

MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE IN GREEK TRANSLATION 1995–2020

Persa Koumoutsi

Series editor **Alexandra Büchler**

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Series editor: Alexandra Büchler

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Modern Arabic Literature in Greek Translation

1995 – 2020

Persa Koumoutsi

About the author

Persa Koumoutsi is a novelist, award-winning literary translator (Arabic, English, Greek) and Co-founder and Content Coordinator at Centre of Greek and Arabic Literature and Culture in Athens. She was born in Cairo, Egypt, and moved to Greece following her studies at the Egyptian University of Cairo where she studied English and Arabic literature. She has translated over forty titles, including a significant part of the literary work of the Egyptian Literary Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz from Arabic into Greek, as well as many other distinguished Arab authors. She has also worked as a publishing editor and attended many national and international literary forums. Among her distinctions are The International Cavafy Prize for translation (2001), honorary medals by the Egyptian ministry of education in (2008 and 2010), special award by the school of languages of the Al Azhar University (2015), 1st Translation Guild Award (2017). She has also published eight novels some of which have been translated into Arabic, including *West of the Nile*, *In the Streets of Cairo*, *A Walk with Naguib Mahfouz* and *Alexandrian Voices*. She writes articles and critical reviews for Greek newspapers and literary magazines.

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Introduction

This study examines the translation flows of Arabic literature into Greek during the past 25 years (1995-2020), with particular attention to developments of the last two decades and on the production of Arabic literary titles in the post-Arab Spring era. It offers an overview, a thorough list of the translated works, the factors for the shifts and changes, and Greek readership preferences.

Sources of information/database used for this study

BIBLIONET or Βιβλιονet.gr is the bibliographic database which since 1998 has continuously recorded all Greek publishing production information and is available free of charge by the **Hellenic Foundation for Culture**. This database provides the ability to search for information on titles (books published with Greek ISBN), persons (authors, translators, contributors) or publishing companies in various alternative ways: simple or complex search, thematic search, new releases, award-winning books, and so forth.

All data are interconnected by active links so that it is easy to navigate between fields and combine information retrieval.

BIBLIONET/Βιβλιονet.gr includes information on:

- Detailed bibliographic data (book title, author name, publisher, ISBN, subject, Dewey Decimal Classification-DDC, etc.)
- CVs, photographs and essays of the author and other contributors (translators, curators, illustrators, photographers, painters, etc.)
- Publishers (identity, contact details)
- Commercial information of the book (distributor, price, availability)
- Criticism-branded critical texts from print and digital press (newspapers, magazines).

However, although it started in 1998, the database contains information on books dating back to the beginning of the 1990s.

Additionally, I include a list of articles (and interviews of translators) in Greek, Arabic and English on translated works with links, as well as my personal view as the leading translator of Arabic literature in Greece since the early 1990s.

Overview

Arabic literature has always been a major part of world literature and enjoys a wide readership worldwide. It is not and must not be seen as a separate body, unless we need to demonstrate or emphasise its special features, cultural nuances, development, and impact on readers outside its geographical borders.

Although the intercultural relationships between Greece and the Arab world date back to at least 2000 years ago, and the Greek writing of great philosophers were translated by Arabs in the Middle Ages and vice versa, Modern Arabic literature, with a few exceptions, began to become more widely known in Greece in the 1980s. Before this period, the Eastern world was mostly depicted through the eyes of literary works of European writers such as P. Bowls of J. Barrows, Darrel, Tsirkas, Kavafis and others, followed by a few samples of French-speaking Arabic literature, the so-called Francophone-Arab writers. Exotic themes that were related to this geographical area (the Middle East) prevailed in their choice of subject matter. In other words, exotic or romantic themes were the main criteria for reading and selecting them. Thus, the Greek reader knew little about the core of modern Arabic literature and its intelligentsia, who laid the foundations of modern Arabic literature, such as Mahfouz, Taha Hussein, and Tawfiq al-Hakim. To them, contemporary Arabic literature was almost a 'terra incognita'. The only available text translated purely from Arabic was the (first) translation of the Qur'an by the Greek Orientalist Gerassimos Pentakis. This text was translated and published at the beginning of the 20th century and constituted the translation basis for all the rest of the translations of more recent Qur'an translations in Greece. There was a gap that lasted for almost six or seven decades.

Mid-seventies and eighties: a shift of interest

The primary cause of this shift of interest and perspective of modern Arabic literature was contributed by Palestinian critic and thinker Edward Said's *Orientalism*—perhaps the most important and famous by his books—which was published in 1978 and immediately

translated into many languages, amongst them Greek. The book was translated from the French language, but it caused a wide range of discussions at the international level, as it was, in essence, a critical review of the Western perception of the 'exoticism' of the East, where truths were either profoundly distorted or limited to the colonial experience. The influence of this work on the social sciences and humanities was enormous and contributed to people in the West turning their attention to contemporary Arabic literature with genuine interest and lack of prejudice, and consequently to its genuine representatives.

This shift of interest peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, mainly with translations of the Nobel Prize winning writer Naguib Mahfouz being published in Greek translation one after the other following his award. It took a literary Nobel for the West, Greece included, to wake up completely from its lethargy and prejudices and once again look with renewed and authentic interest at the literature of the East and its global/ecumenical dimension.

Naguib Mahfouz, who is generally acknowledged as the most representative writer, not only of Egypt, but also of the entire Arab world, introduced what I call the 'universality' of modern Arabic literature. After him, the history, the hardships/problems of the Egyptians reflecting those of the Arab world became more or less universally known, while Arabic cities such as Cairo, where we find the core of Egyptian society, within its small and large neighbourhoods became in itself a global or universal neighbourhood.

The Western and consequently Greek reader began to wander through the trails of human activities, recognising that they are all ordinary and familiar facets of life everywhere. As Naguib Mahfouz spoke of the human condition, man's existential problem, fears, weaknesses and despairs, honouring the living values of life and reminding us that happiness is the creation of man himself and that our greatest misery is the acceptance of our misfortunes. Throughout his work, Mahfouz clearly underlines man's everlasting struggle to face his nature, his follies and the limits he has created and imposed upon oneself, themes that were introduced by other renowned Greek and Western writers. Utilising and transforming local symbols of his birthplace into universal ones, he managed to introduce to the heart of the Western reader the Eastern world in its most exquisite version and composition. At the same time, he consolidated in the conscience of the reader the inevitable truth that man everywhere face the same struggles, both inner and external,

while life itself is an arena of challenges that need to be faced with courage, knowledge and self-awareness. Readers in Greece became mesmerised with his books and more interested in knowing about this geographical area and its original cultural representatives.

However, the beginning of his career was not very fruitful as a few of his books were translated from intermediate languages (English or French), and the reception was mediocre. In the beginning of 1990, the first book that was translated from Arabic into Greek was *بداية و نهاية* by the Egyptian scholar and translator Ahmad Etman. However, the rendering into Greek by a non-Greek caused some problems to the readership, so the publisher resorted to using English translators once more. It was not until 1995 that the book was translated into Greek from Arabic by the Greek-Egyptian translator Persa Koumoutsi that Naguib Mahfouz was met with great enthusiasm. Since then, one translation followed the other consecutively for almost 15 years.

Naguib Mahfouz translations translated between 1993-2013

- Miramar مرامار Μιραμάρ, translated by Ahmad Etman, Psychogios publications, 1993.
- Kasr al Shoque قصرالشوق Το παλάτι των επιθυμιών, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 1995.
- Aoulad el Gebelaoui أولاد الجبلأوي Τα παιδιά του Γκεμπελάουι translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 1996.
- Alf Leila oua Leila ألف ليلة وليلة Χίλιες και μια νύχτες, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 1997.
- Malhamat al Harafish ملحمة الحرافيش Το έπος των Χαραφίς, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 1998.
- Tharthara Faouk al Nil ثرثرة فوق النيل Φλυαρία πάνω στον Νείλο, Translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 1998.
- Khan el Khalili خان الخليلي κλεμμένα όνειρα στο Χαν ελ Χαλίλι, Translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 1999.
- Zoukak el Midak زقاق المدق Το σοκάκι της αμαρτίας, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios publications, 2000.
- Al Maraya المرايا Καθρέφτες, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 2001.

- Al kahera al Gadida القاهرة الجديدة translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 2002.
- Al Baki min al Zaman Saa الباقي من الزمن ساعة Απέμεινε από τον χρόνο μια ώρα, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 2003.
- Al Hob taht al Matar الحب تحت المطر Αγάπη κάτω από τη βροχή, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 2003.
- Al Sarab السراب Χίμαιρα, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Kastaniotis Editions, 2010.
- Amam al Arsh أمام العرش Ενώπιον του θρόνου, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 2011.
- Hadith al Sabah oal Massa, حديث الصباح والمساء, translated by Aggeliki Sigourou and Eleni Kapetanaki, Kastaniotis Editions, 2011.
- Qualb al lail قلب الليل Στην καρδιά της νύχτας, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 2012.

The post-Mahfouz era of Arabic literature in Greece

After Mahfouz's popularity and success, publishers turned their interest to Arabic literature, particularly Egyptian. Thus, more Egyptian writers were translated into Greek. This was also because Egyptian literature was considered more familiar to the Greek readership due to the proximity of the two nations and the cultural relations between Greece and Egypt, which were enhanced by the so-called Greek-Egyptians that returned to their homeland after the mid-sixties, seventies, and eighties.

Many literary titles were undertaken by various publication houses, which began to open their doors to Arabic literature and the East in general, particularly in the years that followed Mahfouz's success.

Translations from 2000-2020

The following translations of Egyptian Arabic literature were translated from 2000-2020:

- Youssef Idris, Kessat Hob. قصة حب, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Psychogios Publications, 2000.

- Ibrahim Abd el Meguid, Atabat al Bahga عتبات البهجة, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Libro Publications, 2002.
- Gamal Ghitani, Mutun al Ahram متون الأهرام, translated by Eleni Kapetanaki and Angeliki Sigourou, Kastaniotis Editions, 2006.
- Hala al Badri, Montaha منتهى, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Ilectra Editions, 2008.
- Baha' Taher, Ouahat al Ghoroub واحة الغروب, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Livanis Publications, 2009.
- Khaled el Khamissi, Taxi تاكسى, translated by Persa Koumouts, Metaixmio editions, 2010.
- Youssef Zidan , Azazil, عزازيل, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Livanis Publications, 2011.
- Yahya Haqqi, Kandil Oum Hashem, قنديل أم هاشم, translated by Eleni Kapetanaki, Maistos Publications, 2012.
- Reem Basiouni, Al Ostaza Hana, الأستاذة هناء, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Papadopoulos Editions, 2013.
- Sonalla Ibrahim, Al Lagna اللجنة, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Alfaomega Editions, 2019.
- Nawal el Sadawi, Firdaous فردوس, translated by Eleni Kapetanaki, Room, 2019.
- Taha Hussein, Doah al Karouan دعاء الكروان, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Gutenberg Publications, 2019.

Arabic Literature Outside Egypt

Another significant factor that resulted in this increase of interest in modern Arabic literature outside Egypt is that major historical events have transformed the traditional literary landscape of Arabic literature in the past few decades. It is well-known that whenever the political and social situation is transformed, it is usually accompanied by a

new artistic and literary movement, and countless examples support this view. The same occurred in Arabic literature; these changes directly and substantially impacted the type of literature written in Arabic.

Due to the political and social transformations that occurred, literature no longer became limited to the realistic depiction of traditional societies or the stereotyped themes of the past. Existential concerns were replacing the romantic notions that previously dominated (especially in poetry). Traditional methods of narration have also given way to new narrative techniques and more elliptical dialogues, and plain realism to symbolism and allegory. These changes started to occur particularly after the end of the colonial era, while women's social and political empowerment, even in more traditional or conservative societies, not only encouraged and enhanced women's writing, but resulted in the birth of a brilliant and rich production of fiction. This not only contributed to these transformations but embarked upon revolutionising Arabic literature.

One should not ignore the Palestine issue and its significant role and impact on these changes. The Arab Spring and the wars that took place during the last two decades in this geographical area also impacted the way writers think and express their views and experiences, creating new tendencies and themes and a generation of writers that altogether left behind introversion replacing it with openness, straightforwardness, clarity, and a critical or stochastic mood. The strict perspective of writers and their attitude towards anything that was old or outdated redefine modern Arabic literature. Particularly in terms of the Syrian war and the displacement of massive populations from their birthplaces into different European countries, the themes that have emerged correspond to the problems that the (displaced) Syrian community is faced with. The need for a dialogue, better understanding, communication and generally an 'opening to the Other' has become more imperative than ever.

The literature of the Arabic diaspora has also emerged stronger than before, with works that depict the emotional and cultural conflicts of people who are being torn between places. Due to this rapid transformation of the social horizons, which are inevitably reflected upon literary expressions, the focus of writers is now on concepts and issues concerning identity, nostalgia and the experience of displacement, as it affects the sense of belonging in

multifaceted or multicultural societies. These are ideas of utmost interest to the Greek readership due to their nature and historical sensitivity, as a large portion of Greeks were refugees or immigrants in the past. Currently, due to the financial crisis, the migration of massive numbers of young people to foreign countries has become once again a major issue, recreating or introducing the literature of the Greek diaspora anew, which was inert for a long time.

Poetry, in particular, has played an extremely important role in the diversification of Arabic literature as it carries all these characteristics. Consequently, an increasing number of poets of the new generation are being explored with great interest in Greece. In 2016, the first anthology of modern Arabic poetry appeared in the Greek market, causing quite a stir and winning the inaugural Greek Literary Translators Guilt Prize.

Arabic literature has demonstrated its universality and continues to have a significant impact on the Western world and Greece, which is in close geographic proximity to the Middle East and has also received a great number of Middle Eastern refugees.

Another factor is the emergence of a new generation of translators, although very few that appeared by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, translating from Arabic, or ‘almost from Arabic’—i.e. resorting to intermediate translations as well, mainly because as in Greece there is not an official Department of Arabic studies at a University, that could train translators properly and provide them with the right methodological tools needed, and although these translators relied on their personal or practical experience of the language, rather than a thorough knowledge of the literary language. In that respect, there are more books that have been translated into the Greek language.

Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the fact that many Arabic titles were also translated from other European languages, such as French, Spanish or even Italian, which also helped increase the number of translations of Arabic literature and maintain the translation movement of Arabic literature in Greece. Such were the translations of the renowned Egyptian writer Alaa Al Aswani, who has been translated from French. Some books were also translated at first from intermediate languages such as English or French and then were

republished again in translation from Arabic; such was the case of Rabee Jaber's *The Druze of Belgrade*.

Books from other Arabic countries translated between 2000-2020, undertaken by a wide range of publication houses in Greece include:

- Hoda Barakat, Harethou al Miyah حارث الميعة, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Alexandria Editions, 2004.
- Salwa al Neimi, Burhan el asal برهان العسل, translated by Persa koumoutsi, Okeanida Editions, 2009.
- Ibrahim Koni, الذهب ولعنة الصحراء, translated by Angeliki Sigourou, Eleni Kapetanaki, 2017.
- Sahar Khalifa, el Rabie el Nari الربيع الناري, translated by Angeliki Sigourou and Eleni Kapetanaki, 2018.
- Sinan Antoyan, Ar Roman Yaalam, translated by Angeliki Sigourou, 2019.
- Khaled Khalifa, الموت عمل شاق, translated by Angeliki Sigourou, 2019.
- Joka el Harthi, بنات القمر, translated by Eleni Kapetanaki, 2020.

Non-fiction from 2003 to the present

Non-fiction has not been a popular genre in Greece in general, particularly if it concerns other literatures. However, there have been some translations, such as the following:

- *Stefanites and Ichnelates*: a translation into Greek of *Kitâb Kalîla wa-Dimna*. While this translation has no entry in BIBLIONET, it is referred to in the bio of the translator. Publication date should be around 1997.
- The meanings of the Holy Qur'an, معانى القرآن الكريم Empiria Editions. This is the first translation of the Qur'an into modern Greek Language. Translated by Persa Koumoutsi, 2002.

- Adonis, *Nessab oua Mabade' نَسَبٌ وَمَبَادِيٌّ لِأَدُونِيْسٍ*, translated by E. Kondylis-Basoukou, Ellinika Grammata Editions, 2003.
- *Stories of Alf Leila oua Leila, قصص شهرآزات من الف ليلة وليلة*, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Narkissos Editions, 2006.
- Samar Yazbek, *أبواب للاشي*, translated by Eleni Kapetanaki and Angeliki Sigourou, 2016.
- Baha el Din ibn Shadad, *Saladin*, translated by Eleni Kapetanaki, Livanis Publications, 2016.

Poetry from 2001-2020

The interest in Arabic poetry culminated in the post-Arabic Spring era, especially during the last years of the Syrian conflict, for the same reasons previously discussed that concerned prose. Arabic poetry translated directly from the Arabic text first appeared in 2001 with the collection of the Saudi Arabian poet Abdalla El Korashi, who commissioned the translator (the only translator of Arabic literature at that time) to translate a select amount of his poetry. This marks the beginning of translating modern Arabic poetry in Greece, except for Khalil Gibran, who had been translated several times from English and French texts by the so-called Francophone translators in the seventies and eighties. In fact, Kahlil Gibran had been one of the most widely read poets in Greece after Kavafis, Seferis, Ritsos and other great Greek poets. This was followed by several translations that culminated after the Arabic Spring and were met with enthusiasm by the Greek readership:

- Abdalla El Korashi, *في ظلال المنفى*, a collection translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Sideris Editions, 2001.
- Adonis, *The Analogies and the Principles, Annotated Translation of the Eponymous Poetry Collection of the Arabic Poet Adonis*, translated by E. Basoukou, Kondylis, Ellinika Grammata Editions, 2003.
- Mahmoud Darwish, a collection, translated by Aggeliki Sigourou and Roni Abu Saba, Patakis Editions, 2009.

- Adonis, مقبرت نيويورك, a collection, translated by Aggeliki Sigourou and Roni Abu Saba, Patakis Editions, 2011.
- *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, selected poems from a vast area of 14 Arabic countries, selected and translated by Persa Koumoutsi, AΩ editions, 2016.
- Nourri Al Jarrah, قارب إلى ليسبوس, and other poems, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Alfaomega Editions, 2019.

Cyprus

Cyprus is a Greek-speaking country that has just recently been introduced to Arabic poetry with the work of Palestinian poet Najwan Darwish. A collection of 80 poems selected from several of his poetic collections on exile, grief and loss was translated by Persa Koumoutsi.

Other publications of translated works are pending for 2021. They were supposed to be launched by the end of 2020, but due to the global pandemic, they are about to be launched in 2021:

- Hoda Barakat, بريد الليل, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Kedros Publications, June 2021.
- Mazen Marouf, Jokes for Gunmen نكات للمسلحين, translated by Persa Koumoutsi, Xaramada Editions, October 2021.

Pending for 2021-22

Pending publication in 2021-22 is a bilingual anthology of Greek and Arabic poems on common themes such as the Mediterranean as a means of inspiration, representative poetry of the Greek and Arabic Diaspora, the representations of women's voices on both sides of the Mediterranean. Translators that have undertaken and currently work on this project are translators Persa Koumoutsi (Greece) and Dr Khaled Raouf (Egypt). The publication will be funded by the Hellenic Foundation and the newly founded KELALP (Centre for Greek and Arabic Literature and Culture).

Greek translators with more than one work according to appearance in the Hellenic translation scene, from 1995-present

Persa Koumoutsi (active translator since 1994) returned to Greece after completing her studies at Cairo University in Egypt. Since the early 1990s, she has been professionally engaged in literary translation, translating the majority of the translated works of the Egyptian Nobel Prize-winning writer Naguib Mahfouz directly from the Arabic language into Greek and works by other prominent Egyptian and Arab writers. Her work also includes the rendering of the sacred verses of the Qur'an (2002) and the first comprehensive *Anthology of Contemporary Arabic Poetry* in 2016. She has been awarded the International Kavafy (Honorary) Award for her work and received special honours from the Department of Greek and Italian Studies at Al-Azhar University, and the 1st Translation Guilt Award for her *Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*. She has also been awarded several honorary mentions for the promotion of intercultural dialogue between the West and East through her personal and translated works, as well as articles and reviews. Her work has been highly recognised by various cultural institutions in Greece and has represented Greece at many international literary conferences and International Book Exhibitions in Europe and the Arab world. Her reviews, texts, articles, and studies on translating contemporary Arabic literature are published in newspapers and literary magazines in Greece and abroad. Recently, she co-founded the Centre for Greek and Arabic Literature and Culture, which she now directs. The Centre aims at enhancing awareness of the importance of modern Arabic literature and its impact, strengthening cultural ties and promoting Greek and Arabic literary voices. She has also written a book on Naguib Mahfouz called *A walk in the Streets of Cairo: A walk with Naguib Mahfouz* which was published in Arabic by the Egyptian General Book Organisation in its 'Awards' series.

A full list of Persa Koumoutsi's translations and works can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/PersaKoumoutsi>.

Eleni Basoukou-Kondyli was born in Athens and grew up in Belgium. She first studied Romance literature and subsequently Byzantine and Classical Arabic literature and history. Her doctoral dissertation deals with the relations between Byzantine and Arabic literature. She has worked at the Center for Arabic Philosophy and the Institute of Oriental Studies at

the University of Leuven and at the Belgian National Center for Scientific Research. In 1993 he was awarded by the Belgian Academy. She teaches Arabic culture and Arabic literature as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Her published works include *Stéphanitès kai Ichnélatès*, a Greek translation of the novel *Kalila wa-Dimna*, *Udetude lexicologique et littéraire* (Peeters, Louvain, Paris 1997), *Introduction to Arabic Literature* (improved edition Field 2017), *The Analogies and the Principles*, annotated translation of the eponymous poetry collection of the Arabic poet Adonis (Greek Letters 2003 and 2019). She also writes poetry, such as *Culture* (Field 2016), *Wrong train* (Greek Letters 2006), and *News and beasts* (Endymion 2009).

A full list of Eleni Basoukou-Kondyli's translations and works can be accessed here:

<https://tinyurl.com/EleniBasoukou-Kondyli>.

Eleni E. Kapetanaki studied Economics. For a time, she worked as a bank clerk, but Arabic language and literature won her over. Currently, she lives in Athens and deals with translations of Arabic literature and historical works.

A full list of Eleni E. Kapetanaki's translations and works can be accessed here:

<https://tinyurl.com/EleniKapetanaki>.

Angeliki Sigourou was born in Athens in 1973. She studied French literature, dramatic art, and modern and classical dance. Her poems have been published in the literary magazines *Nea Poreia*, *Poisi*, *Dromologio*, as well as in the electronic magazines *poeticanet.gr* and *e-poema.eu*. He has translated from French Fernando Pessoa's play 'The Sailor' ('Mnimi' Theater Company, 1998), the philosophical essay by Costas Papaioannou "Hunt, homeland, space", the short story by Guy de Mopasan 'One' (Electra publications, 2008), and from Arabic Gamal Al Gitani's novel *Pyramids* (Kastaniotis publications, 2006), as well as the poetry collection *Siege Situation* by Mahmoud Darwish. She lives in Syros, where he teaches contemporary dance and where she created the dance theatre group 'Akropoditi' in 2005.

A full list of Angeliki Sigourou's translations and works can be accessed here:

<https://tinyurl.com/AngelikiSigourou>.

Interviews and Articles in Arabic, English and Greek

Below is a list of interviews and articles regarding the translation of Arabic literature in Greece:

- [Interview/Article 1](#)
- [Interview/Article 2](#)
- [Interview/Article 3](#)
- [Interview/Article 4](#)
- [Interview/Article 5](#)
- [Interview/Article 6](#)
- [Interview/Article 7](#)
- [Interview/Article 8](#)
- [Interview/Article 9](#)

Articles in Greek on Arabic literature/books

- [Article 1](#)
- [Article 2](#)
- [Article 3](#)
- [Article 4](#)
- [Article 5](#)
- [Article 6](#)
- [Article 7](#)
- [Article 8](#)
- [Article 9](#)
- [Article 10](#)
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- [Article 17](#)
- [Article 18](#)
- [Article 19](#)
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Readership in Greece

Although Arabic literature titles vary and have increased over the past two decades, unfortunately, the readership has decreased dramatically, particularly after the economic crisis in Greece that took place in the second decade of the 21st century. However, this is also the case for translated works from other languages such as French, Italian, and Spanish. Today, these books, Arabic included, maintain a readership of no more than 500-700 (sales numbers) per title at best. Some titles have not even reached these sales numbers. This small number of readers discourages publishers from publishing more titles per year.

Publishers who have published Arabic titles

The first publisher who introduced Arabic books and published titles translated from Arabic or other intermediate languages is Psychogios Publications, the leading publisher in that field for the past 20 years. However, as the sales of these titles decreased, Psychogios resorted to European titles in the last years. Other publishers include Patakis Publications, Kastaniotis Publications, Kedros Editions, Livanis, AW Alfaomega Editions, and Alexandria Editions.

Institutes that promote/disseminate Arabic literature in Greece: a short overview

Greece lacks a formal department of Arabic or Middle Eastern studies in universities and only independent subjects that concern Arabic civilisation are taught, including literature and Qur'anic studies. As such, these subjects are taught as part of the syllabus of other departments such as Greek Philosophy, Turkish studies, and International Studies, the work of selecting Arabic titles was (and still is to some extent) done mainly by book agents, publishers and translators. During the past decade, book agents have undertaken this role almost exclusively, although translators may also influence or play an important part in selecting and suggesting titles. However, this has proven insufficient. There has also been a realisation of the urgent need of institutes to promote and support the works and, to an extent, help in funding translations projects after the closing down of EKEBI (the National Book Centre of Greece).

The Hellenic Foundation for Culture's (HFC) responsibility for promoting literature

The HFC was established in 1992 and is based in Athens. Its main aim is to promote Greek culture and language throughout the world. Its mission is to promote the Greek language and books by presenting authors and new titles, supporting translations, and participating in international book fairs, etc. HFC has created a network of branches outside Greece by organising cultural events.

The HFC assumed responsibility for many EKEBI (The National Book Center) activities that were closed due to the economic crises in Greece and has branches based in Alexandria, Belgrade, Berlin, Bucharest, Moscow, Odessa, and Trieste. HFC is a member of two European cultural networks: the European Union of National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) and the Anna Lindh Foundation. It cooperates with Greek Studies university departments, Greek language schools, embassies, cultural centres, museums, and libraries worldwide.

However, its main function is to promote Greek books abroad. Only recently, they signed an agreement of cooperation with the newly founded **Centre for Greek and Arabic Literature and Culture (KELALP)**, which aims to bring the two literatures and cultures (Greek and Arabic) closer together through mutual understanding. Since mid-2020, KELALP has undertaken considerable initiatives to reinforce the links between Greek and Arab literature both in Greece and Arab countries by launching different activities and in particular specialised events between Greek and Arab poets that received the support of the Hellenic Cultural Foundation and the aegis of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs-see more about these events at:

<https://culturepolisngo.wixsite.com/kelalp/events?lang=en>.

New events are foreseen in KELALP for the 2021-2022 work programme together with targeted activities in the framework of projects led by CulturePolis and funded by the EU ERASMUS + programme:

- TOGETHER: **TOWARDS a cultural understandinG of tHE oTHER** <https://bit.ly/3gl8GKg>;
- READ-IN-CLUB: *READ-ING for CuLtUres across Borders*—<https://bit.ly/2QYD3kY>;
- Bilingual editions with special topics that enhance cross-cultural dialogue.

The **Centre for Greek and Arabic Literature and Culture** was co-founded and is directed by **Persa Koumoutsis**, translator of Arabic literature since 1995. KELALP has recently signed an agreement with **HFC** for further collaboration to promote Arabic literature in Greece and Europe.

Conclusion

Modern Arab literature has changed drastically in the past few decades, leaving behind its traditional character and now it seeks to satisfy a broader range of readership outside its boundaries, with radical works and ideas that give food for thought and reflection. Its readership is no longer choosing it out of 'curiosity' or for its exotic nature, as was the case in the past, but rather for its manifold and universal subject matter. However, as Greece is a small country with many financial problems, many translations do not reach a large audience. Therefore, institutions should do more work in this respect by increasing awareness and knowledge of such publications and their importance for cross-cultural understanding, and the new Centre for Greek and Arabic Literature will play an important part in raising this kind of awareness and stimulating interest.