

LITERARY TRANSLATION
FROM ARABIC INTO ENGLISH
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

1990-2017

ALICE GUTHRIE



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INTRODUCTION

This is an update of a report published by Literature Across Frontiers in 2011 which formed part of a large project of mapping translation flows in the Euro-Mediterranean region, commissioned by the Anna Lindh Euro Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, an intergovernmental institution co-financed by the 42 countries of the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Commission. Translation was identified by the Anna Lindh Foundation as being central to intercultural dialogue and the vast study it launched in 2012 mapped translations between 57 language pairs, taking into account not only statistics, but, importantly, the ‘various aspects and actors of translation, including authors, translators, publishers, book sellers, librarians, critics and funding donors’. The study was intended to provide a basis for future research and continued debates on the subject, with the ultimate aim of formulating a Euro-Mediterranean Translation Programme.

However, the Arab world consists of more countries than those included in the Union of the Mediterranean, and while the countries of the Maghreb (North Africa) and the Mashreq (‘Levant’) are known as the main locations where literature is published and consumed, the Gulf region has been in recent years investing in programmes encouraging translation and developing industry forums and business platforms where Arab publishing professionals can interact with their colleagues from the rest of the world. Significantly, the study was published in the year that revolutions broke out across the region, the suppression of which caused widespread turmoil and in the case of Syria and Yemen even civil wars. The subsequent displacement of writers, journalists and publishers who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries or further afield in Europe has complex effects on the writing and publishing scene, of course.

The 2011 study, based on a large number of interviews with the relevant actors in the United Kingdom, examined not only the publishing of translations but the entire infrastructure from training of literary translators to reviewing and reception of translated books. It identified key issues and problems, and formulated recommendations. Looking back six years later, we can see that, although there have been some positive developments, many of the recommendations have

not been implemented and the opening paragraph of the Executive Summary to the 2011 report applies now even more than it did in at the time of writing and publication.

‘This report was written at a time when most organisations promoting literature and supporting literary translation across Europe are experiencing cuts to their already inadequate budgets. This presents an immediate threat to literary translation, which depends largely on public and private subsidies. Yet, the need for translation between languages and cultures, between Europe and its neighbouring regions, and in particular the Arab world, has never been greater. It is clear that we need to develop new and innovative approaches to argue the case for the key role of culture, including literary translation, in contributing to intercultural understanding, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in the wider Euro-Mediterranean region.’

While there have been some positive changes, the funding implications of ongoing political change and Brexit for the UK translation scene are as yet unknown. However, as Creative Europe translation grants now include Arabic as an eligible language for the first time, UK publishers could lose access to this and other types of funding. Furthermore, given that a great deal of Arabic literary publishing in English originates in the USA, recent threats by the current US administration to entirely defund the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) there, although yet to be approved by Congress, are discouraging.

METHOD AND SCOPE: AN UPDATE

The 2011 report was extensive and comprehensive, and this short and concise update is intended not to replace it but to complement it by looking at developments over the past six years: which of the same issues identified back then remain, what new issues have arisen, and which, if any, of the report’s recommendations have been implemented.

LAF’s recent update to our statistical report on literary translation publishing in the UK and Ireland provides figures for books translated from Arabic and published in the UK, based on the British Library data. However, we are not providing an updated bibliography appended to this report in the same format as our 1990-2010 edition, as we are currently reconsidering bibliography methodology for this context in the light of several complicating factors.

Firstly, the unfortunate limitation of the British Library data sets is that they include anything with an ISBN, such as self-publishing and non-commercial titles which may not be properly distributed, thereby blurring the picture of what is available to the ordinary reader. Further complicating the data, some records are filed for books that do not in the end get published, and on the other hand some records of published books are missing, due to glitches in the system.

In the US Chad Post's work on the Three Percent database addresses this blurred picture well and provides an accurate view of everything distributed in the US, which includes some but not most UK publications. In the UK however there is so far no equivalent to this database available, and no funding for it to be developed. In practice, a close observer of the scene such as ArabLit founder and editor-in-chief Marcia Lynx Qualey may well have the best grip on the numbers of Arabic books appearing in the anglophone world, even if this knowledge is anecdotal rather than based on strict statistics.

Secondly, it is crucial to note that whilst very little Arabic literature is published in the UK compared to the US, the world of book buying, distribution and discoverability is a different place compared to six years ago, with online book retailers supplying books published in the US to the UK customer. Of course, for the UK customer to order the book in question they have to know that it exists, and a book which is not distributed in the UK will not be on a physical UK bookshop table to be browsed by the customer in person. But given that the Arabic literary scene remains such a marginal and niche market, and given that the main way a curious reader might come across mention of a book translated from Arabic is online at a site such as [ArabLit](#) or in the suggestions section of an Amazon page, ordering online is a likely way for this customer to shop, unaffected and probably unaware of the formal national distribution of the product.

With all that in mind, it seems most logical to consider the figures provided by Chad Post's [Three Percent database](#) plus the number of books we know were published in the UK for any given year as roughly indicative of quantitative trends in publishing as they affect the reader in real terms for our purposes here, and to consult Marcia Lynx Qualey on her impressions.

FINDINGS AND ISSUES: AN UPDATE

LITERATURE TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC – VOLUME AND TRENDS

The Three Percent database mentioned above reveals that the number of books published in translation from Arabic that are distributed in the US has fluctuated without changing dramatically overall during the six years since our last report:

2011: 18

2012: 25

2013: 17

2014: 24

2015: 26

2016: 25

If we add to these figures the numbers for UK-only titles (only compiled up to 2015 so far), the likely total would reflect a similar trend:

2011: 28

2012: 38

2013: 23

2014: 28

2015: 25

However, Marcia Lynx Qualey notes that:

‘Since 2010, the number of Arabic books published in English has been increasing in fits and starts, with the majority of the activity coming out of the US and Arab-majority countries, namely Egypt and Qatar. I don't keep exact figures, but the titles are booming – 2017 will be a particularly large year, with 20 titles forthcoming in the fall season alone. There was perhaps a dip in the total production when BQFP stalled out and AUC Press reorganized to launch Hoopoe, in 2013-2015. But now Amazon Crossing, for instance, has joined in with Arabic titles for 2018. It's already looking to be another boom year.’

The authors of the original 2011 report noted an increased interest in Arab writing during the period in question, and once again in 2017 a tangible (if very hard to measure) increased interest in Arab writing and culture in the English-speaking world can be observed. Two snapshots perhaps indicative of this development are: Basma Abdel Aziz's novel *The Queue*, translated by Elisabeth Jaquette, sold 5,000 copies in the first six months after it was published by Melville House in 2016; and several Arab writers working in English have met with substantial critical and commercial success since 2010, notably Susan Abulhawa, Rabih Alameddine, and Laila Lalami (whose *The Moor's Account* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2015 and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in the same year). Although outside of the scope of this report, it is important to note this expansion of the anglophone reading of Arab writers and Arab world narratives. However, Arabic literature in English translation is still far from mainstream, far from commercially successful in the main, rarely reviewed, hard to fund, and precariously placed. It is also worth noting that Arabic literature faces the specific challenge of being published in a racist reception environment: a recent YouGov poll showed that 55% of UK voters regard racial profiling of Arabs by police as 'right.'

Although often problematic for the writers concerned, there has been some increased visibility for writers and books from the countries of the Arab 'Spring' since 2011, as well as resulting from the refugee 'crisis' and the recent US travel ban. The latter two phenomena have focused some attention on the Arab world and lead to a number of specific publications and special editions of journals being produced in response to these events by Comma Press, Saqi, Asymptote, and others. For some this response is seen as a way of defying the political moment by taking a real interest in the literature of these peoples; for others it constitutes a continuation of what the 2011 report noted:

'With some exceptions, interest in books coming from the Arab world is determined by socio-political factors rather than by the desire to explore the literary culture of the Middle East and North Africa for its own merits. This means that books from this region are often approached primarily as a source of socio-political commentary or documentary, rather than as literary works per se.'

Whatever the content of these books and the way they are received, the 2011 report's conclusion still stands:

'It seems to be mainly extra-literary factors that make publishers take an interest in books from the region. In the case of Arabic literature, we have witnessed a sharp rise in interest in the Arab and Muslim world following the events of 9/11. Despite this, translation from Arabic largely remains the preserve of specialised publishers.'

But there is much to be celebrated, too. The important work of Arabic literary stalwarts Banipal, as noted in 2010, continues apace and has expanded with the magazine's full and searchable digitisation of their entire archive and ongoing digital and hard copy publication. Their popular live events continue, and the Saif Ghobash / Banipal Prize endowment now includes, since 2015, an annual lecture in London on literary translation. In addition to all this, in 2016 a major new initiative was launched in collaboration with the British Council and St Aidan's College of the University of Durham: the Banipal Visiting Writer Fellowship. This annual three-month residency for an author writing in Arabic attracts hundreds of applications every year. In addition to providing time space and funds for intensive writing, it includes monthly literary events around the country and provides good visibility for the writer in question.

The [ArabLit](#) blog, founded by now editor-in-chief Marcia Lynx Qualey, has evolved into more of a high quality review journal, database, media platform and arts magazine than a blog, featuring guest writers, rich media content, events calendars, and comprehensive cross-referencing with other art forms and venues. Long seen as the go-to source of information on Arabic literary publishing news, the site increasingly offers information on titles that have yet to appear in English, and is followed by keen readers all over the world.

Comma Press, having championed Arabic writing for years, have now developed an actual Arabic imprint, publishing both single-author collections and anthologies from the region, commissioning much new work and broadening the range of Arabic literary genres available to the anglophone reader.

In 2016 the American University in Cairo Press launched a new imprint, Hoopoe, broadening and reinvigorating the range of their contemporary publications. It remains to be seen whether the imprint will achieve an improvement in the distribution and publicity of their titles.

Chicago-based digital journal *Words Without Borders* has produced special editions on several countries from the region, and looked at the Arab 'Spring' five years on from its inception in 2016; US literary journal *The Common* brought out 'Tajdeed: Contemporary Arabic Stories', guest-edited by Hisham Bustani, in 2016, to be followed by regular insets of Arabic fiction in their future editions. Other quality US literary journals have turned their attention to Arabic literature in translation with occasional features.

A key development for the scene since 2011 has been the launch of the Library of Arabic Literature, a monumental initiative based at the New York University Abu Dhabi and published by NYU Press. The series offers Arabic editions and English translations of significant works of Arabic literature, with an emphasis on the seventh to nineteenth centuries, supported by a residential fellowship programme for the editor-translators of the works. Since LAL requires that its editor-translators have a doctorate, that tends to limit the range of fellows to academics. Initially appearing in dual-language hardback editions, LAL titles are also issued in English-only paperbacks, thereby appealing to both the academic and the mass audience – at least in theory. Editorial standards are very high, and the initiative marks a major and overdue departure in bringing part of the Arabic canon over into English. Notably praised for being a quality literary project funded by a Gulf state, there have also been various protests over the NYU Abu Dhabi collaboration in general in recent years, sparked by issues ranging from to the treatment of Abu Dhabi campus workers to the denial by UAE authorities of visas for several dissident Emirati NYU faculty members.

London-based Libyan family business Darf Publishing has been in existence since 1980, but since 2014 their list includes a new focus on contemporary Arabic fiction in English translation, with several novels a year appearing since then. The house has broken new ground by using bilingual editorial capacity on all their novels. *The Common's* upcoming new Arabic literature series, as well as their 2016 special edition of contemporary Arabic fiction, *Tajdeed*, also used bilingual editors to review translations, and this may be taking place in other projects without the knowledge of the authors of this update. Might this prove to be the start of an important new trend?

Established Egyptian bookstore Alef opened two London stores in 2015 and 2017, adding to the physical places readers can browse and buy Arabic literature in translation.

Bloomsbury and the Qatar Foundation dissolved their partnership (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing) in 2014, having been in operation since 2010, and the press became Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, which continues to publish Arabic literature in English translation. Despite the fact that BQFP's initial ambitions and plans such as mentoring schemes and secondments, or the planned 'Gulf-based platform to discuss issues related to translation at both the theoretical and practical level' did not materialise or take off as hoped, the house certainly brought a broader range of titles into English, with key Arab world commercial successes or talking points such as *The Bamboo Stalk* by IPAF winner Saud Alsanousi appearing in English.

Haus Arabia as a distinct imprint no longer exists, although Haus still publishes several Arabic titles a year as part of their main fiction list. Their mentoring scheme of young writers by Rafik Schami has also folded, having produced only one novel, *Sarmada* by Fadi Azzam.

The expansion of Amazon Crossing, now the biggest publisher of fiction in English translation, has not yet resulted in their publishing a book translated from Arabic, although they are apparently set to publish one in 2018.

Since 2010 several Arabic translations have been nominated for or won prizes in the anglophone world, adding to media coverage and visibility of this sector: the 2012 National Translation Award went to Sinan Antoon's translation of *In The Presence of Absence* by Mahmoud Darwish, and in 2015 the same award went to William Hutchins for *New Waw* by Ibrahim al-Koni; the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize went to an Arab author for the first time in 2014 – Hassan Blassim for *The Iraqi Christ* (in English translation by Jonathan Wright, published by UK independent Comma Press). The 2015 Man Booker Prize (before those two prizes merged) had two Arab writers on its shortlist, Huda Barakat and Ibrahim al-Koni, for the first time in the prize's history.

The Liverpool Arab Arts Festival has continued to develop, featuring some literary events every year. The London biennial festival of Arab arts Shubbak, launched in 2013, has developed a literary strand, with a two-day programme of Arabic literary events taking place in 2015 and 2017 alongside artist residencies and special commissions including collaborative publications of new

work in *Words Without Borders* and *Modern Poetry in Translation*. The theatre and performance strand of the festival regularly features plays translated from Arabic, adding to an area identified in 2011 as particularly lacking. Some of these works have a marked literary crossover appeal, such as 2017's *Taha*, the fictionalised life story of celebrated Palestinian poet Taha Muhammad Ali.

The Abu Dhabi-funded International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) has continued to offer greater visibility to Arabic literature, producing translated extracts from their shortlisted books as well as high quality media content about their authors and hosting their 'nadwa' writing retreats for emerging writers. Since 2015 the prize has also funded some writers from the region to appear at Shubbak in London. Although there is some concern over the mechanisms of candidate titles' nomination as well as some controversy around the politics of some of the judges, as the 2011 report noted 'the mere existence of a prize such as IPAF which indirectly challenges censorship is a very positive development.' In recent years the prize has done vital work in this regard, spotlighting issues of racism and the abuse of migrant labour with the 2013 award to Saud Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk* and risking homophobic backlash in the region by shortlisting Mohamed Abdelnabi's *In the Spider's Room* in 2017.

Political events since 2011 have created a new Arab diaspora in the UK and Europe, including members of the literary community. The emergence of a new generation not only of writers but also publishers, such as Dar al-Mutawassit in Milan or Bright Fingers, a Syrian publisher of children's books in Arabic, now settled in Amsterdam, will likely contribute to shaping the trajectory of Arabic literature in English over the coming years. Whether this will lead to more diverse translations and publications, and how it might affect standards and gatekeeping, are open questions at this point.

In terms of an overview of trends since 2011 for diversity in terms of authors' gender and country of origin, Marcia Lynx Qualey has this to say:

'There is definitely more attention being paid to gender balance. People are talking about it, at least. Of the 20 translations I know of forthcoming in the fall of 2017, six are by women, which is a bit better than usual. One thing that's been pointed out is the masculinizing effect of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction: It's the most well known prize, and it's male-dominated. Areas where women have dominated the prize sphere,

such as graphic novels and literature for young people, are less well represented in translation.'

She goes on to note:

'I think there is some movement toward diversification, although as Sudanese novelist Hammour Ziada has noted (about diversity in other Arabic literary contexts), we're still awaiting the inclusion of Eritrean and Mauritanian authors, for instance. There has been some movement toward publishing new Sudanese authors, which is excellent, and Sudanese writer Bushra al-Fadil just this year became the first arabophone author to win the Caine Prize. And certainly there's been a much larger effort toward publishing Khaleeji [Gulf] authors, at least in part because of the boom of the Sharjah and Abu Dhabi book fairs.'

NEED FOR RELIABLE DATA ON PUBLISHED TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLATION MATTERS

The 2011 report noted that:

'The need for a reliable mechanism to collect and analyse data on translated books is one of the most urgent issues to have emerged from this and other studies and surveys, including those conducted previously by Literature Across Frontiers.'

Although this is arguably still the case due to the limitations of the datasets and the blurred picture mentioned above, some progress has been made, as LAF have produced a number of reports since then, compiling the data on translated books published in the UK: a feasibility study followed by a statistical report on translated literature published in the UK and Ireland covering the period 1990-2010 released in 2015 and updated to cover the years 2010-2015 this year.

Although as noted in 2011 there are several organisations dealing with translation which provide some information, none of them offers a comprehensive coverage of this field in the United Kingdom and Ireland comparable to, for example, the Three Percent website in the United States. The Anna Lindh Foundation is now proposing to create a digital platform for translation – not only between Arabic and English, but one that would serve the entire Euro-Mediterranean translation sector and would offer resources and information. This is a very ambitious aim and it remains to be seen whether it will be set up and be sustainable.

Although there have been some minor advances in this area (see below), the needs are still basically as they were in 2011:

‘Translation quality monitoring and assurance is another issue that comes up repeatedly with regard to Arabic to English translation. Publishing houses generally do not have the required expertise to assess translations from these languages or to offer editorial input, leaving translations without sufficient additional editing. There is also frequently a lack of professional editing of the original Arabic published text, which needs to be addressed. Measures to upgrade editorial care on the part of publishers and create a more robust critical review culture for translations from Arabic, which engages with the quality of translations, are therefore crucial to improving the quality of published translations.’

The high quality journal offering in-depth critical reviews of translations recommended by Marilyn Booth in 2011 has not materialised; there is still a limited amount of quality control assessment across the scene. As Sinan Antoon put it in his uncompromising and frank 2014 article on the subject, ‘A serious conversation about the criteria and methods by which literary translations from Arabic are evaluated in the Anglophone world is long overdue.’

Other issues noted in this section in the 2011 report appear here below, annotated in bold to reflect any changes or improvements:

- a) Changing demographics in the translator community, and how new intake can be supported
- b) Non-native Anglophone translators unsupported by native editors
- c) Insufficiency of training opportunities — importance of informal short term opportunities and especially the value of mentoring
- d) Academic credit **still** needs to be accorded to translations

Some more support has materialised for the first three items here above, in the form of BCLT mentorships and summer school since 2010 (and in the USA the American Literary Translators Association have launched a mentorship scheme modelled on the UK one). There are a few more residency programmes open to literary translators than there were. The informal training and

mentoring happening within the Emerging Translators Network online community and in person at the Literary Translation Centre at the London International Book Fair and the International Translation Day events, as part of an expanded and more robust translation infrastructure developed since 2010 are all moves in the right direction. But in terms of specific training courses for this language pair, or specific support for non-native speakers of English, not much has changed. The stated aim of the British Council in 2010, following the Cairo winter school pilot project for Arabic to English literary translators, to ‘secure a group of partners (UK and overseas) who will provide long-term funding and support for future workshops and establish a sustainable programme’ has not been achieved, although there was one further workshop in Doha. There are some hopes that further funding might be secured for this kind of work following a British Council roundtable on Gulf arts cooperation hosted with the Shubbak Professional Programme in July 2017, as yet unconfirmed.

It is worth noting in this context that language acquisition expectations for UK and US undergraduate Arabic language courses are set very low compared to other modern languages such as French or Spanish. In practice, one can graduate with a first class degree in Arabic from a reputable UK university without having read an entire novel in Arabic or written a composition of more than 500 words in Arabic. The implications of this for the ability of the graduate to translate Arabic literature are obvious. As Professor Wen-chin Ouyang put it during the recent International Translation Day panel on Arabic translation, ‘If language education is in crisis, translation will be in crisis.’

An additional obstacle to high quality language training for translators since 2011 is the impossibility of foreign students and researchers studying in Syria, and disruption to that possibility also in Egypt.

PUBLISHING, MARKETING OF BOOKS AND SUPPORT FOR TRANSLATION

The need identified in the 2011 report for ‘a better coordinated system of support for the entire publishing process’ can still be felt in 2017, perhaps unsurprisingly. The 2011 report went on to note that:

‘It remains to be seen what changes the Arab uprisings will bring in this regard, but it is unlikely that resources will be made available for the international promotion of culture and for translation in the short term, whether at pan-Arab or national level.’

Given the trajectory of the uprisings since 2011, it is perhaps surprising that there have been any positive developments in the literary funding arena at all, or that any funding sources even remain. With the exception of the Cairo-based Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy, a cultural NGO which made direct grants to several authors to pay for the translation of their work, but had to move out of Egypt after the government crackdown on NGOs, all the Arab world funding for translation has come from the Gulf. Principal funding schemes consist of those run by the Sharjah Book Fair and the Abu Dhabi Book Fair. The former runs a professional programme bringing together global publishing professionals who can apply for grants to cover the translation of titles acquired at the fair. In the case of Abu Dhabi, the grants programme ‘Spotlight on Rights’ covers the acquisition of translation rights rather than the cost of translation, and applications can also only be made in situ. Information about grants awarded is not made public by either organisation.

Two other less direct sources of Gulf funding aimed at promoting Arabic literature in translation are the Abu Dhabi-funded International Prize for Arabic Fiction, as mentioned above, and the Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding, founded in Qatar in 2015. In addition to awarding specific translations between Arabic and English and Arabic and other languages, there is also a set of annual Achievement Awards, one of which went to Banipal in 2016. As is the case with the other Gulf state funding streams, there have been concerns and protests over aspects of Qatari policy and ‘culture washing’ associated with this prize, most notably around the imprisoning of the poet Rashid Al-Ajami (also known as Ibn al-Deeb). This case provoked a boycott letter signed by most writers and translators in the scene which is thought to have contributed to his release from prison in 2016.

The positive developments in the wider translation infrastructure in the UK since 2011, such as the Literary Translation Centre at the London International Book Fair, the annual International Translation Day events, the Translators in Schools scheme, have of course had a positive impact on Arabic-English translation along with all other language pairs. Although nothing specific has changed in terms of funding translations, the whole infrastructure has become more solid as a result of that set of investments. Recent news of Daniel Hahn’s launching, with the support of the

British Council, a prize for a first published translation to be split between translator and editor is likewise positive news for the whole scene, including Arabic.

Other publishing issues noted in 2011 that remain relevant are listed here below, annotated in bold to reflect any changes or improvements:

- a) The negative impact of the commercial imperative in selection and promotion / marketing of published titles
- b) Disproportionate influence of certain parties on selection of authors and titles or 'gatekeeping', and lack of involvement of Arab experts in this selection process
- c) This has broadened out somewhat since 2011, with the expansion of new publishers and venues as noted above, and an increased range of translators and Arabic scholars and speakers able to recommend work. The continued expansion of the digital world and the connectivity it offers facilitates this.
- d) In 2013-15 And Other Stories ran an Arabic reading group in London Cairo and the NYC specifically aimed at finding books to translate, with all the titles under discussion suggested by translators. Although none of these ended up being published by AOS themselves a number of them did go on to be picked up by other presses, presumably at least in part as a result of the publicity and feedback on the books that this approach generated.
- e) Lack of translation quality control mechanisms and lack of copy-editors with knowledge of Arabic
- f) There have been some limited but commendable shifts towards using bilingual editors to work with translators on their texts, but so far only by a very few publishers and venues.
- g) Low rates of pay and poor contractual conditions, no royalties offered

Other funding issues for translation and promotion of books noted in 2011 that remain relevant today are listed here below, annotated in bold to reflect changes or improvements:

- a) Lack of funding in general; funding needs to be increased and cover all stages in the chain from selection to marketing

- b) Arab world funding issues: the lack of funding in general, and the question of ethical sources of funding, censorship
- c) As noted above, there has been some increase in Gulf funding for translation, but the ethical issues and concerns obviously remain. The need for Arab world funding for a broader range of publishing and promotional activities, rather than just rewarding the best translations, is widely felt.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The media attention given to translated Arabic literature in English has perhaps increased somewhat since 2011, partly due to the extra-literary factors mentioned above (so that a Syrian novel, for example, is newsworthy in a way it was not in 2010) and partly due to some small spikes in coverage around the various Arab writers and Arabic books longlisted shortlisted or winning awards in this period.

LITERARY EXCHANGE AND MOBILITY — THE BROADER PICTURE

The 2011 report noted that:

‘Provision for literary exchange and mobility in the British Isles is largely insufficient, and independent organisations are not given the incentives and support necessary to plan ambitious international projects and offer opportunities to professionals, both local and from abroad.’

Although in the specific context of Arabic to English literary translation there has been some improvement since 2015 with the Shubbak Festival’s literary strand bringing writers from across the Arab region and the diaspora for festival appearances and residencies, and since 2016 with the Banipal Visiting Writer Fellowship, artist mobility is increasingly impacted by the UK visa regime. There is a widely felt concern across UK arts organisations that international artistic presence at UK events is becoming too difficult to sustain for this reason.

RECOMMENDATIONS: AN UPDATE

In the conclusion of the 2011 report a number of recommendations were formulated. Given that so many of the of the issues remain, most of the recommendations therefore still apply: the following is an updated list reflecting developments noted above and focusing solely on those that apply to Arabic-English rather than the wider translation scene.

TRANSLATORS, TRAINING AND CONDITIONS OF WORK

There is a need to develop a coordinated raft of measures affecting translators:

- a) developing and improving training opportunities, especially in terms of short-term training, residencies and mentoring;
- b) raising the standards of undergraduate Arabic courses to be closer in line with other modern languages;
- c) improving translators' contractual conditions and remuneration — a role for the Translators' Association;
- d) creating support measures complementary to payment offered by publishers (following models and best practices in other countries)
- e) improving mechanisms for translation quality control and feedback on the standard of published translations, and measures to improve editing practices of both source and target texts by means of internships, training and seminars, the use of bilingual editorial capacity, and the production of manual-type publications
- f) An up-to-date, fully detailed contact database of currently active translators (identified by country of origin, so as to assess UK/US questions of translation) needs to be established, not only for the languages in question. In the absence of any significant membership in professional associations such as the Translators' Association, and in the absence of publicly accessible data, such information is hard to come by, except through publisher-by-publisher appeal.

PUBLISHING AND THE BOOK TRADE

A better picture of the trade end of publishing is needed in order to ascertain attitudes — and barriers — to the uptake of Arabic literature in translation by bookshops, libraries and the public. This would help to devise marketing and reader development strategies. In addition to publishers, there is a need to approach and interview sales reps, bookshop buyers, distributors and publicists to get a picture of the attitudes and barriers that exist in that last intervening section of the publishing endeavour between book production and reader. Online retailers such as Amazon or the Book Depository also need to be assessed both in terms of patterns of buying and patterns of related publicity.

OUTREACH TO INDEPENDENT PRESSES

Outreach to smaller independent presses is needed in order to achieve more diversity in publishing. These might be publishers with translation lists, or publishers with specialised interests, whether in a region or particular genres or forms.

TRANSLATION AND THE MEDIA

A thorough assessment of translated Arabic literature's coverage by print, digital and audio-visual media is required, so as to devise measures aiming to increase its visibility, under the aegis of the Translators' Association and the Society of Authors, British Centre for Literary Translation, English PEN and other relevant organisations. Further support for workshops and seminars on reviewing, the role of translators as reviewers, and general measures to improve reviewing by mainstream media are called for, as well as a specialised review publication dedicated to a more detailed analysis which would improve translation quality as a result of qualified peer review.

ENSURING DIVERSITY IN PUBLISHING

More resources need to be made available to organisations, venues and smaller presses publishing and promoting Arabic literature in translation, to ensure that small, independent

presses can effectively compete in a crowded market largely hostile to it. A regular publication summarising and reviewing new literature published in Arabic prior to its translation would be of great use. Despite improvements since 2011 that are noted above, contacts need to be improved between British and Arab publishers and the Arab literary world in general, further involving Arab literary professionals in the selection and assessment of material to be translated.

SUPPORT FOR LITERARY EXCHANGE AND MOBILITY

Resources need to be made available to achieve a more lively and equitable literary exchange, provide adequate mobility funding for authors, translators and other professionals, and create more residency opportunities in the UK and Ireland following international examples of best practice.

In addition, concerted campaigning around the problematics of the UK visa system for visiting artists needs to be coordinated among the very many organisations affected by it. In order for literary festivals to programme events that include Arab and other non-European authors arriving from outside the UK, and for these authors to be able to take part in artist residencies in the UK, a more reliable system of securing their visas is needed. At present the work, the cost and the uncertainty involved in getting a visa for a non-European artist is increasingly prohibitive for programming organisations, something that needs to be addressed.

ADVOCACY AND FUNDING FOR TRANSLATION

Translation into English is a priority for Arabic literature, as it provides for onward translation into other languages. New and innovative approaches need to be developed to argue the case for financial support for this translation — emphasising its role in the reduction of conflict, cross-cultural dialogue and international relations, for example, in addition to making a case for diversity and access to international culture as a means of countering rising islamophobia and xenophobia. This must be done with a view to accessing sources of funds that have not traditionally been available for the arts, literature, publishing or translation — such as charitable foundations, private individuals and innovative sponsorships. Existing sources of funding from

Sharjah and Abu Dhabi are restricted by would-be grantees having to attend the book fairs in person in order to apply.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is certainly some good news of positive developments in the scene, as well as the clear need for lots more improvement, as reflected in our updated recommendations. In a word, *discoverability* perhaps sums up much of what needs to change – both of books in the original Arabic by Anglophone publishers, and of translated Arabic books by Anglophone readers once they are published.

Furthermore, the scene is of course negatively impacted by broader paradigmatic issues including racism and xenophobia, the commercialisation and commodification of culture and the arts, low standards in language education, inequitable access to education the border regime, and so on. Obviously tackling these profound and systemic issues is far outside the scope of the recommendations made by this report, but it is worth remembering that improvements may be limited whilst those aspects of the broader paradigm hold firm.

At Literature Across Frontiers we will continue to observe developments with interest, and we hope to continue updating this report in the future. Watch this space.

Alice Guthrie is a British translator and editor specialising in contemporary Arabic academic, media and literary content. As part of her BA in Arabic Language and Translation from Exeter University she spent 2001-2003 studying in the Arabic language programme at IFEAD in Damascus. Since 2008 her translation work has been featured in a broad range of international venues and publications, and has been recognised with various grants and awards. As a translation assessor and comparative editorial consultant she specialises in the finest detail of translation; as an event producer she programmes the literary strand of Shubbak, London's biennial festival of Arab arts and culture.