

FROM ANTIQUITY
TO MODERNITY

STUDIES ON MIDDLE EASTERN
AND ASIAN SOCIETIES

Asia in the Mirror



*Self-Representations, Self-Narratives,
and Perception of the Other*

EDITED BY

Alessandro Achilli, Fiorenzo Iuliano,
Angela Daiana Langone,
Emma Lupano, Valentina Serra

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Jamsheed K. Choksy
General Editor

Vol. 3

The From Antiquity to Modernity series is part of the Peter Lang Humanities list.

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Alessandro Achilli, Fiorenzo Iuliano,
Angela Daiana Langone, Emma Lupano, and
Valentina Serra (eds.), with the assistance of
Mittal M. Trivedi

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.
The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography;
detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

The volume is a key output of the “Asia in the Mirror” project funded by Fondazione di Sardegna (2021) and conducted at the Department of Literature, Languages and Cultural Heritage of the University of Cagliari, Italy.



Cover images: Erasmus Quellinus II, Jan Van Kessel the Elder - Allegory of Asia;
Kitagawa Utamaro - Takashima Ohisa Using Two Mirrors to Observe Her Coiffure.
Cover design by Peter Lang Group AG

ISSN 2328-9236 | ISSN 2328-9244 (online)

ISBN 978-3-0343-5872-9 (print)

ISBN 978-3-0343-5873-6 (E-PDF)

ISBN 978-3-0343-5874-3 (E-Pub)

DOI 10.3726/b23295



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Published by Peter Lang Publishing Inc., New York, USA
info@peterlang.com - www.peterlang.com

This publication has been peer reviewed.

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The Literary Movement of Translation in the United Arab Emirates.

Some Remarks on the Kalima Project

ANGELA DAIANA LANGONE

إن الجلال صدق للفكر النبيل

—LONGINUS ('ABD ALLĀH 2009: 105)

Introduction

In 2007, the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage launched *Mašrūʿ Kalima li-l-tarǧama* (the Kalima Translation Project, where *kalima* means “word”) which aims to translate into Arabic hundreds of high-quality works from all over the world. An important purpose of the project is to revive the art of translation in the Arab world and to revitalize the so-called Golden Age of translation, which occurred during the Abbasid dynasty, especially during the reign of Al-Maʾmūn in the eighth century, when the translation movement was at its peak. So, in some ways, the Kalima project aspires to become the third largest consciously organized translation movement in the Arab world—the first two being the movement of the so-called Bayt al-Ḥikma [The House of Wisdom] in the Abbasid Baghdad in the Middle Age and the so-called Nahḍa [Renaissance or Awakening] period, which happened specifically in Cairo and Beirut during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Just three years after the start of the project, Nassar (2010) analyzes this translation movement in its aspects of distribution, finance, and administration, applying the SWOT¹ matrix, which is a tool for evaluating the strategic position of organizations of many kinds. From another point of view, Kesseiri and Bani Hashem (2013) investigate techniques and strategies used by the Kalima project to assess and guarantee the quality of translations, while Brown (2010) questions the reception of these translated texts outside the narrow circle of scholars and advanced students.

What are the guiding principles for selecting the works to be translated? Who are the most translated authors? Which literature is most frequently drawn upon in translations? And why? In short, to borrow the words of Even-Zohar's influential paper (1990), what is the position of translated literature within the polysystem of the Arab Gulf?

These questions prompted me to seek answers in the archives of the Kalima project that are available on its official website.²

Numbers and Statistics

The database shows 1,416 publications in total; if we therefore consider 16.5 years of activity, the average number of books published is around 86 annually (rounded up), somewhat less than Kalima's declared objective of publishing 100 new titles per year. In fact, the website is not always up to date, as previously pointed out by Benmessaoud and Buzelin, according to whom "the extent to which the Kalima program has lived up to its stated target is not clear," thus highlighting "a big problem that plagues research on translation into and from Arabic, namely the absence of accurate and current bibliographic data" (Benmessaoud and Buzelin 2018, 173). Therefore, all the data mentioned and processed in this article has been taken from the project's website and have also been supplemented by what we can consider secondary sources, in particular from Wikālat Anbā' al-Imārāt WAM (Emirates News Agency—WAM),³ the catalog of Maktabat Muḥammad bin Rāšid,⁴ and a number of Emirati newspapers such as *al-Ittiḥād*, *al-Bayān*, and *al-Ḥaliḡ*.

1 This is an acronym for the four parameters—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—examined by the technique.

2 "Kalima Homepage," Kalima, <<https://kalima.ae/>>, last consultation July 26, 2024.

3 "Homepage," Emirates News Agency—WAM, <https://wam.ae>, last consultation August 17, 2024.

4 "Catalog—MBRL," Mohammed Bin Rashid Library, <<https://www.mbml.ac/catalog>>, last consultation August 19, 2024.

It should be considered however that before 2007 there were already several institutions in the country translating works mainly from English and Persian, such as al-Mağma' al-Taḳāfi in Abu Dhabi, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi, and Mu'assasat Muḥammad bin Rāšid al-Maktūm in Dubai. Nevertheless, the two-year period 2008–2009, immediately after the start of the Kalima project, marks an impressive increase in the number of books translated in the United Arab Emirates, as shown in the table on the UNESCO database—Statistics and Index Translationum. Unfortunately, however, the latest index data concerning the evolution of translation in the UAE dates back to 2009 without any subsequent updates.⁵

On the Kalima project website, we can find twelve different categories:

1. *Atfāl wa-nāšī'a* (Children's and Young People's Literature);
2. *al-Adab* (Literature);
3. *al-Tārīḥ wa-l-ġūğurāfiyā wa-kutub al-sīra* (History, Geography and Biography books);
4. *al-Diyānāt* (Religions);
5. *al-Riḥlāt* (Travel Books);
6. *al-'Ulūm al-iğtimā'iyya* (Social Sciences);
7. *al-'Ulūm al-ṭabī'iyya wa-l-daḳīqa* (Natural and Exact Sciences);
8. *al-Falsafa wa-'ilm al-naḥs* (Philosophy and Psychology);
9. *al-Funūn wa-l-al'āb al-riyāḍiyya* (Arts and Sports);
10. *al-Luġāt* (Languages);
11. *al-Mā'arif al-āmma* (General Knowledge);
12. *Turāt wa-Tārīḥ al-Imārāt wa-l-Ḥaliğ al-'arabī* (Heritage and History of the Emirates and the Arabian Gulf).

Presented here is a pie chart (Figure 14.1 “Books translated in the Kalima project”) that visually demonstrates the distribution of the twelve categories.

“Literature” (which includes both literary works and essays on literary criticism) is the category with the highest number of translations (41%), followed significantly by “Children's literature” (19%) and the considerably smaller “History, Geography and Biography” (9%). Since children's literature is a literary genre (for more information on children's literature in the UAE, see Gjylbegaj 2019), we can safely say that 60% of the books translated under the Kalima

5 “Index translationum,” UNESCO Culture Sector, <<https://www.unesco.org/xtrans/bsstatexp.aspx>>, last consultation: July 20, 2024.

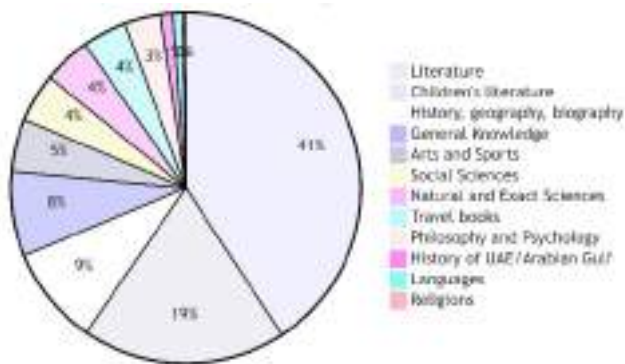


Figure 14.1. Books translated in the Kalima project.

project are literature related. It is also worth remarking that “Religions” remains the least translated category of texts.

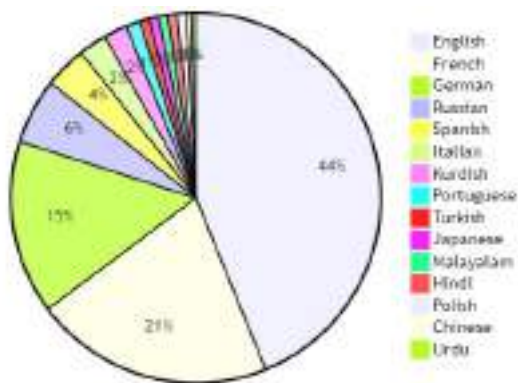


Figure 14.2. Source languages.

As can be seen from the second pie chart (Figure 14.2 “Source languages”), there are currently fifteen languages from which texts have been translated, namely Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Kurdish, Malayalam, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Urdu. English (44%) occupies the lion’s share of the source languages, followed by French (21%). Both languages also serve as pivot languages, especially in the first years of the project’s translation activities. Then, due to the importance of translating directly from the source language, the Kalima project signed cooperation agreements with some of the world’s leading scholarly foundations in order to develop the idea of translation

into a process that takes place between two international institutions. For example, Kalima signed agreements for German in March 2009 with Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, for Italian in July 2009 with the Carlo Alfonso Nallino Institute for the Orient, based in Rome (concerning Italian literature translated by the Kalima project into Arabic see Diana 2010, Elmenfi 2022, Abdelmontaleb 2023), for Japanese in May 2023 with the Japan Foundation and, most recently, an agreement for Chinese was reached with China International Communications Group (CICG) in July 2024.

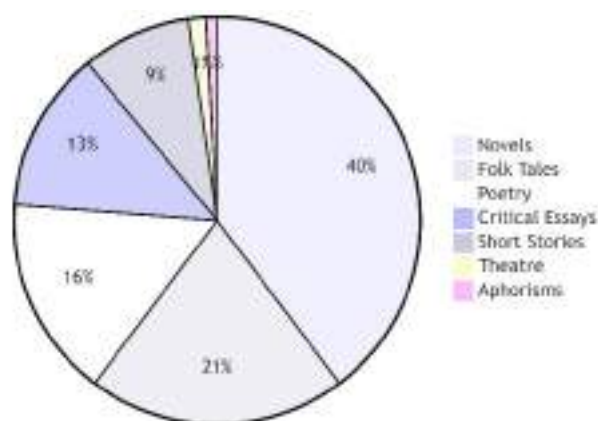


Figure 14.3. Genres.

Figure 14.3 indicates “Genres”: almost half of the translated books are novels (40%), with a good deal of interest also found in folk tales (21%) and poetry (16%). There are still very few translations of theatrical texts (1%), in the UAE, a country where the medium of theater has only taken hold very recently (Michalak-Pikulska 2012), and in addition to this, according to Tijani (2014, 129) “dramatic literature seems to be the least patronized literary genre by the Emiratis.”

Authors that have been translated so far by the Kalima project are listed here. This table does not include children’s literature nor critical studies:

American writers Ai Ogawa (born Florence Anthony); Billy Collins; Junot Díaz; William Faulkner; Louise Gluck; Denis Johnson; Ted Kooser; Jhumpa Lahiri; Dorianne Laux; Denise Levertov; Solomon Northup; Robert M. Pirsig; Sylvia Plath; Marilynne Robinson; Sarah Ruhl; Anne Sexton; Charles Simić; Danielle Steel; Mark Twain; Michael Weaver

Ancient literature	<i>On the Sublime</i> (in Greek); <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> (in Sanskrit); <i>Aeneid</i> (in Latin); <i>Snorra Edda</i> by Snorri Sturluson (old Norse literature)
Arab authors writing in French	Abdelhak Serhane, and some critical essays on the francophone literature from the Maghreb
Austrian writers	Daniel Glattauer; Peter Handke; Paulus Hochgatterer; Walter Kappacher; Michael Köhlmeier; Hans Platzgumer; Teresa Präauer; Rainer Maria Rilke; Arthur Schnitzler
British writers	Kingsley Amis; J. G. Ballard; Elias Canetti ⁶ ; George Eliot; Joanna Kavenna; John Milton; William Shakespeare; Ali Smith
Chinese writers	Shěn Cóngwén; Dài Sījīé; Cáo Yǔ; and a Dictionary of Chinese Literature.
Czech writers	Stanislav Biler
Dutch writers	Kader Abdolah; Multatuli
French writers	Charles Baudelaire; Michel Butor; Albert Camus; Simone de Beauvoir; Edmond de Goncourt; François de La Rochefoucauld; Guy de Maupassant; Gérard de Nerval; Alexandre Dumas père; Jean Echenoz; Maxence Ferminé; Gustave Flaubert; Théophile Gautier; Jean Giono; Victor Hugo; Joris-Karl Huysmans; Jules Laforgue; Lautréamont; Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio; André Miquel; Laurent Mauvignier; Jean-Marc Moura; Patrick Modiano; Marie Ndiaye; Marcel Proust; Olivier Rolin; Gao Xingjian; Émile Zola; and an Encyclopedia of French Poets as well as a collection of short stories
German writers	Kirsten Boie; Daniela Danz; Heinrich Heine; Svenja Leiber; Dea Loher; Paul Maar; Kai Meyer; Herta Müller; Ralf Rothmann; Joachim Sartorius; Ingo Schulze; Lutz Seiler; Christa Wolf; and an Anthology of German Poetry
German Austrian writers	Daniel Kehlmann
Indian writers	Amitav Ghosh; Qurratulain Hyder (Urdu); R. K. Narayan; Phanishwar Nath Renu; K. Satchidanandan; Seema Singh; Vandana Singh; Krishna Sobti; Perumbadavam Sreedharan; Kamala Surayya; M. T. Vasudevan Nair; and Anthology of Contemporary Kerala Poetry as well as a Dictionary of Indian Literatures

6 Elias Canetti was a German-language writer born in Bulgaria. He became a British citizen in 1952.

Italian writers	Carmine Abate; Sergio Atzeni; Gesualdo Bufalino; Cristiano Cavina; Grazia Deledda; Umberto Eco; Fulvio Ervas; Elena Ferrante; Giacomo Leopardi; Carlo Levi; Eugenio Montale; Cesare Pavese; Ermanno Rea; Roberto Saviano, and an introduction to Italian literature (by Peter Hainsworth and David Robey)
Japanese writers	Fumiko Hayashi; Daisaku Ikeda; Mitsuyo Kakuta; Tetsuo Miura; Miyuki Miyabe; Haruki Murakami; Bunroku Shishi; Natsume Sōseki; Rika Yokomori, and a Dictionary of Japanese Literature
Kurdish writers	Selahattin Bulut (Turkey); Jan Dost (Syria); Hesenê Metê (Turkey)
Latin-American writers	Jorge Amado (Brazil); Mario Benedetti (Uruguay); Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina); Carlos Liscano (Uruguay); Augusto Monterroso (Guatemala); Julio Ramón Ribeyro (Peru); and a selection of Brazilian poets as well as an introduction on Modern Latin-American Literature
Polish writers	Czesław Miłosz; Wojciech Żukrowski
Portuguese writers	Fernando Pessoa
Russian-language writers	Leonid Nikolaevič Andreev; Ivan Alekseevič Bunin; Kanta Ibragimov; Aleksej Ivanov; Zachar Prilepin; Michail Evgrafovič Saltykov-Ščedrin; Aleksej Tolstoj; Ivan Turgenev; Aleksej Varlamov; Andrej Volos, and a selection of Russian short stories
South-African writers	Nadine Gordimer
Spanish writers	Miguel de Unamuno; Don Juan Manuel; Luis García Montero; José Maria Merino
Swedish writers	Gunnar Ekelöf; Henning Mankell
Swiss writers	Lukas Bärfuss; Eugène; Franz Hohler; Ilma Rakusa
Turkish writers	Serkan Özburun; Işık Sükan; and an anthology of Turkish short stories by Tarkan Dursun and Rifat Ilgaz et al.

As shown by the histogram (Figure 14.1—“The most translated authors”), the most translated author is Patrick Modiano (Nobel Prize winner for Literature in 2014) with six novels translated into Arabic: *Sirk yamurr* [Un cirque passe], *Şibya tayyibūn* [De si braves garçons], *Daftar al-‘ā’ila* [Livret de famille], *Min*

aqāṣī al-nisyan [Du plus loin de l'oubli], *Sulāla* [Un pedigree], *Ḥādīṭ laylī* [Accident nocturne], all published between 2015 and 2016.

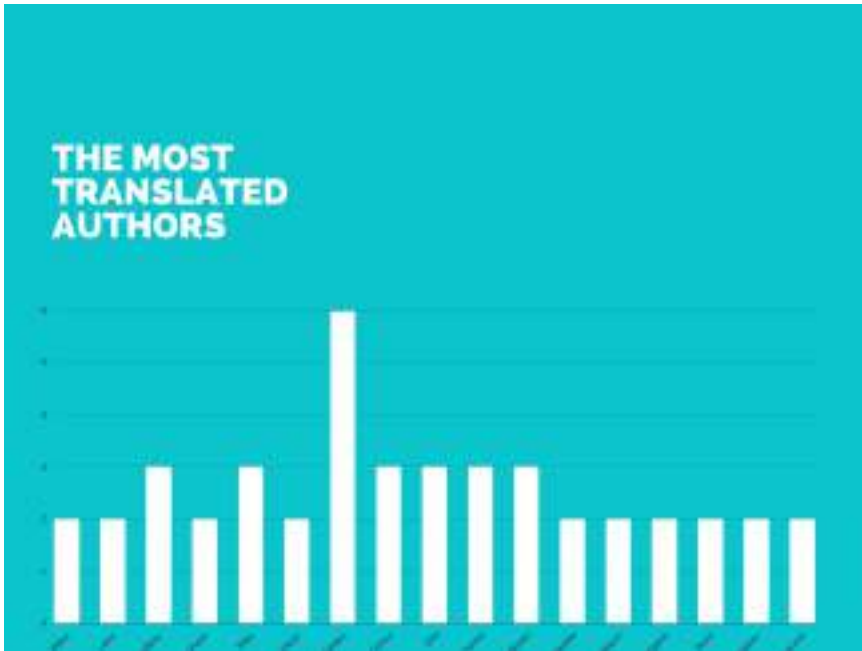


Figure 14.4. The most translated authors.

Needs

Regarding the first major translation movement in the Abbasid Baghdad, Dimitri Gutas in his compelling work entitled *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (1998) wonders which works were translated into Arabic and why some works of Greek, Persian, and Indian heritage were translated, while others were overlooked. Why did the Abbasid caliph commission the first Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Topics*, based on a Syriac intermediary, and a century later *Topics* was retranslated into Arabic from the original Greek, and fifty years after that yet another translation was produced? Why this great interest in precisely translating Aristotle's *Topics*? Gutas explains the existence of these multiple translations on the basis of a need. In fact, in the early Abbasid period, Muslims found in the Jews and Christians some formidable intellectual opponents with centuries of experience in interfaith debate. For this reason, they realized that they needed a handbook in Arabic that would teach them the art of argumentation and disputation (*ḡadal* in Arabic).

As for the translation movement that took place during the Nahḍa, it served at the very beginning bureaucratic and technological needs for a speedy modernization of Muḥammad ‘Alī’s Egypt in the hope of closing the gap with the West and achieving progress (Abu-Lughod 1963). At a second stage, it served the project of language reform and the expansion of journalism (Selim 2019).

So, what are today’s needs? Why have certain texts been translated or retranslated by the Kalima project? What is the common thread that holds such an arbitrary group of translated texts and authors together? Who selects the books? Who chooses the texts most worthy of being translated?

Researchers, intellectuals and academic partnerships from all over the world feed Kalima with suggestions and ideas for new translations. A book, before being selected, is cross-checked against existing translated works, grouped into a genre and studied by the Kalima committee (Seaman 2010; Snir 2017, 64).

Brown (2010, 147) frankly admits that he cannot find a way to make sense of this collection because “it reads like a selection of texts that were picked arbitrarily from the reading lists of the entire course catalog at a decent, comprehensive university.”

What lies behind this list of authors and titles?

As Umberto Eco teaches us in *La Vertigine della Lista* (*The Infinity of Lists*)—a work that was also translated in 2013 within the Kalima project under the title *Lā nihā’iyyat al-Qawā’im*—lists can also be read in another way, for example to deform, to express the excess or destruction of an order, especially when it comes to chaotic lists, which are assemblages of things with no apparent relationship to one another:

[Possono] suggerire abbondanza, colmare il bisogno di *kolossal*, mostrare non una sola immagine affascinante ma molte, moltissime [...], così come i potenti di un tempo si adornavano con cascate di gioielli. Così, la tecnica dell’elenco non mette in forse alcun ordine del mondo, anzi vuole riconfermare che l’universo dell’abbondanza e dei consumi rappresenta l’unico modello di società ordinate. (Eco 2009, 353)

[They can] suggest abundance, show not just one fascinating image but many, many [...], just as the mighty adorned themselves with cascades of jewels. Thus, the list technique does not call into question any order of the world, rather it wants to reconfirm that the universe of abundance and consumption represents the only model of an ordered society.

In short, such lists can be understood merely as a huge collection of literary works. What is the objective of this Kalima project then? Is it merely another tool to enhance Abu Dhabi’s image as that of a high-end luxury environment?

Perhaps some answers can be found in the paratextual elements of the published volumes (for a definition of paratextuality, see Genette 1987, 11), in both categories of peritext (located close to the text, in the book, i.e., prefaces, titles, notes, etc.) and epitext (originally outside the book, i.e., interviews, reviews, publicity announcements, etc.). Unfortunately, there are few translations containing introductions edited by translators providing important information not just limited to a simple biography of the author translated.

Among the many texts consulted, we consider the following example to be particularly worthy of attention because of its preface and introduction: the book *Fi l-Ġalāl* [On the Sublime], the Arabic version of the treatise entitled Περὶ Ὑψους by an unknown author, conventionally referred to as Longinus or Pseudo-Longinus. In its foreword (*tawṭīʿ* at *al-mutarġim*), the translator ʿAdnān Ḥālīd ʿAbd Allāh, a scholar from the University of Sharjah who deeply studied the theory of translation during the Abassid era (Abdulla 2021), explains why he chose to translate precisely the Greek treatise *On the Sublime*:

يمكن أن يُعدّ كتاب لونجين «في الجلال» أول وثيقة أدبية وأخطر ما تؤرخ للتقابل بين الفكر النقدي اليوناني والنظرية الشعرية العربية قبل ما يقرب من ألف وسبعمائة عام، عندما التقى لونجين ذو الأصول العربية والثقافة الإغريقية الواسعة والذي بلغ حدا من العلم والمعرفة حتى أن معاصريه أطلقوا عليه لقب «المتحف المتنقل» في بلاط زنوبية—ملكة تدمر—بحضارات وآداب متنوعة ومدهشة.

Perhaps the book *On the Sublime* by Longinus is the first and most significant literary testimony that chronicles the encounter between Greek critical thought and Arabic poetic theory nearly 1,700 years ago, at a time when Longinus, who had Arab origins and had such a vast Greek culture that his contemporaries nicknamed him “a walking museum,” encountered different, wonderful civilisations and literatures at the court of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra. (ʿAbd Allāh 2009, 7)

Thus, based on this account, we realize that the translator moves the history of contact between Greek culture and Arabic literature further back, long before the Abbasid translation movement, through the bridging figure of the Neoplatonist philosopher Cassius Longinus.

According to the scholar, Longinus, a close advisor to Zenobia, was both *dū l-uṣūl al-ʿarabiyya* [of Arab origins] and *dū l-ṭaqāfa al-ig̃riqiyya al-wāsiʿa* [with extensive knowledge of Greek culture]: the first element is justified by the fact that he was born in 213 AD in Emesa, an ancient city in Syria built near the Assyrian city of Qadesh in the area of present-day Homs; the second, because he was educated in Alexandria and appears to have taught in Athens.

On the Sublime, sometimes referred to as *The High Effect in Literature*, is one of the most important classical treatises on aesthetics and the effects of good writing.

Longinus, or rather Pseudo-Longinus, defines the “Sublime” as the loftiness and exceptionality of speech where the soul is elevated by nature under its impulse. For Longinus, the sublime is the supreme quality of all poetry and discourse, whereas its antipodes are represented by the category “mediocre” or “unsuccessful.”

‘Adnān Ḥālīd ‘Abd Allāh explains that he came up with the idea of translating this treatise by Longinus after publishing his own research (‘Abd Allāh 2000) entitled *Lūngīn wa-l-Ġurġānī: dirāsa tāriḥiyya muqārana* [Longinus and al-Ġurġānī: A Historical Comparative Study]. Instead of using the original Greek text, he translated *On the Sublime* through an English version and admits that he felt a deep sense of urgency to make the text available in Arabic:

وعلى الرغم أن الكتاب قد نقل إلى أكثر من مائة وعشرين لغة، وموضوعه أقرب ما يكون إلى الشعرية العربية، والحاجة أشد ما تكون إلى نقله إلى العربية قبل غيرها من اللغات لاحتمال تأثير لونجين بالشعر العربي، إلا أنه من المحزن أنه لم يترجم إلى العربية كاملاً قط!

Although the book has been translated into more than one hundred and twenty languages, and despite its subject matter being very close to Arabic poetry to the point that it should have been translated into Arabic even before all other languages because of the influence between Longinus and the Arabic poetry, it is disappointing that it was never translated into Arabic in its entirety! (‘Abd Allāh 2009, 8–9)

The last few words of this excerpt refer to the translation into Arabic made by Hayfā’ Hāšim of only a few chapters of Longinus’ treatise. ‘Adnān Ḥālīd ‘Abd Allāh also points out that there is another motivation behind his translation choice:

ولعل أهم سبب دفعني إلى ترجمة هذا الكتاب المهم هو الأمل الذي يحدوني في أن يقوم بعض الباحثين بدراسته دراسة معمقة لإلقاء الضوء على نقاط التشابه والاختلاف بين البلاغة الإغريقية والعربية، ومن ثم المساهمة في المناقشات والجدل الدائر حالياً حول تلاقح وانتقال الأفكار وتفاعل المفاهيم الشعرية العربية واليونانية.

Perhaps the greatest reason that prompted me to translate this important book is the hope that scholars will one day study it in depth to shed light on the points of similarity and difference between Greek and Arabic rhetoric, and thus contribute to the ongoing debate and discussion on the cross-pollination and transmission of ideas and the interaction of Arabic and Greek poetic concepts. (‘Abd Allāh 2009, 13)

After the foreword, ‘Adnān Ḥālīd ‘Abd Allāh inserts an introduction [*muqaddima*], where he acknowledges the Kalima project for realizing the importance of Longinus’ treatise *li-l-ṭaqāfa al-‘arabiyya al-mu‘āṣira* [for contemporary Arabic culture].

Some leading Greek scholars now tend to date this treatise to AD 1 (see, for example, Guidorizzi 1991, 22–23), but, even if it were later and dated to the

third century AD, the crucial question is: what would this treatise have to offer contemporary Arabic literature?

Pseudo-Longinus analyses the mechanisms of greatness in literature and states that it essentially comes from five sources: i) the power of forming great conceptions; ii) vehement and inspired passion; iii) the due formation of figures; iv) a noble diction; and v) dignified and elevated composition. Therefore, ‘Abd Allāh’s translation and analysis are rightly part of the debate on aesthetics in Arab thought, from von Grunebaum (1952, 336) who stated that the Arabs did not have to follow the Platonic and Plotinian tradition to investigate the nature of the beautiful, to Harb (2020) defining the aesthetics of wonder for Arabic literature, which is very different from European conceptions of beauty and sublime.

In Europe, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Longinus’ text underwent an astonishing renaissance, because, by filling an emotional need that Aristotle’s *Poetics* did not have, any literary genre was evaluated according to Longinus criteria and there was no major theorist who did not make use of it (Giordanetti and Mazzocut-Mis 2005). In England, in particular, the debate on the sublime leads to the definition of a poetry that arouses passions and enthusiasm, the paradigm of which becomes John Milton (Vozar 2024) who deeply knew Longinus’ *On the Sublime* and recommended it for the literary education of youth (Teskey 2015, 411).

It is not by chance that the Kalima project, following the thread of the debate on the sublime, decided to publish or republish in 2009 the translation of two works by John Milton, namely *al-Firdaws al-Mafqūd* [Paradise Lost] and *‘Awdat al-Firdaws* [Paradise Regained], both translated by the famous Egyptian dramatist and critic Muḥammad ‘Anānī (1939–2023), also nicknamed *ṣayḥ al-mutarǧimīn* [sheikh of the translators].

In his later renowned essay on style in translation, Muḥammad ‘Anānī expresses his deep interest in Longinus’ treatise due to the similarity of its views to many Arab ideas and suggests that it may have influenced the “Grand Style” in both Milton and in Shakespeare (Enani 2020, 123). Issa (2017) notes how skilfully ‘Anānī uses the poetic resources of classical and Koranic Arabic to render Miltonic language.

Why all this attention to the sublime and to the importance of the elevation of the language? Is this a purely linguistic need? As a matter of fact, in recent years, a debate on the vitality of Arabic has arisen among many Arab intellectuals who fear a possible decline of their language, under the pressure of dialects, external forces, and the appeal of foreign languages.

Standard Arabic is obviously the official language of the UAE, but as Jacquemond (2009, 20) states regarding this country, “although it has launched the latest and most ambitious Arabic translation program to date, any visitor to the region cannot but notice the subaltern status of the national language.” Many languages are used for communication because of a large non-Arab, non-national population. Among them, the first is English, which is used among educated people to the point that “Arabic, the autochthonous and official language of the territory, has practically been relegated to a minority language or second language, especially in the educated strata of society and the education system” (Siemund et al. 2021, 192), provoking Arabic-English code-switching phenomena especially in the speech of the younger generation. The second is the so-called Gulf Pidgin Arabic that is spoken by numerous incoming workers from the Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asia. In addition to these languages, hundreds of thousands of Asian workers speak Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, and Urdu, a phenomenon that has been called “Asianization of the work force” (see Kapiszewski 2007).

Accordingly, the presence of so many foreign languages on the Emirati territory has created fear of a weakening Arabic language, a perception described by Suleiman (2014) as “Arab(ic) Language Anxiety” and as an exaggeration by Holes (2011, 144) considering that the reality is that Arabic is not dying but rather public exposure to and passive comprehension of the standard language, even among the older, less educationally advantaged generations, is increasing.

Translating *On the Sublime* is perhaps not a simple invitation to elevate the language, but to raise the spirit, with ethical implications that one of the largest newspapers in the Emirates, *al-Ittihad*, goes so far as to emphasize:

نقصد أن الحياة التي يعيشها الأديب يجب أن تكون مرتكزاً لنظريته الأدبية،
مهما كان مثالياً أو مهما كان واقعياً. فلا يجوز أن يقدم الأديب أدباً راقياً ويعيش حياة
منحطة ... بل أكثر من ذلك فقد حذر لونجينوس من أن التفكير السيئ في الأدب
ينعكس في حياة المرء نفسه، فالنبيل يجب أن يبقى نبيلاً في الحياة وفي الكتابة معاً.

We mean that the life that a writer lives must be the basis of his literary theory, no matter how idealistic or realistic it is. It is not permissible for a writer to present refined literature and live a decadent life ... More than that, Longinus warned that bad thinking in literature is reflected in the person's own life, for a noble person must remain noble in both life and writing. (‘Abbūd 2019)

Moreover, Longinus is considered the illustrious ancestor of great Arab literary theorists such as ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Ġurġānī and especially Ḥāzim al-Qarṭāġannī (d. 1285), the author of a remarkable work entitled *Minhāġ al-bulaġā’ wa-sirāġ*

al-udabā' [The Path of the Eloquent and the Lamp of Educated], that 'Abbūd (2019) describes as *tarğama ħurra li-kitāb Lūnğinūs* [a free translation of Longinus' book].

The author of *On the Sublime* believed that literature could mold a soul and vice versa; that a great soul could pour itself entirely into a work of art. The author seems to yearn for a kind of universal library to which only that which is indisputably great, and for that very reason unanimously admired, has access for all of eternity.

The Kalima project, in its desire to establish that universal library, wishes to lay the foundations for a cultural renaissance that is hoped will soon flourish in the Arab Gulf (see Langone 2023, 56).

Conclusions

The United Arab Emirates was founded in 1971: it is a very young country but, at the same time, it is also one of the fastest growing. From a cluster of villages surviving on pearl diving and fishing, a nation has emerged with a thriving art scene that is gaining international recognition. The Arabian Peninsula, especially the UAE, has now become the new center of gravity of Arab culture, or rather, in the words of Pascale Casanova (1999, *La République mondiale des Lettres*) the new "Greenwich Meridian" of Arabic literature. The UAE represents a real cultural experimentation laboratory and aspires to be the protagonist of the third largest and consciously organized translation movement in the Arab world, after the Bayt al-Ĥikma of Abbasid Baghdad and Cairo and Beirut during the Nahḍa period.

The term Renaissance is omnipresent in the Emirates press when mention is made of the Kalima project for translation. Here are just a few examples:

The project serves to advance the Emirate's role on the regional and international cultural scenes, setting the stage for a widespread Arab scientific and cultural *renaissance* built around books. (Emirates New Agency—WAM, November 30, 2022);

The Kalima Translation Project in 2007 with the aim of reviving the art of translation in the Arab world, supporting a vibrant literary ecosystem in Abu Dhabi and contributing to an Arab cultural *renaissance*. (Department of Culture and Tourism—Abu Dhabi, November 28, 2019);

واليوم، بعد مرور أكثر من عقد من الزمن على تلك البداية المدروسة، ها هو «كلمة»
في أعين الكثيرين من نخبة هذا العالم من المثقفين والمفكرين والأدباء، نتاج تنموي
معرفي رصين، وخطوة لاستعادة النهضة العلمية للأمة.

Today, more than a decade after that inspired beginning, here is “Kalima” in the eyes of many of this world’s elite of intellectuals, thinkers and writers, a solid cognitive development product, and a step towards restoring the nation’s scientific renaissance. (Laḥbib 2018)

As in the great periods of the Renaissance, the field of translatability has become unlimited: any text, of any genre, in any language, is now considered suitable for translation. The Renaissance was marked first and foremost by a massive increase in the volume of translations. Nevertheless, despite the apparent “*illimitation du champ de traduction*” (Berman 1988, 23), as in a carpet, all the details of the patterns are “readable,” meaning they are symbols of the values and wishes of its owner.

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