

# **The Role of Oriental Christian in Translation from Greek to Arabic During Seventh and Eighth Centuries, A.C**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The first attempts were to transfer the Greek Heritages or their civilization to the Arab world, especially to the Levant area. This was clear during the umayyad period, through the exaggeration in the efforts of some princes and Caliphs. This was obvious during the period of prince Khalid bin Yazid as well as Caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz, as the priests and the Monks tried very hard to transfer the Greek Literature into Arabic, as well as, the Medicine, and Chemistry, where these Sciences were taught in the Syrian schools. This made the Syrian to be distinguished from the rest of the Zones, in addition to the presence of the Roman community, as it was being the headquarters of the Caliphs during that era. This research consists of two main topics: The Greek literature and themes which had been translated during the period (13 AH. To go AH- 634/709) during the era of Khalid bin Yazid, especially the books of Chemistry and Medicine. The Monk Marians had translated all of his acquaintances from Greek to Arabic. Regarding the second topic, it was an attempt to translate from Greek to Arabic during the period (54-105 AH), it was a remarkable period where Egyptian Christians played a greet role, during the reign of Caliphs Omar Suleiman bin Abdul Aziz, as he was the ruler at the time, and he had astronauts efforts to encourage the translation.

## Introduction

Omar bin Abdul Aziz was the only Caliph who considered and gave an importance to the translation from Greek language.

This research takes an account of many Arabic- Islamic sources, such as, the writers, Andalusy and Anadeem as well as Ibn khalkun.

This research relies on number of references such as what were written by O'Leary in 'The Transfer of the Greek Sciences to the Arabs', as well as the 'The Unity and Diversity' which was written by the Orientalist, (Grenbaum), in addition to the books which were written by Abdul Rehman Badawi, and which called 'The Greek Heritage and its Effects on the Islamic Civilization' , as well as many recent studies which are concerned with cultural history and political history.

The methodology of this study is confirmed on the extrapolation of the historical texts, and tries to identify the names of people who promised to act as pioneers of translation from Greek to Arabic, and to identify the time as well as the places in which the translation being carried out and to show the role of the Levant, in the translation.

## The First Topic

Literature and the topic of Greek that have been translated into Arabic during the period 13-105 AH (634-720AD), were considered the motivated period in the translation from Greek to Arabic, during the Umayyad Era.

The Islamic state needed to use the knowledge of other nations, especially the Greece for the sake of transferring the Heritage theme to the Arab. Therefore, all the ingredients for success were available as concern the operations of translation in the Umayyad period, especially during the reign of prince Khalid bin Yazid, presented by the presence of the translators of the Levant Christians who were fluent in Greek, by the virtue of their previous relationship with Rome as well as with the Byzantium alike. <sup>1</sup>Especially if we know the roles played by those two cities in the lives of the people of the East.(1)

All the above features have been available to provide fertile ground for the success of translation processes, particularly the enlargement of the Arab- Islamic state, in the East as well as at the West.

So, there has been friction as far as the civilization is concerned, prompting the souls of all the princes whether they were Umayyad or Abbasids to pay attention to the transfer of knowledge of administration and governance in that era, especially that of the Umayyad political- establishment which felt the need for such a knowledge to cope

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1. <sup>1</sup> Ibn al- Nadim, Abu Faraj Mohammed bin Ishaq (send No 438AH 1406 AD, Catalogue, Beirut) page 4210.

with the knowledge and to notify the other surrounding Arab or the Islamic countries who come under the banner of the Arabs and Muslims in the present conversant.<sup>2</sup>

The complexity of the new life for the editors and the need to pay attentions to the development of science are needed to transfer the state in every day life, such as medicine to head the wounded in the battles of liberation and conquests, and the Chemist who is involved in the daily industries of food, drinks and others<sup>3f</sup>

The best proof of the growing interest in translation is in the early stages of the Umayyad period and that Muawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan had good relations with the Christian doctors, as most of them were philosophers and were schooled in Greek, which include (Ibn Athal AL- Massarany who lived in Damascus.<sup>4</sup>

### **Biography Of Prince Khalid Bin Yazid**

The Arab- Islamic sources have great deal of effects concerning the biography of prince hermit, Khalid bin Yazid as he is Abu Hashim Khalid bin Yazid bin Abi Sufyan who died in the eighty- five of Migration Period or on the year 90 of Migration as mentioned by bin Asaker, as he was regarded as the 'well educated of El-Merwan and had been very interested In 'Sciences' <sup>5</sup>. This means that he was keen in science and very passionate in the collection of science<sup>6</sup>. At seems that he had got a kind of exaggeration in dealing with historical novels amongst the Arab historians as well as the Muslims to amplify the biography and the biography of Prince Khalid bin Yazid<sup>7</sup>, as he heard that there were number of scientists who have the knowledge of the Greek language in Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

2. Amin, Ahmed, Dawn of Islam, Egyptian Renaissance Library, (Cairo, 1959, page, 1620).
3. Ibn Abi Usaibia, Ahmed bin Qasim (serial 668 AH) (Beirut, 1965), page 1710.
4. Ibn Khalkan, Abu Abbas, Shamsuddin Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Abi Bakr (serial 681 AH.1282 AD) and Mortality objects and the news of the sons of time (Beirut 1969) page 262.
5. IBin Asakir, Ali Bin Hassan bin Abdullah (Serial 571/AH), the great history (trimmed history of bin Asakir) arranged and corrected Abdul Qadir Badran, Dar Al Maseerah (Beirut 1979).
6. Ibn al- Nadim, Catalogue, Beirut) page 4210.
7. Op,cit , P42
8. Ibn Qautaiba Abu Mohammed Abdula bin Muslim Al Deanury Serial 276AH/669AD),AL-Maref . nd.nt) page 353.

Most of the Priests have translated the Greek into Arabic and not the prince himself did that, as he didn't know the Greek at all. One day, the Caliph Omar Bin Aboul Aziz said that, Khalid bin Yazid was the only prince who was very keen and interested in science and translation.<sup>9</sup>

The opinion of Ibn khaldun, who said that Khalid was not a scientific personality and didn't know about the Science of Medicine and Chemistry.<sup>10</sup> But these knowledge came through the translation from Greek into Arabic, as these facts were mentioned in our Arabic sources. He was a good reader in all of the translations, especially in the field of Chemistry and Medicine, and he wasn't the kind of persons who knew the various humanitarian sciences.

So, it was a sort of exaggeration by the Islamic- Arabic sources which are used to glorify the rulers and Sultans and to show them as superheroes, as mentioned by Ibn khaldun.

### **The Translation From The Greek Into Arabic, During The Period Of The Prince Khalid Bin Yazid**

With reference to our historical sources which indicated that several conditions and elements have helped the translation to be carried out, because of the presence of Assyrians translators as well as the Levants, reference has disclosed that the Arab Sources explicitly bringing these translators to the Levant<sup>11</sup>. The time between those ingredients was the real desire for the Arab Authority to translate from Greek to Arabic, as well as the encouragement given by the Christians, who were the effective translation tool.<sup>12</sup>

Khalid bin Yazid, was the advisor of the former Caliph Abdul Malik bin Merwan, where the process of 'money Arabization', which took place during that era, also suggest the production of Islamic coins and the developing of writing of the Koranic verses on them.<sup>13</sup>

9. Ibn Abd Rabbo Al- Andalusian, the Unique Contract, page 83-84.

10. Ibn Khaldun Abd al-Rahman bin muhammed (D808 AH) INTRODUCTION NT.NP)P 226

11. Ibn Khaldon . INTRODUCTION . P 505

12. Philip,Hatti. history of the Arab prolonged, translated by Adard Georgi and Abdula- Rahman Ron, the Scout House for Printing and Publishing, (Beirut 1953-1961), page 325.

13. Al- Sioty, Jalaludean Abdul Rahman Al- Ciotty, Serial 911 AH the history of Caliphs, achieved by Asaad Atlas Press. (Baghdad, 195), page 218

So, we can say that the translation was taken place during the time of Khalid bin Yazid.

The main reason for the translation of books such as chemistry & medicine <sup>14</sup>in that era<sup>15</sup>, is that because of the urgent need of the Islamic state which has seen breakthrough in the East as well as in the west, the need of the chemistry which is needed in the Military & Civilian industry, and the need of the Muslims and Arabs to determine the times of the their prayers and the knowledge of accountant and the years.<sup>16</sup>

These confusion resolved by the thesis of Ibn khaldun who in turn didn't offend the prince Khalid bin Yazid, <sup>17</sup>but he put up a hypothesis and questioners, that the prince Khalid was fluent in all those science?

It was known that the Umayyad possessed nomadic nature, which is for from urbanization, this was according to Ibn khaldun.<sup>18</sup>

We agree with Ibn khaldun in his opinion concerning the lack of knowledge of the Umayyad civilization, that is because of the nature of nomadic<sup>19</sup>. The lack of knowledge of the Princes and Caliphs in the Levant, Al- Jezira, and the Mesopotamia are all a good evidence which heralded their culture.<sup>20</sup>

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14. Ibn Khalkan, Al Wafiat Senate, page 226, 224.

15. Al- Jumaili, Rashid Hamid Hassan, the Impact of Translation in the Arab-Islamic Civilization. Unpublished MA thesis, being introduced to the History Department/ Faculty of Art, Baghdad University, in Islamic History (Baghdad University, 1974AD) page 65.

16. Al- Jahiz, Uthman Omar bin Bahr (Serial 355AH), The Statement and the Identification, Investigation Abdul Salam Mohammed Haroun, Dar Al- Fikr, (Beriut, 1948) Voll, page 328, also see:

17. Al- Maqreezi Ahmed bin Ali (Serial 845 AH).

18. I-bn Al- Nadim, Catalog, page 3540. Ibn Saeed Alndulusian, Abu al- Qasim bin Ahmed Al- Taghlupri, (Senial, 462AH/1069), [Al- Najaf, The Holly 1967, page 63].

19. Ibn Al- Nadim, the index) page 353. Al- Baladhuri, Ahmed bin Yahia, (279AH/892 AD), Ansab. (Jerusalem, 1938) 565-66.

20. Ibn Khaldun, Introduction. Page 505.

Modern researchers mentioned a great deal about the Khalid science production and the large amounts of money spent in the translation of books which were put in the disposal of those who were interested in Science.<sup>21</sup>

It had been mentioned that Ibn Al- Nadim, wrote about the manner in which being carried out during the Prince Khalid bin Yazid era, has ordered a group of Greek philosophers who had come down to the city of Egypt, who has disclosed in Arabic, and ordered them to transfer the book from Greek and Coptic into Arabic, this was the first transfer which was taken in the Islam, from one language to another.<sup>22</sup>

There was a source which had mentioned that the Monk (Estefan) and in accordance to the desire of his student Khalid bin Yazid, translated from Greek into Arabic. This illustrates the problem that was done by the historian, which were resolved by Ibn al- Nadim and Ibn khaldun.<sup>23</sup>

From the previous texts there were several facts concerning the translation:

1. All translators were Greek and Romans, Syrians and Iraqis Assyrians Ocaldan.
2. All these translators were encamped in Egypt cities because most of them were from Egypt, Alexandria and the fortress of Babylon, near the Fustat (Cairo now), Aswan and the rest of the coptics.
3. The translators were very brilliant in their translation and show appropriately to classical Arabic, and this is not so easy to do, as it needs skills, writers, and the knowledge of the language Grammar focusing and scientific vocabularies, as most of the translations were in chemistry, medicine and astronomy.
4. The translations were not Greek, but Coptic, this means that the translations included the knowledge of the coptics in those fields of the knowledge.
5. This text clearly illustrates that this is the first attempt in the history of Islam, from the officied point of view, which is adopted by the authority of Islam. The question that arises is the individual or public attempts by the muslims and non- Muslims for the translations to Arabic and other languages as well.

### **The Topics of Translation and its Related Writing during the Era of Khalid bin Yazid**

The Arab- Islamic sources unanimously mentioned that the subjects of translations during the era of prince Khalid bin Yazid were accurate in its scientific contents, such as the names of the chemical compounds and the foundation of teaching chemistry<sup>24</sup>.

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21. Ali, Mohammed Kurd, Islam and Arab Civilization, Printing Committee of Translations & Publishing, (Cairo 1950) page 132.

22. Bartold ,Vlademer , Islamic Civilization translated by Hamzah Taher , 3rd. (Eygpt. 1950), p2722-

23. 23Ibn Al- Nadim, Catalog, page 354. Ibn Saeed Al- Andulusian, page 63.

24. Ibn al- Nadim, Catalogue page 354

There were also books written which are dealing with medicine and stars, as the prince encouraged all translators in the fields.<sup>25</sup>

In this regard, Prof, Al- Hashemi declared that translations included some of natural science, without exceeding towards logic and psychology and metaphysics.<sup>26</sup>

In the historical novels, authors were attributed to prince Khalid bin Yazid, in the fields of chemistry, medicine and astronomy, that is according to Ibn al- Nadim.<sup>27</sup>

From the foregoing, we conclude the following:

1. Most of the literatures were from Greek to Arabic.
2. Names of the persons represented the Saints Merians and Astifan.
3. The topics included were the subjects of astronomy, chemistry, medicine and all the new knowledge about the Arabs and Muslims during that era.<sup>28</sup>

Some sources have mentioned names of books in different subjects, such as, chemistry and medicine which are attributed to prince Khalid and which are believed to be as Greek origin.<sup>29</sup>

The attempts of translations continued during the era of caliphs sulaiman bin Abdul Malik bin Merwan<sup>30</sup> and Caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz<sup>31</sup> as well as the continuation of the efforts by Caliph Abdul Malik bin Merwan who had taken the Arabization of the bureaucracy and money from Persian into Arabic.<sup>32</sup>

## **The Translation During The Reign Of Caliph Suleiman Bin Abdul Malik**

It seems that the Caliph Suleiman bin Abdul Malik continued his father's policy to encourage the translations into Arabic, such as the translations of science that the nation needed at that time. This was recorded in custody of the prince Omar bin Abdul Aziz bin Merwan, when he was the ruler of Egypt, as he brought a number of

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25. Ibn Nadim, Catalog, p242 and supported by Ibn Abd Rabbo- Andalusian, Ahmed bin Mohammed. The Unique Contract (Cairo, 1953J 283- 84).

26. Al- Hashimi, Joseph, Solomon Al- Bustani and the Iliad (Beirut 1960), page 8.

27. Ibn Nadim, Catalog, p242. Al-Dhahby, Al Hafidh Shams al Din Abu Abdullah Mohammed bin Ahmed Al- Turkman, (Serial 784AH/1347AD), page 240 .

28. Ibn Khaldon . Introduction. P.505

29. Op.cit.p.505.

30. Ibid. p. 505.

31. Ibid. p. 505.

32. Ibid. p. 505.

translators, such as (Salih bin Abdul Rehman)<sup>33</sup>. These attempts were a result of the attention of Omar bin Abdul Aziz in his studying of Greek literature.

### **Translation during the reign of Caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz**

The Caliph was the first Muslim Caliph who paid tremendous attention to translation as well as the translators, especially in the Greek science.<sup>34</sup> This was because of that the adherence of the Caliph in the Levant, and the fact that the Levant was the headquarter of the Umayyad Caliphate, The said caliph had transferred the school and its scientists, to school of Antioch.<sup>35</sup>

Some other sources mentioned that the Caliph also transferred the scientists from Haran and other Levant cities. Doctor Ibn Abjar Al- kinani also tried to transfer medicine books which were written in Greek, into Arabic.<sup>36</sup>

It seems that Ibn Abjar was the resident of Alexandria, and the Caliph Omar accompanied him to Antakia, where he was called as Masarjouih.

So the masarjouih & his colleagues translated all of the Greek books in the field of Medicine to Arabic language, that was during the reign of Caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz.<sup>37</sup>

According to historical Novels, which were existed during the period of the Caliphs Suleiman and Omar bin Abdul Aziz, one can gather the following:

1. Caliph Suleiman bin Abdul Malik didn't have a great efforts regarding the field of translation from Greek to Arabic, but he continued his father's policy to encourage the translation into Arabic, this can be clearly noticed in the efforts of the governor Omar bin Abdul Aziz when he was the ruler of Egypt.
2. The Caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz was interested in the Science of Law and jurisprudence, and he had encouraged his followers to translate of the Greek into Arabic, such as Medicine.

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33. Al-Hamowy . Yaqot bin Abd Alah(D626AH)Muajem Al-Udbaa: Dar Ihyaa Al-Turath , Berut. 1355-1357AH).

34. Al zaru, Khalil Dawood, Scientific Life in the Levant during the First Two Centuries of Migration, Dar Al- Afaq. (Beirut 1971, page 178).

35. Khoda Bakhsh, The Islamic Civilization, translated by Dr. Ali Hosni Al-Kherbutafi, Dar Al- Kutub (Cairo, 1960) (page, 153/154).

36. Ibn Khalkan, Wefiat page 224.

37. Ibn Nadim, Catalogue, page 354, Ibn Abd Raboo, M. Andulusion, Al- Aqid Al Fareed, page 83/84. Ibn Saeed M. Andulusian, page 63. Ibn Askir, The Great History page 120.

38. Ibn Khalekan , Wafiat.

3. Another important concern during the reign of Caliph Omer bin Abdul Aziz was the translation of the books dealing with Chemistry and Astronomy.
4. The Antioch school played a big role in the field translation, especially in the time of Caliph Omer bin Abdul Aziz, and the most likely in the translation concerning the science of Medicine, Astronomy & Chemistry.<sup>38</sup>
5. The efforts of Caliph Omer bin Abdul Aziz in translations belong to the days of his mandate of Egypt; this means that he paid great attention to the sciences of the previous nations, especially the Greece science.
6. The process of translating the book of 'Aherm', didn't last more than forty days, this was according to the novel written by Ibn 'Jilgle', and was a very difficult to 'masarjouih', alone, if there would be assistants and assigned appointed by the Caliph himself.<sup>39</sup>
7. The translation stage has recorded the emergence of competent translators of Arab nationality<sup>40</sup>, and even they were Christian, such as, Abjer Al- kinani, who has great efforts in translating to Medicine.<sup>41</sup>

## Summary

Through my follow up to the theme of the Middle East Christians in the translation from Greek into Arabic during the seventh and eighth centuries, gathered the following results:

1. There were several factors which prompted the Princes and Caliphs of the Umayyad to pay attention to the translation, in the forefront of the legitimacy or

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39. Ibn Jiljl, Abu Dawood Sulaiman bin Hassen, (Tabaqat Al- Atibaa and Al Hukamaa), achievement by Mr. Fouad Al Sayed, The Press of Scientific Institute, (Cairo, 1995). Ibn Saeed Al- Andulusi, Tabaqat Al Umam page 112-113. , Al-

40. Qufti, Jamal al Deen Abu Al- Mahasin, Ali Ibn Al- quathi Al- Ashraq Yousiuf. Serial 646AH/1248AD, Akhbar ALulamaa Bi Akhbar Al Hukamaa (Cairo 132AH) Pag213 . AL- Tikriti, Saleen Taha, the Impact of Translation in the Development of the Arabic- (Islamic Mentality Zeidan, Georgi, The History of Islamic Civilization, Cairo, page 146.

41. Ibn Al- Nadim, Catalog, page 354, and Ray Ibn Khaldun, The Introduction, page 505.

religious through the confirmation of the Al- Qoran and the sunnah, to reflect on the creation of the Universe. Therefore, there was the need to translate what is known in the Greek into Arabic in this field which was during the reign of prince Hermit Khalid bin Yazid. The Muslims need and their congregations from other nations to the Science of Medicine, which prompted Prince Khalid to encourage the translation of Greek literature in the Science of Medicine, as the Arab states and the Islamic, are, in the state of Jihad, which requires considerable knowledge in the field of Medicine.

2. Most of the translators were Egyptian Clergies & Syrians who were involved in the translation of bureaucracy during the reign of Caliph Abdul Malik bin Merwan.

3. It seems that all the top translators came from Egypt, and in recent succession headquarter took the translation process, and therefore retained its components there, and the copies were translated from Greek to Arabic seems reserved in caliphs headquarters. That is why the prince Khalid was able to read all the written books in the science of Medicine, Chemistry and Astronomy.

4. Number of our Arabic- Islamic sources have exaggerated in the proportion of Greek books to the prince Khalid bin Yazid, and that Ibn Al- Nadim and Ibn khaldun, tried to correct those errors or such exaggeration in some of the Arab sources.

5. In fact we were able to show the names of the translators during the Umayyad period through these studies as well as to determine the general topics to which translations is being carried out.

6. The evidence show that the Syrian school was the leader in the translation from Greek to Arabic, such as, doctor Al- Jemses who translated to his professor, Hippocrates before the Islamic period.

7. The importance of the Syrians translators from Greek, into Arabic in the Umayyad period, especially, what masarjouih of Syriac origin, in the schools of Antioch and Haran.

8. Finally we can say that the translation from Greek to Arabic in the Umayyad period, has reached a significant level, especially, the prince Khalid bin Abdul Aziz, spent a large amount of money for the sake of translation from Greek into Arabic, as well as he copied a lot of Greek books, in Medicine and Chemistry and made them ready for the whole of the general parish.

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- (11) Ibn khaldun, Abdul Rehman bin Mohammed (Serial 808 AH)/1405 AD. (Cairo).
- (12) Ibn Qautaiba Abu Mohammed Abdula bin Muslim Al Deanury Serial 276AH/669AD).
- (13) Ibn al- Nadim, Abu Faraj Mohammed bin Ishaq (send No 438AH 1406 AD, Catalogue, Beirut).
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- (8) Kahaleh, Omer Ridha, Lexicon Authors, Damascus, 1957.
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- (10) Philip, Hatti. history of the Arab prolonged, translated by Adard Georgi and Abdula- Rahman Ron, the Scout House for Printing and Publishing, (Beirut 1953-1961).
- (11) Zeidan, Georgi, The History of Islamic Civilization, Cairo.