

The Manuscript Center 4th Annual Conference Translated Manuscripts

**Bibliotheca Alexandrina
(29 May - 1 June 2007)**

The successive international conferences held by the Manuscript Center exhibit discernible continuity in exploring untrodden, neglected areas in Arabic/Islamic heritage. The Center's fourth annual conference **Translated Manuscripts** will follow the pattern of its predecessors shedding light on one of the significant facets of Arabic heritage, namely, its contact with preceding and succeeding legacies of knowledge.

Interaction among human civilizations takes place in manifold forms. Translation, perhaps one of the most important of these forms, was the main passage to inspiring and forging future knowledge from past intellectual experience and to triggering crossfertilization among contemporaneous and/or successive cultures. It was through translation that Muslims were introduced to the cultural stock of former civilizations. They particularly drew upon Classical heritage, which in its turn had absorbed a great deal of the learning of the Ancient Egyptian and Oriental civilizations.

Translation, however, was not the only medium for cultural interaction. There were other influential factors: trade routes as the case of the Silk Road and its historical significance; the spread of religious disciplines and spiritual doctrines and their quite astonishing evolution; as well as battles and wars waged in quest of illusive glory and wealth. From a closer perspective, a pattern of inner complementarity and interaction among the abovementioned factors is revealed. In fact, global trade, religious trends, sanguine wars and translation activities are all shaping elements of civilization.

Translation remains one of the factors that has enriched and influenced human history to its core. Thanks to translators Judaism and Christianity survived to the present. Translation is also credited for the transmission of Classical heritage to the Syriacs then to the Arabs, to be eventually adapted by the Latin world and finally into modern European languages. On the other hand, absence of translation activities had its negative impact resulting in the loss of an enormous patrimony

written in languages that fell into oblivion along with their users: Ancient Egyptian, Abyssinian (Ge'ez), Pahlavi, Armenian and many other languages whose peoples vanished during the course of time or clung as a fading memory on the margins of human civilization.

Translation has always been and will remain an indicator of culture survival and indelibility. Therefore, the **translated manuscript** as an embodiment of an ancient text subsisting in two languages or more is the main focus of the present conference. It will also attempt to investigate carefully both the generalities and particularities of the translation process through elaborating on certain themes mentioned hereinafter.

Although translation is the main topic of the conference, we also aspire to shed light on the hidden links among the driving forces that led to the flourishing of the translation movement in certain periods. This may furnish some answers to many speculations: why did translation exist exclusively from/into certain languages and not others? Why did translation reach its zenith in certain episodes of human history and decline in others? Was the translation process dominated by a set of techniques of leading schools, or carried out according to individual disposition, or did it adopt a middle course between both? What was the impact of translated manuscripts on the target language culture and what was the nature of those manuscripts to begin with? What was the relation between the translation activities and the governing powers and how far did they affect each other?

Conference Themes

Given the ample possibilities of topics related to **translated manuscripts**, it seems only fitting to limit the fields of discussions to the following themes:

- **First, the factors that led to the flowering of translation activities.**
- **Second, translations of living versus bygone heritage and their selection criteria. Investigating, moreover, their influence on the shaping of human history and the nature of contemporaneous and successive civilizations.** Major translation movements aiming at transmitting the variegated legacies of mankind sometimes took place between a rising culture and a bygone heritage. In this context, we may mention the Arabic translations of the old Indian and Persian heritage, e.g. the translations of *Kitāb al-Sumūm* (Book of Poisons) by Šanāq, *Kalīla wa Dimna*, astronomical almanacs (*Azyāj*) and calendars (*Hisāb*

al-Sinīn). In other times, translation activities occurred among contemporaneous or chronologically overlapping languages. This is seen in the Babylonian and Assyrian interpretations of Sumerian writings as well as the Arabic translations from Greek and Syriac. Strangely enough, the Arabs did not translate Egyptian Hieroglyphics (which they labeled *lughat al-Tayr* [language of the birds]), although some Arab scholars were aware at an early stage of its significance and distinctive nature as seen in the works of Ibn Wahšiyya al-Nabatī. Why, then, does a community embark on the translation of a certain culture and neglect another?

- **Third, translations carried out by academic institutions or commissioned by patrons.** This is highly significant in order to understand the selection criteria governed by ideology, power and the perimeters of the acceptable, and to know when religious texts or secular ones marked the preference of translators. This entails, consequently, the study of the nature and background of those who were occupied with the translation process. For instance, the institutional translation represented in the endeavors of *Bayt al-Hikma* (the academy) in Baghdad with its set techniques and methods on the one hand, and on the other hand the translations commissioned by Khālīd bin Yazīd and Banū Mūsā bin Šāqir. This patronage-based translation was carried out under certain circumstances and with different techniques from the institutional translation represented by *Bayt al-Hikma* and the European academies during the Renaissance.
- **Fourth, the impact of translation on reconstructing our awareness of preceding heritage and, subsequently, influencing the development of world knowledge, i.e., the authority of translation.** This is seen in the influence exerted by the Arabic translation of the Alexandrian heritage on the scientific progress of the Arabic/Islamic civilization. The impact of the European translations of Arabic heritage on shaping Western consciousness during Medieval Europe and the Renaissance is another evident example.
- **Fifth, tracing the journey of a translated masterpiece, or rather two journeys. The first in its original culture and the other in the target culture.** The translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* into various European languages and Avicenna's *Canon* into Latin (the first

edition appeared in Italy in 1575), as well as the translations of al-Birūnī are all clear instances of this theme.

- **Six, the languages from/into which the translated manuscripts were transmitted.** In particular, the languages that played a significant intermediary role bringing different cultures together, such as Syriac, which was elevated and degraded respectively by translation. Syriac reached its climax with the culmination of translation from classical Greek into it and finally into Arabic. However, it was eventually put aside to promote Arabic as the dominant language of religion and governance in al-Šām during the first centuries after the Hijra.
- **Seventh, translation studies. Tracing the works in Arabic heritage that dealt directly with the process of translation whether independently or integrated in other writings.** This can be seen in the case of al-‘Āmilī’s *Kaškūl*, in which he draws a comparison between the methods of translation and interpretation according to both Yūhanā bin al-Batrīq and Hunayn bin Īshāq. Moreover, some papers may consider the examining of issues related to translation such as technical terminology and re-translation of a given work employing different techniques from the original translator, and other topics related to what is known today as translation theory and its applications.

Further Information

Further information about the conference participants, accepted abstracts, accessible facilities, and other organizational matters are available on the conference official website:

www.manuscriptcenter.org/translated

Those who are willing to participate in the conference are kindly requested to complete the registration form, attached herewith, and submit it via:

Email: youssef.ziedan@bibalex.org

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Mail: Manuscript Center,
Bibliotheca Alexandrina,
Shatby , P.O Box 138,
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Translated Manuscripts Conference

Bibliotheca Alexandrina

May 29-1 June, 2007

Registration Form

Please fill in the form (BLOCK LETTERS)

Title: _____
(Mr., Ms., Dr., etc)

Name: _____
(The conference badges and lists will be printed according to the information you provide here)

Address: _____

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Organization: _____

Job Position: _____

Are you submitting a paper in one of the sessions? Yes () No ()

Paper Title: _____

Language: _____
(The official language of the conference is Arabic, papers written in English are also accepted)

Requirements: _____
(Laptop – Projector – Internet Access – Other)

You are kindly requested to indicate your choices of the conference free-of-charge activities listed below (Please state the number of people who may accompany you):

	YES/NO	Accompanying
	Persons	
1. Tour of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and		
2. Planetarium Show		
3. Conference Dinner		
4. Excursion: Alexandria City Tour		

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Submission Procedure

Please follow carefully to assist the conference organizers to serve you well

1. Fill out this form completely
2. Prepare an abstract (**300** words maximum) and a bio (**100** words maximum) to be used in the conference publications and website
3. Submit an electronic version of the abstract and bio to youssef.ziedan@bibalex.org and the completed registration form no later than **31.1. 2007** to the Conference Secretariat by mail, fax, or email

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4. Kindly submit an electronic version of the full text of your paper no later than **25.2. 2007** to youssef.ziedan@bibalex.org