



## THE TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES OF ANDALUS PERIOD

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### **Abstract:**

Throughout the history, all civilizations have transferred knowledge from either a previous civilization or from a contemporary civilization. The translation activities have an important channel of this transferring knowledge. We knew the most important translation activities started at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and was expanded during Abbasid Caliphate. Now, we will be stressing on the development of translation works with regards to Andalusia. As a result of the eagerness of Muslim to seek knowledge, institutions such as madrasah, libraries, elementary schools, research institutions grew rapidly in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and mosque schools had been upgraded into local universities. Andalusia became a famous translation centre in the region and it has known as the multilingual centre of learning and translation, gathering all people from different cultures and ethnicities who loved wisdom and knowledge. The light age of intellectual development of Islamic Civilization has reached its peak with beautiful cities of Almeria, Malaga, Cadiz, Huelva, Cordoba, Seville and Granada during 10<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of these developments, the translation became an art where it was dealing with languages, texts, and words. On the other hand, after a long period of time, it became a science. Translation also one of the school of science as it had become more systematic through time and the translated books must have undergone several tests of validity and precision in terms of its languages. In this article, translation activities in Andalus period which had a great influence on formation of Islamic philosophy were discussed.

**Keywords:** Umayyad civilization, Cordoba, Toledo, translation activity

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout the history, information exchange between the civilizations continued. The emergence of new civilizations took place thanks to this transfer of knowledge and the culture of east and west started to get closer rapidly. Undoubtedly, the most important element of this cultural interaction is the translation activities. Undeniably, the fact that living languages impact each other and get influenced by each other is a natural phenomenon (Akreş, 2016:17). While Muslim societies were creating their own civilizations, they could not stay indifferent towards intellectual, scientific and cultural accumulation of the other civilizations (Dağbaşı, 2015:2). As a result of the expansion of the Muslim borders, the translation activities gained acceleration and thus the need to know other nations' cultures came to existence. In the translation movement conducted in Europe, Andalus culture and civilization became the center for the translation movement that was the key for intercultural communication and the cradle for the scientific movement. Andalus era is the strongest, most rooted, widest and longest-term relationship Islam civilization and Europe had between each other. Through translation works conducted in this period, Islam civilization transferred the scientific accumulation it acquired and adopted from the civilizations that came before her to Europe and thus Europe had the chance of getting to know the Islam science and civilization (Yıldız, 2009:52).

## 2. Certain Scientific Activities Held Prior to Islam

The first period in which the scientific activities started in the world history goes back to the Ancient Greek sources. The scientific works of the Ancient Greeks; especially their activities in the field of philosophy expanded towards other cultures via different routes. Greek philosophy works that dates back to 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and had its golden years; continued in the science centers created at that time for a long period. To exemplify some of these science centers; academies established by Plato and Aristo are among them (Vatandaş, 2009: 47). Due to not being able to reach today, scientific activities that were conducted in Athens as the center for Greek philosophy, information belonging to Aristo could not be transferred to us sufficiently as well.

The work "Corpus Aristotelicum" that reached us from the school of Aristoteles, in which the scientific activities took place during the period in question, is known as the main resource and many of the works claimed to be of Aristoteles slowly cease their existence (Köz, 1992: 92). Below are some of the important centers in which the scientific activities of the time took place explained briefly.

Having become the most important city of the region after the empire's capital Roma towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Alexandria also became a significant economy and trade center located at the intersection of big sea and roads connecting Europe to Asia. The city had the feature of being the liveliest city of intellectuals in the ancient era that gathered all philosophy and religions. Byzantines did not only multiply and update the texts and explanations belonging to the ancient era but also the scientific supports belonging to the Arab and Iranian neighbors. Established by the Greeks in Egypt and Alexandria in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, *the School of Alexandria* created significant works in Greek texts and in the field of linguistics. Dionysios Thrax, who lived in the period in question, prepared a Greek linguistics book called *Tekfine Grammatike* as a result of an approximate work of 400 years that worked as a pioneer for the classical grammar books in the west. Later on (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) it is seen that Apollonios Dyskolos from Alexandria accommodated an important syntax book (Aksan, 1995:18)

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the School of Alexandria created a medical research canon that included four writings of Hippocrates, sixteen writings of Galen (129-216 AD), *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, and scientific works of Soranus and Rufus of Ephesus. These works constitute the fundamentals of theoretical medical education in Byzantium. The medical education was given a great importance during the period in question. As theoretical medical education resources, manuscripts translated from the Arabic, Persian and Latin works into Greek were used. Since the translated works included Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Indian concepts, it is seen that there were dictionaries next to some of the manuscripts. It is striking that the Greek translations of Arabic and Persian medical works started to widespread with the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Following the Alexandria's conquest of the city of Rome, schools of Antioch, Harran, Nusaybin and Gundeshapur became the centers, in which the Ancient Greek Philosophy was maintained.

### 3. A Brief Overview of Andalus History

Known since the old times with the name "Iberia", the Iberian Peninsula was for the first time called by the Romans as Hispania. Thus taking the form of Hispania, it eventually became "Spain" in English. The name Andalus, which is accepted to be derived from the name "Vandalacia" referring to the Vandals that reached Gibraltar in 411 BC by migrating from North to South, was first used by the Muslims (Arslan, 1997 :270). From the first periods of Islam, social and cultural disengagement from the Roman and Visigoth Spain started to take place. This disengagement did not occur at once but took place step by step and in a radical way. We see the disengagement from the past with the name Andalus itself. Instead of *Hispania* and *Spain* from the Roman period or the *İşbaniya* in their language, the

Arab conquerors used a totally different name of *Andalus* from the very beginning. The local community living in the lands under the Islamic rule also preferred to use the name Andalus. This situation clearly presents the new social and cultural structure that emerged as a result of the socialization between the Arab, Berberis and the local community of the region (Bal, 2008: 35).

Due to having an appropriate structure in the fields of agricultural and commercial activities since its past, Spain was the target for foreign immigrations and attacks (Samirai, 2000: 12). Due to having feature of being a natural passage between Europe and Africa, people from many nations settled in this region for centuries (Bal, 2008: 16). Some of the tribes that immigrated to the region and settled can be listed as follows: Ibers from Africa, Celts and Indo-European tribes, Phoenicians, Carthaginians ruled the region respectively starting with the 900 BC and settled in various parts of the peninsula. All these tribes became romanized with the start of 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and for the first time gathered under a single rule during the Roman era (Samirai, 2000: 12). Another rule that came to power after Roman Empire was the Visigothic Kingdom.

The peninsula rule of the Visigoths coincides with the end of 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. Visigoths adapted the Roman tax system and reflected the whole tax load into a certain group and thus prepared the end of country administration. The economic structure in the country was completely altered later to be re-structured by the Muslims in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (İmamuddin, 2000: 13). In a period, when Spain was weakening in terms of political management, the Muslims conquered the whole Arabian Peninsula and faced Byzantium. An army under the command of Zeyd ibn-i Harise send by the Prophet (peace be upon him) met Byzantium for the first time in Mu'te, which was located at the current lands of Jordan, and later the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself launched an expedition against Byzantium and came all the way to Tabuk. However, no war broke out between the parties. After the death of the Prophet, during the era of four caliphs and the Umayyad era following it, the conquests continued non-stop. In 710, all North Africa including Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauretania was conquered and Musa Ibn-I Nusyar, who was the commander of the conquest armies at that time, analyzed the reports given to him in regard to the economic, social and political condition of Spain and decided to expand the conquest towards Europe. In order to be able to start the conquest towards this direction, he notified the Caliph Velid b. Abdulmelik located in Damascus about his view on Spain's conquest, and the Caliph allowed this conquest on condition that the life safety of the soldiers were provided (İbnu-l Esir, 1927: 108). Upon this approval, Ibn-i Nusayr entered into Spain in June 712 with an army of 1800 men, majority of which were Arabs, and conquered the city in the month of Ramadan in the year of 94 hegira calendar, in 30 June 713 current era as a result of a year-long siege.

Musa b. Nusayr and Tarık b. Ziyad were continuing their conquests however, Musa b. Nusayr was asked to return without completing the conquest. Therefore Musa b. Nusayr, designated his son Abdulaziz as a governor in his place and let Spain together with Tarık b. Ziyad on September 714 (Zulhijja 95) and came back to Damascus. Thus the period of governorate connected to Umayyad that would continue until the year 756 started. Within that period, around 21 governors worked in Andalus and while the governors were elected directly by the caliph located in Damascus, they were sometimes elected by the soldiers assigned in the Peninsula. Meanwhile the Abbasids ended the Umayyad dynasty and along with that they started a huge massacre against the Umayyad.

One of the few survivors of this massacre was the founder of Caliphate of Andalus Umayyad Abdurrahman b. Muaviye. Abdurrahman went to Andalus in 755 and became the first founder and ruler of the Independent State of Umayyad. As a result of the authority gap that came into existence in the future periods of the state, large and small many states were established in place of the state of Andalus Umayyad and a new period called Mülûku't Tavaif started (Özdemir, 1995: 212-214). Since many influential families living cities outside Cordoba declared their independence following the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate, the number of small cities established in that period is not known for certain. After the fall of Toledo city as one of the significant cities of the period into the hands of Christians, an important threat came to the forefront for the Muslim population living in Andalus. Some of the emirs sensing the approaching threat asked the help of Almoravids ruling in North Africa thanks to the support of ulema and public and thus a new period called ad Almoravids era started in Andalus (Özdemir, 1995: 214). Later on, two different administrations ruled the state up to 1492 called Almohads Era and Emirate of Granada respectively. As a result of the invasions of Christian kingdoms, the capital city Granada was conquered in 1492 and the Islamic rule of 781 years in Andalus came to an end (Bal, 2008: 35).

#### **4. Certain Scientific Activities that Took Place in Andalus Era**

Andalus is accepted as the birthplace of Islamic philosophy and it raised important scholars in many fields such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy and botanic in terms of scientific knowledge. In addition to language and literature as part of social sciences, important scholars within the fields of history, geography, biography, philosophy and religious studies were raised and valuable works were created. Some of the scholars that lived during the first times that Almoravids ruled in Andalus are Ebû Cafer Yusuf b. Hasdây, Ebû's-Silt, Ibn Bâce, Ebû Mervan Ibn Zühr, Ebû'l-Ulâ Ibn Zühr, Ebû Mervan b. Ebû'l-Ulâ' Ibn Zühr and botanic scholar Ibnü'l-Avvâm from Seville. The scholars that lived during the rule of Almohads

were; Hafîd Ebû Bekr Ibn Zühr, Ebû Muhammed Ibnü'l-Hafîd Ibn Zühr, great scholar and philosopher Ebû'l-Velîd Ibn Rushd, Ebû Bekr Ebû'l-Hasen Zührî and botanist Ibnü'l-Baytar from Mâleka. These scholars, as the most valuable persons of their time, made great contributions to the Andalus culture and development of its civilization. As examples to the scientists pioneering the scientific activities developing in Andalus, the names Zehrâvî and Ibn Baytar can be given. Having lived in Andalus, Zehrâvî is a great scholar of the 10<sup>th</sup> century who revealed that the simple and insufficient tools used for the operations for longer than one thousand years need to be re-designed via a thirty-chapter work called Kitâbu't-Tasrîf. Introducing more than 200 operation tools, Zehrâvî drew all the tools he mentioned in this work and explained in detail from which materials these tools needed to be produced and what kind of usage would be suitable. This magnificent source is known as a fundamental work referenced both in Islamic geography and Europe for hundreds of years. It is known that many of the operation tools explained in the work are still used and among these tools are many tools used for simple or difficult operations such as cauterization tools, scalpels, scissors with special ends, labor tools, and kidney calculi tools. The last three volumes of this work were left for surgery under the name of Kitâb'ül Cerrahiye. This valuable work paving a scientific way for the surgery was translated into Latin, Greek and Hebrew and impacted all the medical applications of the Middle Ages (Kayabalı, 1988: 245).

Another representative of the scientific activities conducted in Andalus is Ibn Baytar. His famous pharmacology book called Kitâbu'l-Câmi' li-Müfredeti'l-Edviye ve'l-Ağziye that was used until 19<sup>th</sup> century has the feature of being the most detailed pharmacology encyclopedia that reached from Middle Ages to today. 1400 different plant, medicine and food used in treatment were listed alphabetically in the work in question. Approximately 200 plants provided in the list were stated for the first time in this work. The information in the book consists of 150 Muslim and 20 Ancient Greek scholars' works in addition to the personal experience and works of Ibn Baytar. The work created a great influence both in the Islamic geography and in Europe and was translated into Latin and printed in 1758. While preparing the work, Ibn Baytar analyzed, recorded and drew the plants by traveling Anatolia, Middle East and North Africa. The work in which the names of the plants were in Persian, French, Latin and Berber along with Arabic, was translated into Turkish in summary as an order of Umur of Aydın from Aydınids. A sample of this translation is registered at Istanbul University Library manuscript section with no. 1204. The work was printed in Cairo in the year 1875. The fact that majority of the information explained in this unique work is still valid today is of great importance (Adıvar, 1970: 13).

## 5. Andalus Era Translation Activities

Translation activities in the Islamic civilization history bring to mind Baghdad and Andalus under the rule of Abbasids. The translation activity that started in Baghdad within the fields of science and philosophy was continued in Andalus in a more intensive way. While the scientific studies made progress in the East, the European Christians banned scientific and intellectual activities for they were considered unholy. Therefore, while the western world lived during the time defined as “*dark ages*”, they were not aware of the Andalus-Islam civilization. However, in the later periods, the Christians had the chance of getting to know the Islamic civilization closer thanks to the Crusades held against Andalus and Middle East. Although there was a civilized communication and interaction during the Crusades, the war was just one of the means. The need to see the Islamic countries arose within European society, and as a result of that they started to adopt the peaceful lives of the Muslims with high prosperity levels. With the start of this great cultural interaction, the Europeans analyzed and adopted the works belonging to the Islamic civilization in the fields of science and philosophy, and within this framework, they started to translate the Arabic works into Latin. Sicily was one of the two important centers for translation activity after Baghdad and the most important was Andalus. Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, which was the golden age for the Muslims, while constraints were put on scientific development in Christian countries, remarkable number of scientific works and inventions were created in Islamic universities. At that time the place, in which the unseen and new opportunities existed for culture, was Islamic world; a vast source of knowledge was created in the Caliph’s library in Cordoba by bringing 400.000 volumes of books together (Bucaile, 1981: 175).

Within the process that all these developments continued, the Muslims established scientific centers to conduct scientific studies in countries immediately after they conquer them and encouraged the movement of elite scientists of advanced levels towards these places in question. Since the significance of positive sciences was understood initially by the papacy, many prominent clergy went to Cordoba to complete their studies and received scientific analysis and research methods training from the Islamic scholars (Rıza, 1982: 142). Although translation activities in Andalus started in 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the more systematic and intensive, form took place in the beginning of 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Cordoba and Toledo became the centers in which translators and writers worked. It is known that Andalus Umayyad caliphates, and especially Hakem el-Müstasnr, established a very rich palace library in the capital city Cordoba, through books they gathered from the Eastern – Islamic science centers of Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Alexandria and Constantinople. On the other hand, the opportunity to benefit from the special libraries created in Cordoba was given to all without

discriminating against Muslims, Jews or Christian. Thanks to that effort, Cordoba and Toledo transformed into a civilization center, in which scholars from different religion and nations united. Other scientific centers similar to the translation schools in Toledo were opened in Seville and Murcia in 7<sup>th</sup> / 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Çetinkaya, 2013: 11)

Andalus civilization appears before us as a book civilization and it is understood that translation activities were the most important factor that led to books and the construction of civilization. As stated earlier, the most prominent center of Andalus in that matter is Toledo. Toledo translation activities are known as the most comprehensive translation activity following Beyt'ül Hikme in the Abbasid era. A similar function of Beyt'ül Hikme in the construction of Islamic civilization was displayed by "Toledo Translation School". Having made great contributions to the creation of western civilization, the translators of Toledo Translation School were not the actors that only translated the texts but also the culture (Özdemir, 1997: 15). These schools, which became translation and culture centers where Eastern – Western cultures were learned and researched, followed similar activities in cities such as Toledo, Granada, Cordoba and Seville. In the stated culture and translation centers, the translations that included Arabic, Syriac, Aramaic, Hebrew and Persian as part of eastern languages within the fields of Astronomy, Mathematics and Medicine attracted the attention of the west. It is a known fact that Islamic philosophers such as İbn Rushd, Musâ b. Meymûn, Ibn Bâce and İbnü'l-Arabî shaped the intellectual and scientific lives of the Christians through their works and ideas for many centuries. The likes of Albert Magnus, Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, Leon-Castile king Alfonso el Sabio X, Dante and Bacon are some of the European intellectuals that created works under the influence of Andalus – Islamic philosophers (Okuyan, 2011: 101).

## 6. Conclusion

Andalus culture and civilization is recognized as the center of translation movement and cradle of scientific movement in Europe. The longest connection between the Muslims and the Christian Europe was created via translations made in Spain and these translation activities in question cast light upon the acquisition of scientific works of Islamic world with the incentive and support of the papas and Christian kings in XII century in Europe.

Among the translation activities that took place in Europe in XII century, Toledo Translation School became the center of Spanish translation movement in terms of the number of translated works, the translators working there and its impacts. The primary works prepared in the fields of Astronomy, Medicine, Chemistry, Nature, Psychology, Logic and Politics were translated into Latin and other languages in Toledo Translation School. As



part of the translated works are the works of Greek and Muslim philosophers such as Aristo, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd.

The vast source of knowledge, whose transmission from the Andalus civilization was enabled, became a center of attraction for the European culture for centuries thanks to the translation activities, schools and libraries.

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