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Karoubi, B.

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Author: Karoubi, Behrouz

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Chapter III

A Concise Account of the Status of Translation in Iran

Translation quality assessment does not occur in a vacuum. To understand the evaluative behavior of the assessors, we have to study them within the specific socio-cultural context in which they are situated. We should always bear in mind that assessors are not simply ‘persons’ but socially and historically constituted subjects. They assess translated texts by setting them against their backdrop of known words and phrases, existing texts and translations, familiar conventions, anterior texts, or, in other words, their general knowledge which is historically generated and ideologically motivated. To have a better perception of the evaluative behavior of assessors in the current research, who are all Iranian and native speakers of Persian, it is necessary to provide some background information on the socio-cultural and historical context in which they have presumably acquired skills to perform the task of assessment. The long history of the practice of translation in Iran, which dates back thousands of years, the indispensable status of translation and translators in the country, the huge number of students studying translation in hundreds of Iranian universities, and the myriad of translated works that are published in Iran are among the features that make it a particularly interesting object of research about translation quality assessment.

There is currently a paucity of literature on the history of translation in Iran. According to Haddadian-Moghaddam (2011), despite nearly two hundred years practice of literary translation in modern Iran, not even a single scientific historiographical volume has yet been written on this topic. He criticizes the lack of a strict scientific attitude in approaching the history of translation in Iran and complains that there is an ongoing discussion between academicians in Iran about several “translation movements in Iran” or “Iranian translation traditions”, but no one is clearly and sufficiently involved in analyzing these movements and traditions and their distinctive characteristics in detail (p. 99). Apparently, the information which is available on the history of translation in Iran is limited to just a handful of encyclopedia entries and sporadic journal articles. The common practice in many of these works is to divide the history of translation in Iran into three distinct periods of ancient, i.e. from the rise of the Achaemenian Empire in 550 BC to the Muslim conquest of Persia in 651 CE, medieval, i.e. from the Muslim conquest of Persia to the rise of the Qajar Dynasty in 1789, and modern times, i.e. from the rise of the Qajar Dynasty to the present time. I will follow the same system of periodization in presenting a brief history of translation in Iran.

Different periods in the history of translation in Iran are usually marked with turning points where translation starts to play an exceptionally prominent role in the process of intercultural transfer of art and knowledge. These turning points generally indicate the beginning of a “translation movement”. A translation movement usually starts with the systematic translation of a large volume of texts and a swift shift in the status of translated literature from a peripheral position toward occupying a central position within the target literary system. Translation movements typically coincide with major socio-political developments in the target society. According to Even-Zohar (1978, pp. 18-22), translation could move to a central position in the target literary system when the system is young or weak, or when it is peripheral within a wider group of neighboring literatures, or during the turning points and crises, or when there is a literary vacuum. The history of Iran appears to be replete with vicissitudes that gave rise to such situations.

3.1. Translation in Pre-Islamic Iran (550 BCE – 651 CE)

The history of the practice of translation in Iran dates back more than 2500 years. The third king of the Persian Achaemenian Empire, Darius, described his triumphs over his enemies in the Behistun Inscription in three different languages. The main body text of the Behistun Inscription is in Old Persian, but it is also accompanied by its Elamite and Babylonian translations. The Behistun inscription could be regarded as one of the most important translations ever documented in the history of ancient Iran, because it contributed greatly to the decipherment of cuneiform. However, as Karimi-Hakkak (1998) explains, although the Achaemenian Empire was multilingual, we have very little information on translation activity in this period, since Achaemenian literary and religious literature in Old Persian is thought to have often been transmitted orally and there are just a small number of multi-lingual inscriptions that have survived the passage of time. Therefore, in Karimi-Hakkak's opinion, the dearth of information would not allow us to carry out any comprehensive analysis of trends or patterns of translation in the Achaemenian era (p. 513). The same holds true for translation activities during the time of the Parthian Empire (247 BCE – 224 CE). According to Boyce (1983, p. 1151), nothing has survived of the literature of the Parthian period in its original form to the present time. Boyce believes that one reason for the lack of extant Parthian literature is that it was not transmitted in written form. She explains that our knowledge about Parthian literature is thus mainly through recensions, redactions or partial translations in Middle Persian, Georgian, Persian and Arabic which were all rendered several centuries later. According to Boyce (1983), Persian and Arabic redactions of the lost Middle Persian *Khodāy-nāmag*, and notably Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāme*, probably owe something directly to the old Iranian epic tradition of the Parthian period. She also believes that the surviving Persian and Georgian versions of the romance of *Vis o Rāmin* have been most probably derived from a Parthian original, once more through the medium of a Middle Persian redaction (pp. 1157-8).

At the time of the Sasanian Empire (224 – 652 CE) Middle Persian, a direct descendant of Old Persian, came to replace Parthian as the official language of the Persian Empire. Patronage plays a very crucial role in different stages of the history of translation in Iran, and the Sasanian era is no exception. The Sasanian Kings were generous patrons of scientists and translators, and translating from Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit into Middle Persian was a common practice in the Sasanian era. The Sasanian king Shāpūr the First, for instance, commissioned many translations from Greek and Indian into Middle Persian to be used in compiling religious texts (Karimi-Hakkak 1999, p. 514). Another Sasanian monarch, Khosrow the First, who was the founder of one of the greatest intellectual centers of the time, Jondi Shāpūr, had a famous translator and physician, Borzūyeh, translate *The Panchatantra* from Sanskrit into Persian (see Karimi-Hakkak 1998, p. 514; Durant 1950, p. 139). The most renowned pre-Islamic translator, however, is Paul the Persian, who translated several scientific and philosophical Greek works, most notably Aristotle's *Logic*, into the Pahlavi language. It is noteworthy that the Arabic version of Aristotle's *Logic* was later produced on the basis of Paul's translation (Fāni as cited in Khojasteh-Rahimi & Sha'bāni 2010). Borzūyeh's translation of *The Panchatantra* was also later translated into Arabic as *Kalīleh va Demneh*.

Although we know for certain that Sasanian literature was extensive and many works of other languages were translated into Middle Persian, unfortunately, we know very little about translation in practice or the strategies and methods that were used by translators at that time, because, as Durant (1950) asserts, of the extensive Middle Persian literature from the Sasanian period only some 600,000 words have survived, nearly all dealing with religion (p. 139). *Vidivdād*, *Nirangestān*, and *Hirbedestān* are among the oldest surviving middle Persian translations of Avestan religious texts that are believed to have been originally translated around the 3rd or 5th centuries because they share several archaic traces with the Manichean Middle Persian and with the Middle Persian of the inscriptions. Cantera (2015) notes that the general

organization of these translated texts is remarkably similar and a consistent word-by-word translation technique is used in all of them; therefore, he argues that the existence of an academic school of translators in the Sasanian era must be assumed.

3.2. Translation in Medieval Iran (651 – 1789)

After the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the Moslem Conquest of Persia in the mid-7th century, the Arab conquerors imposed Arabic as the language of official business onto occupied Persia. For over a thousand years after this incident, translation practice in Iran was predominantly confined to translating between Persian and Arabic. Alongside the mainstream translation movement between Persian and Arabic, however, there were also occasional texts that were translated from other languages such as Greek, Syriac, and Sanskrit into Persian or Arabic in Iran, for instance, Birūnī's 11th century Arabic translation of *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, a compilation of Indian sutras in Sanskrit (see Lawrence 1989, p. 285). Over the first two centuries after the fall of the Sasanian Empire, the Arabic script replaced the Pahlavi script which was used for writing Middle Persian texts, and Middle Persian underwent significant changes in its evolution into New Persian. During these years a number of significant works originally written in Middle Persian or translated from other languages into Middle Persian were translated into Arabic, mainly by translators of Iranian origin under the patronage of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Karimi-Hakkak (1998) claims that translation activities performed by Iranian translators were primarily aimed at preserving pre-Islamic culture through translating the ancient Iranian texts into Arabic. He refers to Ibn al-Muqaffā' as one of the most celebrated and prolific Persian translators who had rendered many important Middle Persian texts, including Borzūyeh's translation of *The Panchatantra* into Arabic. According to Malayeri (2002, p. 125), the most comprehensive list of Iranian translators translating from Middle Persian into Arabic after the Arab conquest of Iran could be found in Ibn-Nadim's bibliographical work *Ketāb Al-Fehrest*, which includes names and works of 16 translators.

It took about two hundred years for Iranians to start producing texts in New Persian. The earliest existing documents in New Persian are translations, almost all from Arabic. According to Karimi-Hakkak (1998), under the courtly patronage of the newly established Iranian kingdoms at the beginning of the 9th century, works originating in different languages began to appear in Persian, often through previous translations in Arabic. These translations set the standard of admissibility of the Arabic lexicon into Persian and provided a model of prose writing in Persian which remained operative for many centuries (p. 515). The oldest existing prose composed in New Persian is believed to be the translation of al-Tabari's *Tārīkh al-Rosol wa al-Molūk* (The History of the Prophets and Kings) by Bal'ami, which was commissioned by the Samanid Monarch, Mansūr ibn Nūh, in the mid-10th century. Bal'ami's translation, in Dabashi's (2012, p. 59) words, "displays all the enduring notes of what will happen in Persian literature for the next millennium, just like the notes of a prelude in a musical composition". The story of the emergence of New Persian is a good indication of how translation could play an innovative role in shaping the core of a fledgling literary system. The nascent Persian prose texts of the Samanid period (820-998 CE), including early translations into Persian, as Kamshad (1996) maintains, have an extremely simple, straightforward and laconic style which closely resembles the Persian spoken by contemporary educated Iranians. According to Kamshad (1996), during the Samanid and the early Ghaznavid periods, Persian was the official language of science, administration, and Sufism in the Iranian kingdoms; however, with the increase of the political influence of the Abbasid Caliphate on the Ghaznavid court and considering the status of the Arabic language as the lingua franca of the Muslim world, the administrative language of the Ghaznavid court reverted to Arabic again toward the end of the 11th century (p. 5). It is interesting to note that almost all Iranian scholars and authors of this period were bilingual, writing in Arabic and Persian.

The translation methods during the tenth to twelfth centuries in Iran were basically functional and pragmatic in nature (cf. Karimi-Hakkak 1998, p. 515)

Typically, texts were subjected to a variety of changes; they were simplified, annotated, abridged, illustrated with pictures and diagrams, amended through sequels, or otherwise altered to suit the specific needs of the patron and the new readership.

According to Karimi-Hakkak (1998), there are also many philosophical and scientific works in Persian which are of an indeterminate character, i.e. bilingual or hybrid texts as well as translations with many annotations or Arabic texts with commentaries in Persian.

The Mongol conquest of Iran in the 13th century gradually put an end to the influence of the Arabic speaking neighbors of the country and, as a result, led to the reduction of works composed in the Arabic language and the increase in works originally written in Persian. One good example for this tendency is Shams-e Qays-e Rāzi's *Mo'jam*, a work of literary criticism that was originally composed in Arabic and, following the Mongol invasion, rewritten in Persian. In the preface to his book, Qays-e Rāzi claims that he had rewritten it in Persian on the request of many Persian poets and literati who did not possess sufficient knowledge of Arabic and were questioning the rationale behind composing a work on Persian poetic prosody in Arabic, because in their view such a work would be useful neither for the Arab audience, who had no familiarity with Persian language, nor for the Persian readers (see Shams-e Qays-e Rāzi 1232/1935, pp. 17-18). The significance of *Mo'jam*, as Chalisova (2009, p.153) aptly notes, lies in the fact that, by rewriting his own composition in Persian, Shams-e Qays-e Rāzi made a new step to 'domesticate' the Arab literary theory and introduce some important aspects of Arabic poetics, which had previously been unexplored in Persian books of prosody, to his Persian speaking scholarly colleagues. The tradition of translation from Arabic into Persian, however, resurfaced again in the early 16th century with the establishment of the Safavid Empire (1501-1722) in Iran. According to Nāji Nasrābādi (2001), during the

Safavid period, when Shi'i Islam became the official religion of Iran, many Iranian scholars set out to translate various religious and jurisprudential texts from Arabic into Persian to promulgate Shi'ism. At that time, translators tended to render free translations of the Arabic texts; nevertheless, they were exact in transferring the content and if they added anything to their translations, they would do their best to clearly differentiate it from the original idea of the source texts by using statements such as "*the narrator says*" or "*the translator says*" (p. 107). The tendency for more or less free translations in 16th century Iran after the decline of the influence of Arabs on the country is somehow similar to the tradition of "*le belle infidèle*" in 17th century France, where the newly emerging French language gained a sufficient degree of confidence to produce free translations complying with French linguistic and literary norms (see Chapter 1, pp. 12-13).

3.3. Translation in Modern Iran (1789 – 2013)

The early 19th century witnessed a drastic turning point in the history of translation in Iran. Following their humiliating defeat by the numerically inferior but technologically superior Russian forces in the Russo-Persian wars (1804-1828), the Iranians started to realize that over a thousand years of having limited political exchange had kept them technologically inferior. Therefore, the defeat in the Russo-Persian war served as a wakeup call for the Iranians to resort to translation as the main means to compensate for their weaknesses. Abbās Mirzā (1789-1833), the Qajar crown prince of Persia, played a very influential role in the initiation of the new translation movement by commissioning the first translations from modern European languages into Persian and dispatching a number of Iranian students to Western Europe for education, some of whom later became involved in translation activities. It was also during his reign that lithographic printing was for the first time introduced into Iran. Abbās Mirzā's main subjects of interest for translation were industry, medical sciences, the military, and, to some extent, history. According to Loloi (2015, p.311),

although the first translations in the Qajar period were of an educational and historical nature, soon other kinds of prose translation gradually gained ground, particularly in the form of European novels and plays, mainly from French. Nāji Nasrābādi (2001, p. 107) claims that the first book translated from a language other than Arabic into Persian in this period is *Havādeth-Nāmeḥ* (*The Record of Events*), which was translated in 1805 under the commission of Abbās Mirzā by Mohammad Rāzi Tabrizi from Ottoman Turkish. *Tāriḫ-e Eskandar* (*The History of Alexander the Great*), translated in 1812 by James Campbell, Abbās Mirzā's physician, is believed to be the first work which was directly translated from a major European language into Persian (Nowrūz Morādi 2002, p. 3). According to Afshār (2003), the first translations from the European languages into Persian were heavily influenced by the thousand-year-old tradition of translating from Arabic. Translators were doing their best to render the Western idioms and expressions into their commonly used Persian equivalents in order to make the translation fluent and understandable to the target audience. Almost all the translators during the reign of Abbās Mirzā, Mohammad Shah (1808-1848), and Nāser al-Din Shah (1831-1896) deemed it necessary to follow the translating tradition of their predecessors, a tradition which insisted on faithfulness to the sense rather than words of the original and favored so-called 'free translations' (p. 11). Afshār (2003) asserts that literary translators even allowed themselves the freedom to alter European proper nouns into Persian ones for ease of reading; for instance, in translating Comtesse de Ségur's *Mémoires d'un âne*, E'temād-al-Saltaneh changed all the French names into Persian and included some Persian verses, proverbs, and culture-specific expressions in his translation (p. 12). During this period, many new ideas and literary genres, such as novel, short story, and drama, were introduced to Iranian readers by translators. Nāji Nasrābādi (2001) categorizes the translators in the early Qajar period into three groups:

- 1) European experts residing in Iran for political, military, or scientific reasons;

- 2) Iranian students who had been sent to European countries for education and learnt European languages during their stay there; and
- 3) Scholars and translators who were not familiar with European languages and were continuing the old tradition of translating from Arabic into Persian.

The establishment in 1851 of Dār al-fonūn, the first polytechnic college in Iran, gave momentum to the translation movement, since a considerable number of its teaching staff were European and some of its students were sent to Europe for further education, many of whom became involved in translation activities upon their return; for example, Mirzā Malkom Khān translated for Zatti, an Austrian instructor in the college, but also taught mathematics and geometry. There were also a large number of students studying languages at Dār al-fonūn. In 1858 thirty-five students were learning French and twelve English or Russian (Gurney and Nabavi 1993, pp. 664-666). In 1871 a state-run office called Dār al-Tarjomeh (House of Translation) was founded in the capital to organize and supervise governmental translation activities. According to Kowsari (2010), the translation movement in late 19th century Iran continued in two different directions, one led by the Qajar court and the other by expatriate intellectuals. The works being translated in the courtly House of Translation generally were not of any cultural significance or literary value, but translations produced by expatriate intellectuals in Europe and the Ottoman Empire had a decisive role in enlightenment of the Iranian people and expediting the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (p. 39). One can notice a major change in the style of translating in the beginning of the 20th century after the Iranian Constitutional Revolution: the language of translation started to become distanced from the ostentatiously literary style of writing which was common in the Qajar period and gradually became close to the simple colloquial style of the spoken language of the ordinary people. The new translation style turned into a general model for other textual productions in the Persian language in the future. The Persian prose style of Mirzā Habib Isfahāni's hugely successful translation of James Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji*

Baba of Ispahan, for instance, as Kamshad (1996) observes, is still followed by modern Persian writers. Kamshad describes the translation as one of the finest Persian compositions of the 20th century, conforming to the best stylistic canons of Persian prose in terms of fluency, conciseness, and maturity of expression (p. 27).

From 1925 to 1941, during the reign of Rezā Shah, the first monarch of the Pahlavi dynasty, major educational reforms were effected in Iran in which translation played a decisive role. The first university in Iran, the University of Tehran, was established in 1934, and the number of students sent abroad on scholarships increased considerably. The establishment of Farhangestān, the first academy of Persian language and literature, in 1935, apparently in imitation of the Académie Française, was another major development of this period. This was an attempt, in line with Rezā Shah Pahlavi's language purification policies, to remove words of foreign origin (mostly Arabic and French words) from Persian language. During its six years as an active organization, Farhangestān adopted over 3500 Persian words to replace foreign ones. To this end, the Academy not only involved itself in coining new pure Persian terms or reviving older ones, to replace many Arabic and European terms already in use, but also in creating pure Persian terms for new concepts (see Jazayeri 1999, p. 275; also Jazayeri 1966, p. 93). According to Fāni (as cited in Khojasteh-Rahimi & Sha'bāni 2010), the establishment of the University of Tehran contributed to more systematic and purposeful selection of the works to be translated in accordance with the needs of Iranian society. As regards literary translation in this period, Fāni notices a shift of taste away from translating escape literature, as was common throughout the Qajar period, to translating more serious literary works. He attributes this change of taste to the emergence of a new educated middle class in Iranian society that took the place of the Qajar courtiers and elites as the main audience of translated literature. Fāni continues that almost all the key Iranian literary figures of that time we know about today, including Sa'id Nafisi, Mojtabā Minavi, Rashid Yāsami, and Nasrallāh Falsafī, turned to translating, because they had the feeling that Iranian society called for

translations (*ibid*). According to Amir-Faryār (as cited in Khojasteh-Rahimi & Sha'bāni 2010, p. 47), many works that had been already translated in the Qajar period were translated again into Persian during Rezā Shah's reign. The focus of literary translation in this period was predominantly on French literature. There are also a small number of Russian literary works that were most likely re-translated from their French versions into Persian.

According to Fāni (as cited in Khojasteh-Rahimi & Sha'bāni 2010), Iran in the 1940s witnessed "an explosion of translations": the number of books translated just in this decade exceeded the total number of books translated over the preceding 130 years. During this period, under the influence of the leftist movements, works of Russian literature were brought into the center of attention and almost all the works of Maxim Gorky were translated into Persian. There was at the same time a trend to translate political literature, including works from Stefan Zweig, Anatole France, and Jack London, presumably to raise the social and political awareness of Iranian readers (p. 48).

Iran turned into a playground for rivalry between the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, amidst the Cold War in the 1950s. The establishment of the Tehran office of the Franklin Book Programs, Inc., in 1954 was a response to the increasing cultural and translational activities of the leftists and Marxists in Iran that were supported by the communist Soviet Union. Franklin Book Programs was "an American non-profit corporation seeking to aid development of indigenous book publishing in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America" (Smith 2000, p. 187). Franklin's main focus was on assisting the publication of translations from American books into local languages; however, it occasionally aided the development of reading and the establishment of indigenous publishing. During 25 years of activity in Iran, from 1954 to 1979, Franklin published about 800 books, most of them translations of American works, but also a few from British and French sources, and about 50 books originally written in Persian. The books covered a wide range of different

subject matters including literature, children's books, history, science, psychology, Persian and Islamic studies, philosophy, and art (p. 188). Another non-profit organization which was active in the field of publication of translated books in Iran was the Institute for Translation and Publication of Books (Bongāh-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketāb), founded in 1953 by Ehsan Yarshater under the aegis of Mohammad Rezā Shah Pahlavi's court. The historical significance of such organizations, as Karimi-Hakkak (1998) observes, lies in the standards they established "to ensure authenticity, accuracy and editorial supervision" (p. 520). According to Āzarang (2010), for the first time in Iran, highly skilled translation editors were employed at Franklin and The Institute for Translation and Publication of Books that compared the translations with their original texts, in some cases even word by word. They would not approve a translation for publication unless they made sure that the translation adequately corresponded with its original text. The exercise of this editorial policy was a very influential factor in evolving the prominent style of translating in the country from the 'free' translation style of the Qajar period to a completely different style which is known as 'the exact translation' (p. 53). The editorial policy that Franklin made to ensure the accuracy of the translations published under its supervision also, however, had some adverse consequences. According to Deyhimi (as cited in Khojasteh-Rahimi & Sha'bāni 2010, p. 49), since the publishing houses had too much reliance on the translation editors for improving the quality of translations, they did not practice enough care in selecting skillful translators. This is a problem that still persists in the Iranian publishing industry.

The replacement of French as the most translated language in Iran with English, and the inauguration of translation programs at the university level, are the other major developments in the field of translation since the 1960s.

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, translation activities in Iran experienced a period of stagnation which lasted for more than a decade. There are several reasons that contributed to the marginalization of translation

activities in Iran in the 1980s. Shortly after the Islamic Revolution, the ideological regime initiated a cultural revolution which involved a series of measures to purge the universities of pro-western students and lecturers. During the Cultural Revolutions (1980-1983), all the Iranian universities were shut down for three years and many professors and lecturers were expelled from the universities. The Cultural Revolution was followed by a massive brain drain of intellectuals, professionals, and scholars in different fields, including translation. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) had a very adverse effect on translation activities in Iran as well. As regards literary translation in Iran, for example, Farahzād (2011) notices that just a few number of new literary works were translated into Persian during wartime, and the literary translation activities were mainly limited to reprinting the old translations (often with minor or major revisions) or producing new translations of the works that had been already translated in the past. She explains that publishers were reluctant to offer translations of new works which were required to be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmi*) prior to publication and preferred reprinting old translations that had been already approved by the government. Furthermore, because of the restrictions imposed by war conditions, the government was not able to import foreign books, making it very difficult for translators and publishers to access new literary works (pp. 148-9). By the end of the Iran-Iraq war in the late 1980s, however, translation started booming again and gradually returned to its previous central position in the Iranian literary system.

Today, translation continues to play a seminal role in the development of culture and knowledge in Iran. According to the statistics released by *Khāneh-ye Ketāb* (House of Books), an Iranian NGO providing bibliographical information about books published in Iran, translations accounted for approximately 20

percent of the books published in Iran in the year 2011.⁷ The statistics indicate a significant increasing trend in the number of the published book titles translated into Persian during the past three decades in Iran from, 7665 translated titles in the 1980s to 15499 titles in the 1990s and 46261 titles in the first decade of the 21st century. In the year 2011 alone, 13282 translated books (including reprints) were published in Iran on different subjects, including language and literature (11.8%), religion (8.2%), art (5.5%), geography and history (2.9%), philosophy and psychology (9.4%), technology (21.2%), natural sciences (3.8%), social sciences (8.5%), children and youngsters (20.1%), education (0.3%), and miscellaneous (8.9%).

The cultural exchanges that take place between the Persian language and Western languages (predominantly English) through translation are not equal, meaning that the great majority of translations is from English to Persian. This unidirectional relationship, Solhjū (2008, p. 55) maintains, is telling of the heavy dependence of Iranian society on translation as a means to access intellectual and cultural products. According to Solhjū (2008), when Iranian society is in dire need of specific products which are obtainable merely through translation, then it is not surprising that the translator, as a person who has access to those products and is mediating the transfer of them into the society, will acquire an exceptionally high social status (p. 55). Translators in Iran are much more visible than their counterparts in the west: while having the name of the translator mentioned on the front cover of the book is not so usual in Europe and the United States, in Iran it will guarantee the sale of the translation if it is done by a renowned translator. Contrary to common practice in most of the countries of the world, where publishing houses select specific works for translation and retain translators or translation teams to translate them, often in Iran translators themselves select and translate works without the mediation of publishers, and

⁷ In the same year (2011) translation made up 2.5% of all publications in the UK, 3% in the US, over 12% in Germany, around 24% in Spain, and around 15% in France.

the good taste of translators in selecting works to translate may even earn them more professional credibility. Since Iran has not yet joined the Copyright Convention, if Iranian translators translate and publish works of foreign origin inside the country without seeking permission from their copyright holders, they would not be legally prosecuted for the infringement of intellectual property rights. In the absence of copyright and patent laws in Iran, there is constantly a fierce competition between translators to send their translations to market as soon as possible, especially when it comes to translating new books, because when a translator embarks on translating a new book, there is always the possibility of parallel efforts by other translators to translate the same work at the same time. Although multiple translations of the same work may be a rare phenomenon in many parts of the world today, it is not so unusual in Iran. In 2008, for example, *'The Secret'*, a best-selling self-improvement book written by the Australian writer Rohonda Byrne, was translated by more than 30 different translators into Persian. On another occasion in 2014, 20 different translations of *'And the Mountains Echoed'*, a novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini, became available in Persian in less than a year, and it is quite interesting that only two translators used exactly the same Persian words to render the title of the novel.

To make sure of the quality of translations, Iranian publishers sometimes follow the same procedure once used by Franklin and the Institute for Translation and Publication in the past, i.e. seeking help from professional translation editors. According to H. Panāhandeh, a well-known Iranian editor, translation editing, which involves comparing the translation with its original and making amendments if necessary, is the most demanded editing service in the Iranian publishing industry (Panāhandeh 2010, p.63). He believes that a reputable publishing house would never publish a translation without assessing it in the first place. Sometimes, the assessment leads the publisher to the conclusion that the translation must be edited. Panāhandeh claims that there are some publishers in Iran who find translation assessment really important, but

unfortunately the majority of publishers do not care about it, because it costs them a lot of money and they are only interested in making more profit. He says:

Occasionally, I am being asked to assess some translated books upon the request of the publishers. The publishers want to know if the translations are publishable and, unfortunately, the majority of the translations I am being asked to assess are not so; therefore, I often have to reluctantly let the publishers know that I have arrived at a negative decision. As I have reiterated before, just a small number of publishers do care about these considerations and most of them do not care at all. You can see their shoddy books on the shelves in bookstores; the main problem with these translations is the translators' incompetence in both source and target languages or their inability to fluently convey the meaning in Persian. (Panāhandeh 2010, p. 64)

To obtain a license for publishing, Iranian publishers are obliged to send a copy of the book they are going to publish to the Censorship Office at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to be examined by official censors previous to publication, and translated books are no exception to this general rule. According to Abbas (2012), the censorship of the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the most pervasive and aggressive in the world, going far beyond political concerns to include religious, social, and moral considerations as well: "Censorship corrupts all walks of life in Iran: politics and journalism, the internet and the cinema, visual arts and literature, dress code and women's voices – even children's stories" (p. 73). Following the examination of the translation, the censor makes comments and suggests modifications and sends the translation back to the publisher to make the required amendments or revisions in it. Should a translator not carefully take the ideological concerns of the government into account when translating a book, the publisher may run the risk of being denied a license for publishing. To meet the expectations of the censors at the Ministry of Culture, translators sometimes have to apply various manipulative strategies, ranging from large scale omissions (e.g. omitting a whole chapter of the book) to small modifications at the lexical level (e.g. replacing an offensive word with a less offensive word). Although the censorship imposed on translations by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic

Guidance often makes it difficult for translators and publishers to do their jobs, it does not hinder them from publishing new translations, because as Haddadian-Moghaddam (2014) explains, they have learnt how to conform and live with censorship and negotiate with relevant authorities in the Ministry (p. 121). For example, instead of confronting the state censors, translators and publishers bypass them through exercising different methods of self-censorship.

Translation plays a very prominent role in the Islamic Republic of Iran as a vehicle for the promotion of its ideological agendas; that is why the Iranian government has always been actively involved in translation policy making in educational environments. During the Iranian Cultural Revolution in 1980, the Committee of Sketching and Planning Foreign Languages (*komiteh-ye tarh o barnāmeḥ-rizi-ye zabānhā-ye khāreji*) that was responsible for preparing curricula for teaching foreign languages in Iranian schools and universities prepared a report on the order of the Headquarters of the Cultural Revolution⁸ (*setād-e enqelāb-e farhangi*) in which it recommended that the foreign languages and literature departments, namely English, French, German and Russian, be maintained in Iranian universities. The committee mentioned two main reasons for its recommendation, which shows the significance of the status of translation in the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran: “(1) to gain scientific and technological independence from the West; and (2) to translate Islamic ideology into foreign languages and export this revolutionary Islam to various parts of the world” (Borjian 2013, p. 73). Addressing the members of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, during a speech in 1983, the first Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, himself emphasized the necessity of learning foreign languages by students in Iranian universities and religious schools and the importance of translation as a means to export the Islamic ideology to other parts of the world:

⁸ The headquarters of the Cultural Revolution were established in 1980 under the decree of the Ayatollah Khomeini, then Supreme Leader of Iran, for Islamizing the Iranian educational system.

In the past, there was no need for learning a foreign language. Today, however, learning foreign languages should be included in school curricula ... Today is not like yesterday, when our voice could not reach beyond the national boundary. Today, we can stay in Iran but publicize [our ideology] and export our revolution to other parts of the world in different languages.

(Ayatollah Khomeini; quoted in Borjian 2013, p. 71)

In 1989 the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution finally prepared ideologically driven curricula for foreign languages, literature, and translation programs offered at Iranian universities which are still in effect at the present time.

Outside the realm of academia, however, the Iranian government has been merely passively involved in translation policy making by exercising censorship over translated books or providing limited financial support for certain publishing companies for translating a number of ideologically motivated texts. An attempt has been made in recent years (2006) by a newly established governmental research institute known as the Research Institute of Translation Studies (*pazhūheshkadeh-ye motāle'āt-e tarjomeh*) to change the situation and make the government more involved in translation policy making at national level. Hussein Mollānazar, the founder of the institute, describes its primary objectives as follows:

- Initiating a translation movement in Iran and bringing order to the chaotic state of translation in the country;
- Learned and calculated selection of the basic books in different disciplines and introducing them to different institutes to receive translation orders;
- Providing a fruitful ground for translation-related research and training skilled translators;
- Constructing a data bank of translated works to prevent repetitive and unnecessary translations (cf. Mollānazar quoted in Fakhri 2008, p. 10).

The number of public and private universities and institutes of higher education offering Bachelor's degree programs in (English) Translation in Iran has significantly increased during the last two decades. Today, there are

thousands of Iranian students studying English Translation in over 150 public and private universities across the country. It seems that the recent mushrooming of translation schools in the country, rather than being a result of any carefully articulated policy to respond to the needs of society for translation services, is instead an attempt to alleviate the pressure of the ever-increasing young population seeking university education, because most of the newly established translation schools severely suffer from the lack of adequate basic infrastructure such as resourceful libraries and databases and experienced teaching staff.

Although a considerable number of students have graduated over the years from translation schools in Iran, almost none of them have been successful as a professional literary translator. The fact that the majority of famous and successful literary translators in Iran are self-taught professionals has caused many to seriously doubt the effectiveness of the translation pedagogy and translation theories. According to Solhjū (2006, p. 14), most of the Iranian translators believe that not only are translation theories not helpful to translators, but they are counterproductive because they unreasonably take a lot of translators' energy and concentration. Solhjū (2006: 14) claims that some Iranian translators think that translation theories are merely useless fabrications of speculative translation scholars and linguists who have never been practically involved in translating themselves. But at the same time, there are other translators who feel ashamed because they think familiarity with translation theories is a must for translators, and they do not know enough about the theoretical aspects.

The Iranian Ministry of Higher Education mandates a single, unified curriculum for (English) translation programs offered at Iranian public or private universities. The curriculum, which was developed in 1989 and has not been updated or changed ever since, requires students to complete up to 137 credits over a four-year period (eight semesters) to be qualified for a B.A. degree in translation. The curriculum states that, at the end of the program the graduates are expected to successfully accomplish two main tasks: (a) to properly render

English scientific, technical, and literary texts and resources into Persian; and (b) to translate the Islamic theology and Iranian culture into English. The program, which is a mixture of English as a second language (ESL) and translation and interpretation training programs, comprises 120 credits of specialized courses relating to translation and interpretation, English and Persian language, and linguistics. Detailed information about the specialized courses in the program is available in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. The Curricular Content of the English Translation Program in Iranian Universities (Specialized Courses)

Components	English Language (56 credits)	Reading Comprehension (12 credits), English Grammar (8 credits), English conversation (8 credits), Advanced Writing (2 credits), An Introduction to English Literature (4 credits), Study Skills (2 credits), English Simple Prose Texts (2 credits), English Simple Poems (2 credits), Oral Reproduction of Stories (4 credits), Letter Writing (2 credits), Second Language Teaching Methodology (4 credits), Testing Language Skills (2 credits), Essay Writing (2 credits), Reading Comprehension of Journalistic Texts (2 credits)
	Translation and Interpretation (46 credits)	Principles and Methodology of Translation (2 credits), Translation of Simple Texts (2 credits), Idioms and Expressions in Translation (2 credits), Research Methodology (4 credits), Study of the Translated Islamic Texts (4 credits), Advanced Translation (4 credits), Translation of Economic Texts (2 credits), Translation of Political Texts (2 credits), Legal Translation (4 credits), Translation of Journalistic Texts (4 credits), Interpretation (6 credits), Audio-visual translation (2 credits), Individual Translation (4 credits), Theoretical Principles of Translation (2 credits), Translation of Literary Texts (2 credits)
	Linguistics (12 credits)	Phonology (2 credits), General Linguistics (4 credits), Lexicology (2 credits), Contrastive Analysis (4 credits)
	Persian Language (6 credits)	The Construction of Persian Language (2 credits), An Introduction to Contemporary Persian Literature (2 credits), Persian Writing (2 credits),

The curriculum of the translation program in Iranian universities has drawn much criticism from Iranian translation teachers and scholars over the past two decades. As regards the curricular content of the program, for example, Ahmadi-Safā & Amrā'i (2012) claim that it does not sufficiently cover areas of

competence desirable in graduates from the program. To support their claim, they assess the appropriateness of the curricular content of the program against the following list of competences which, according to Kelly (2005, pp. 32-33), are usually expected from graduates of translator training programs:

- **Communicative and textual competence:** i.e. active and passive skills in the two languages involved together with awareness textual and discourse conventions in the cultures involved.
- **Cultural and intercultural competence:** i.e. encyclopedic knowledge of both the cultures involved as well as values, myths, perceptions, beliefs, behaviors and textual representations of them.
- **Subject area competence:** i.e. basic knowledge of subject areas the future translator will/may work in.
- **Professional and instrumental competence:** i.e. knowledge of how to use documentary resources of all kinds (word-processing, desktop publishing, data bases, Internet, email, etc.) as well as basic notions for managing professional activity (contracts, tenders, billing, tax, ethics, professional associations).
- **Psycho-physiological competence:** i.e. self-concept, self-confidence, attention/ concentration, memory.
- **Interpersonal competence:** i.e. the ability to work with other professionals involved in the translation process (translators, revisers, documentary researchers, terminologists, project managers, layout specialists), and other actors (clients, initiators, authors, users, subject area experts).
- **Strategic competence:** i.e. organizational and planning, problem identification and problem-solving, monitoring, self-assessment and revision skills.

At the end of the assessment, Ahmadi-Safā & Amrā'i (2012, p. 44) arrive at the conclusion that while the curriculum, to some degree, covers the communicative

and textual competence required for translators, its main focus remains on developing source language (English) competence, and target language competence is taken for granted and largely neglected. The necessity of the inclusion of more courses in the curriculum to improve target language (Persian) competence in students is an issue which has also been emphasized by many other scholars, such as Khazā'ifār (1999) and Mir'emādi (2003). Regarding cultural and intercultural competence, Ahmadi-Safā & Amrā'i (2012, p. 45) notice that the curriculum has merely focused on the literary aspects of the languages involved and the other cultural elements have not received the attention they deserve. They also notice that only three courses of 8 credits (i.e. Translation of Economic Texts (2 credits), Translation of Political Texts (2 credits), and Legal Translation (4 credits)) in the curriculum directly deal with a specific subject area; as a result, they strongly recommend adding more courses covering diverse subject areas such as engineering, sciences, and medicine to the curricular content of the translation program. As for the last four competences mentioned by Kelly (2005), i.e. professional and instrumental, psycho-physiological, interpersonal, and strategic competences, they seem to have received very little, if any, attention in the curriculum of the translation training program in Iran (see Ahmadi-Safā & Amrā'i 2012, pp. 45-47).

In addition to the curricular content of the translation training program at Iranian universities, some criticism has also been directed at the aims and objectives and the duration of the program, as well as the sequencing of courses and course prerequisites. Many translation scholars in Iran believe that the inclusion of elements of English as a second language (ESL) in the curriculum of the translation program has created ambiguity in the identity and the aims and objectives of the program. They argue that too much time and effort is expended during the translation training program in teaching English to the entrants, while they are supposed to be already sufficiently familiar with the languages involved in the program through the language education that they have received at pre-university levels. They consequently find the roots of the problem of the poor

English of the entrants in the low quality of language education at Iranian secondary schools (see Mirza Ebrahim Tehrani 2003, p. 89; Khazā'ifār 1999, p. 8; Ghazizadeh & Jamalimanesh 2010, p. 92). Some scholars, such as Mirzā Ebrāhīm Tehrāni (2003, p. 90) and Mir'emādi (2003, p. 60), believe that a four-year program simply is not sufficient for developing the desired competences in translation trainees, and thus it had better be extended by a few more years. As for the sequencing of courses, Qonsūli (1991, p. 5) questions the rationality of offering practical translation courses in the curriculum before translation trainees have acquired adequate theoretical knowledge about translating.

The translation teaching methodology, as Karimi-Hakkak (1998, p. 520) reports, is still fairly traditional in most of the classrooms and typically involves the actual practice of translation, “with little discussion of the theoretical underpinnings or the principles governing the process of text production”. Khazā'ifār (1999, p. 5; see also Ghazizadeh & Jamalimanesh 2010, p. 93) describes the scenario that occurs most often during translation classes at Iranian universities as follows:

The teacher assigns a text for the student to translate individually at home or in groups in the classroom. Then the students read out their translations in the classroom and the teacher approves or rejects the proposed translations comparing them with his/her own translation or, occasionally, an already published translation of the text [as a standard]. The teacher often opts for literal translation rather than communicative translation, and naturally, the students will follow the teacher's guidelines. Through a literal translation, the students show the teacher that they have grasped the meaning of every single word and have not missed any details. It is also easier for the teacher to assess a literal translation, since in that case, the focus is shifted on the formal correspondence rather than dynamic equivalence.

The selection of the source texts to be translated in translation classes at Iranian universities, as Mirzā Ebrāhīm Tehrāni (2003, pp. 91-92) reports, is completely arbitrary, merely based on the subjective experience of translation teachers, whereas the level of difficulty of the source text should be carefully determined prior to their selection through application of proper statistical methods. Based on the results of a questionnaire administered by Riazi & Davoodi (2008) to 39

translation teachers in 9 different universities in Iran, the majority of translation teachers at Iranian universities prefer to use essay-type translation tests to measure the translation competence of their students. According to Riazi & Davoodi (2008), translation teachers who participated in the survey mention accuracy of rendering the source text message, grammaticality of the translation, avoiding unnecessary translation shifts, and attention to the genre and register of the source text as the most important criteria that they use in evaluating the students' translations. The questionnaire also reveals that the majority of translation teachers in Iran are not familiar with translation theories.

In general, the expertise of the lecturers who teach translation courses at Iranian universities is not directly related to translation studies, and they usually come from adjacent disciplines such as linguistics, literary studies, or second language teaching. Apparently in response to the demand for better trained translation instructors, the first master programs in Translation Studies were initiated in 2001 at two Iranian universities. At the moment there are 14 universities in the country offering a master program in Translation Studies. In 2011 Allāmeḥ Tabātabā'i University launched a Ph.D. program in Translation Studies and the first group of graduates have received their degrees in 2015. Currently, there are three academic journals in Iran that exclusively publish articles in various fields of translation and interpreting: *Motāle'āt-e Tarjomeh (The Journal of Translation Studies)*, which is published in Tehran, and *Motarjem (The Translator)* and *Motāle'āt-e Zabān va Tarjomeh (The Journal of Language and Translation Studies)*, which are published in Mashhad.

3.4. Concluding Remark

Since the focus of the current dissertation at its second stage, which involves a case study, is geared to a local problem in Iran, this chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the historical, socio-cultural, and educational context of translation in that country. In the course of the chapter, major developments of translation throughout the history of Iran from the antiquity to

the present time were investigated with a special emphasis on turning points, such as the Arab conquest of Iran, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which have given rise to different translation movements. The chapter thus provides an essential part of the framework for the discussions about the evaluative behavior of the (academic) translation assessors in Iran in the following chapters.