sūnus*, transl. Zigmantas Ardickas, Vilnius : Asveja, 1998, 335p., translated from English (*The Prophet, The Garden of The Prophet, Jesus, The Son of Man*);

Džibranas, Kalilis *Smėlis ir pūta : aforizmų knyga*, transl. Zigmantas Ardickas, Vilnius : Taura, 1993, 85p., translated from English (*Sand and Foam*);

Kadra, Yasmina *Kabulo kregždės*, transl. Stasė Banionytė, Vilnius : Žara, 2010, 161 p., translated from French (orig. *Les hirondelles de Kaboul*, English: *The Swallows of Kabul*);

Malufas, Aminas *Tanijo uola*, transl. Stasė Banionytė, Vilnius : Alma littera, 2003, 238 p., translated from French (orig. *Le rocher de Tanios*, English: *The Rock of Tanios*);

Malufas, Aminas *Baltazaro klajonės*, transl. Stasė Banionytė, Vilnius : Žara, 2010, 393 p., translated from French (orig. *Le périple de Baldassare*, English: *Balthazar's Odyssey*).

Suada, Marie-Therese Cuny *Sudeginta gyva*, transl. Laima Račienė, Vilnius : 2004, 239 p., translated from French (orig. *Brûlée vive*, English: *Burned Alive: a Victim of the Law of Men*);

Non-fiction titles (written by Arab authors in other languages)

Malufas, Aminas *Kryžiaus žygiai arabų akimis*, transl. Jūratė Žalgaitė-Kaya, Vilnius : Aidai, 2006, 295 p., translated from French (orig. *Les croisades vues par les Arabes*, English: *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*);

Said, Edward *Orientalizmas*, transl. Violeta Davoliūtė, Kazimieras Seibutis, Vilnius : Ast, 2006, 448 p., translated from English (orig. *Orientalism*), funded by ALK (Atviros Lietuvos Knyga) and CEU (Central European University);

Religious literature

Al-Karadawi, Jusuf, *Kas leistina ir kas draudžiama Islame*, transl. Lietuvos musulmonų jaunimo bendrija, Kaunas : Arx Baltica, 2005, 409 p.; translated from English (originally Arabic: *Halāl wa-al-harām fī al-Islām*, English: *The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam*);

Al-Tantawi, Ali *Bendras įvadas į islamą*, transl. Lietuvos musulmonų jaunimo bendrija, Kaunas : Arx Baltica, 2007, 241 p.; translated from English (origin. Arabic: *Tarīf amm bi-dīn al-islām*, English: General Introduction to Islam);

Baha'u'llah *Slėpiningi žodžiai*, transl. V. Andrašiūnienė, Klaipėda : Bahajų leidykla, 1997, 54p.; translated from English (originally Arabic: *Kalimat-i-Maknunih*, English: *Hidden Words*);

Baha'u'llah *Nuotrupos iš Bahá'u'lláh raštu*, transl: V. Andrašiūnienė, Klaipėda: Bahajų leidyba, 1998. 214 p.; translated from English (*Gleanings from the writings of Bahā'u'llāh*);

Koranas: literatūrinių prasmių vertimas, transl. Sigitas Geda, Vilnius : Kronta, 2008, 561 p.

Koranas: literatūrinių prasmių vertimas, transl. Sigitas Geda, Romas Jakubauskas, Vilnius : Kronta, 2010, 583 p.;

Sources, organizations and people consulted:

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Martynas Mazvydas National Library of Lithuania On-line Databas – www.libis.lt

Lietuvos musulmonų Jaunimo Bendrija - (www.musulmonai.lt)

Lietuvos Bahajų Bendruomenė (www.bahai.lt)

The Oriental Centre of Vilnius University (www.oc.vu.lt)

Lithuanian Association of Literary Translators (www.llvs.lt)

Maritana Larbi (Arabic lecturer in VU)