

TRANSLATION OF MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE INTO POLISH 2010–2020

Marcin Michalski PhD

Series editor **Alexandra Büchler**

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**Translation of modern Arabic literature into Polish
2010 - 2020**

Marcin Michalski PhD

About the author

Marcin Michalski holds a PhD in general linguistics from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. He currently teaches Arabic and linguistics there. His research interests focus on Arabic language and linguistics but he has also done research on literary translation involving this language. He has translated, into Polish, literary texts from English and Spanish, but chiefly from Arabic. His translations from Arabic include books: *Taxi* by Khaled Al Khamissi, *Yalo* by Elias Khoury and *The Druze of Belgrade* by Rabee Jaber, as well as shorter texts by renowned Arabophone writers published in the leading Polish literary magazine *Literatura na Świecie*. In 2008 and 2010 he prepared a survey of literary translations between Arabic and Polish in the period 1990-2010 for the Next Page Foundation.

Contents

Introduction	4
1. Publishing	5
1.1. 2000–21 – an overview	5
1.2. The years 2010–21	6
1.3. Non-prose books, specialist publications and older prose	8
1.4. Arab authors writing in other languages	9
1.5. Publishers	10
1.6. Selection of titles for translation	11
2. Dissemination and reception	13
2.1. Dissemination and availability to readers	13
2.2. Media and critical reception	14
3. Public and private support for translation of Arabic literature	16
4. Translation	17
4.1. Translators	17
4.2. Language training opportunities	18
4.3. Nationals of Arab countries living in Poland	18
4.4. Conditions of work and translation quality monitoring	19
5. Conclusions and recommendations	20
Annexes	22
ANNEX 1: Bibliography of translations	22
ANNEX 2. Survey I: The translators	28
ANNEX 3. Survey II: The publishers	32

Introduction

This study is an update of the *Translations from Arabic in Poland, 1990–2010* report I prepared in 2010 for the Next Page Foundation.¹ Continuing directly from the first report, and covering the following decade, it describes translations of books from modern Arabic (i.e. Arabophone) literature into Polish in the years 2010–20 (2021). It deals with the **modern fiction** (such as novels and short stories), **memoir** and **reportage**. Thus, poetry, drama, specialist publications (historical, political, academic, etc.) and older literature are not taken into consideration as a rule. Section 1 begins with a short comparison of the period covered by this study with the preceding decade 2000–9. This is followed by a more specific look at the titles published in the years 2010–21. Next, examples of translations in other genres (poetry, specialist books) and translations of the work of Arab authors writing in other languages (English, French, German) are considered. Then, profiles of relevant publishers and a discussion of how titles are selected for translation. Section 2 deals with how the translations are disseminated and how they are received in the media and in literary criticism (reviews). Section 3 touches upon the issue of financial support for translation of Arabic literature, while in Section 4 the translators' profiles are presented and consideration given to issues such as training opportunities in Arabic, nationals of Arab countries living in Poland, and the conditions of translators' work and translation quality monitoring. Section 5 sets out some conclusions and recommendations. A complete bibliography is given in tabular form in Annex I.² Annex 2 and Annex 3 contain the results of the translators' survey and publishers' opinions, respectively.

¹ Marcin Michalski, *Translations from Arabic in Poland, 1990–2010: a study by the Next Page Foundation* (November 2010): <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/32866511/translation-activity-from-arabic-to-bosnian-1989-2010-next-page> [Note: the web address has an incorrect title referring to Bosnian].

² Since it has turned out that 'Przewodnik Bibliograficzny' [Bibliographic Guide], the official Polish bibliographic list published regularly by Biblioteka Narodowa (<https://www.bn.org.pl/bibliografie/bibliografia-narodowa/przewodnik-bibliograficzny>), has lacunae (e.g. Abd a-Rahman Munif 2010, Radža as-Sani 2010 and Youssef Rakha 2012 are missing), I have relied on my own research in completing the bibliography. I thank Hanna Jankowska, Marek M. Dziekan and Agnieszka Piotrowska for their help in reviewing it and identifying missing titles.

1. Publishing

1.1. 2000–2021 an overview

In the decade preceding the period covered by this study, 10 new Arabic titles were published in Polish translation; 2 of those in 2008 and 4 in 2009,³ indicating a rising tendency. Indeed, the next year, 2010, brought as many as 5 new titles, a record number (which was only repeated once, in 2019). These relatively high numbers continued until 2014, with 4 new titles appearing annually in 2011, 2012 and 2013, and 3 in 2014. The period 2009–13, which saw more than 4 new titles per year on average (and 3 reissues in total), can be referred to as the golden age of translation into Polish so far, the credit for which goes to the Smak Słowa publishing house: it published 8 new titles and 1 reissue in these four years. The year 2015, with just 2 new titles, marks the start of a decline in the number of Arabic books being translated into Polish: with 1 title published in 2016 and none in 2017. 2019 was, however, an exceptional year, with 5 new titles (3 of which were brought forth by one publisher, Sonia Draga). The quantitative development from outlined above is represented in Figure 1.

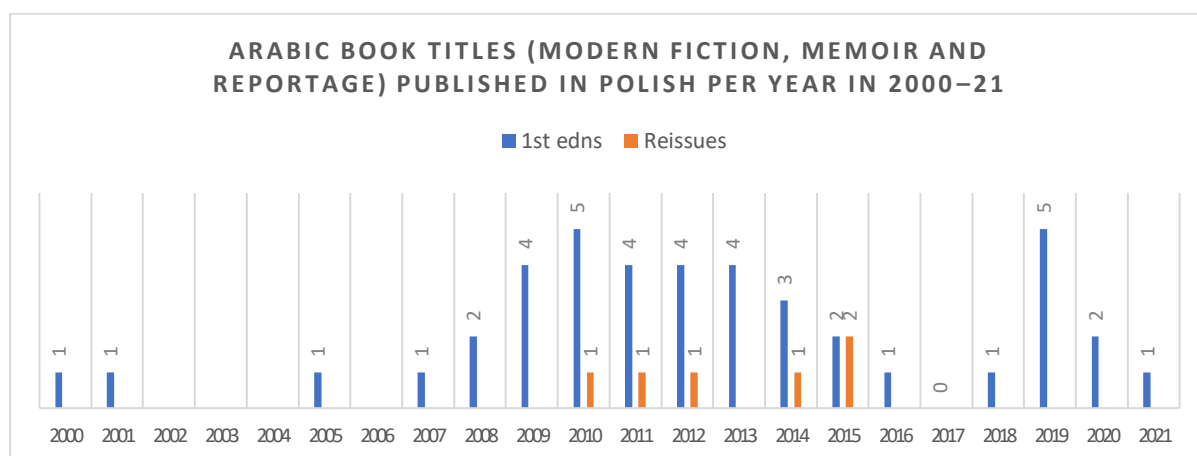


Figure 1. Arabic book titles (modern fiction, memoir and reportage) published in Polish per year in 2000–21.

³ Marcin Michalski, *Translations from Arabic in Poland, 1990–2010: a study by the Next Page Foundation* (November 2010): <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/32866511/translation-activity-from-arabic-to-bosnian-1989-2010-next-page->, pp. 21–2.

1.2. The years 2010–2021

In the period covered by this study, 2010–2021, there were **32 new titles** and 6 reissues (the latter discussed in a paragraph below). This is more than the total number of titles published in the years 1967–2009 in the same genre (1967 being the year when the first Polish translation of this kind appeared). Compared to the period 2000–2009 (10 new titles), the number has tripled. This is a very optimistic trend.

The 32 titles represent 26 writers. Some of these authors have had more than one of their books translated into Polish during the period: Naguib Mahfouz⁴ (as many as 5 new titles⁵ and twice 1 reprint), Tayeb Salih, Salwa Al Neimi and Elias Khoury (2 titles each).

As far as the authors' countries of origin are concerned, there are 10 books from Egypt (5 of them by Naguib Mahfouz), 6 from Lebanon, 5 from Syria, 3 each from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, and 1 each from Palestine and Qatar. There have been no translations of books from the Arabophone literature of the Maghreb (Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya) nor from Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. Interestingly, this geographical distribution reflects the long-standing belief, or stereotype, that the Arab East is better at writing than the Arab West (which is said to produce good literature, but in French).

Among the 32 titles, 12 were published originally in Arabic in the 20th century (3 of them in the first half), and the rest appeared in the 21st. In some cases the translation lag was very short: 9 Polish versions were published no later than 3 years after the original. This means that the translators and publishers have been trying to keep pace with the recent literary developments but have also cared about introducing to the Polish readership some overdue important modern classics (N. Mahfouz, T. Saleh). They have been well chosen and are the works of acclaimed authors. The writer who has had the greatest number of his books translated into Polish has been Naguib Mahfouz, the 1982 Nobel Prize winner, and other names would also be familiar to anyone interested in Arabic literature: Raja Alem, Alaa Al Aswany, Mourid Barghouti, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Rabee Jaber, Khaled Khalifa, Khaled Al

⁴ For the sake of ease of reading, the names of the Arabic authors are given in their English form in the body of the study. In the bibliography (Annex I), the Polish forms are listed first.

⁵ Together with the 5 Naguib Mahfouz titles published before 2010, they add up to 10, which is the highest number by a single author writing in Arabic ever translated into Polish.

Khamissi, Elias Khoury, Abdelrahman Munif, Salwa El Neimi, Tayeb Salih, Rajaa al-Sanea, Huda Shaarawi, Hanan al-Shaykh, Samar Yazbek. Less translated or lesser-known authors include Kholoud Charaf, Dunya Mikhail, Youssef Rakha, Iman Humaydan Younes, Amir Taj al-Sir, Dima Wannous and Jamal Fayeze.

22 titles are by 16 male writers and 10 titles by 10 female writers.

6 translations have not been made directly from the original Arabic language; the bridge languages are English (4 titles) and French (2).⁶

It is interesting to note that 5 of the 32 titles translated into Polish have not so far been translated into English.

There are 5 non-fiction books that can be classed as documentary prose (Mourid Barghouti, Khaled Al Khamissi, Dunya Mikhail, Youssef Rakha and Samar Yazbek) and 1 book of memoirs (Huda Shaarawi).⁷

Among the 32 titles, there are 2 new collections of short stories: one by Hassan Blasim from Iraq and the second by Qatari writer Jamal Fayeze, translated by a group of Arabic studies students and edited by their professor. Apart from these 2 new titles, a selection of prose fables by Georges Kass (Syria/Poland) from his two collections was reissued.

Although not a book, an entire issue of *Literatura na Świecie* (Literature in the World) – the leading Polish literary review that presents world literature, literary analyses and commentaries on translation – was dedicated to modern Arabic fiction⁸. Short stories or fragments of novels by Mohamed Choukri (Morocco), Nawal El Saadawi (Egypt), Gamal al-Ghitani (Egypt), Elias Khoury (Lebanon) and Salim Barakat (Syria), selected by Marcin Michalski, were translated by him and Hanna Jankowska and Izabela Szybilska-Fiedorowicz.

⁶ In 5 cases, this is explicitly indicated by the publisher. 1 book (*Przeprawa* by Samar Yazbek, translated from the English) contains no indication that it was originally written in Arabic.

⁷ 1 book of memoirs or belonging to the reportage genre, *Zapiski z Rakki: ucieczka z Państwa Islamskiego* by Samir (a pseudonym) (The Raqqa Diaries: Escape from Islamic State, translated into Polish by Michał Romanek via English in 2017), has a unique status: the original Arabic version remains unpublished, and the text was sent electronically by the author to Nadir Ibrahim, a BBC journalist, whose English translation appeared in book form in 2017.

⁸ *Literatura na Świecie* 11-12/2016.

A new phenomenon in the field of Arabic literature in Poland are the 6 reissues (or second editions) of 4 titles, the first of which appeared in 2010. This suggests that the publishers considered the reissued titles to be successful in some way. They include two by female writers, and one of them (Naguib Mahfouz's *Hamida z zaulka Midakk*, 1st edn 1982) was reissued three times (in 2010, 2014 and 2015).

There are no professional websites or online resources available in the public domain which present literary translations from Arabic. Samples of Filip Kaźmierczak's (unpublished in book form) translations of the works of Fawwaz Haddad, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Elias Khoury, Abdelrahman Munif and Ghassan Kanafani can be found on his blog,⁹ on the website of Biuro Literackie publishing house,¹⁰ and in online literary and cultural magazines.¹¹

1.3. Non-prose books, specialist publications and older prose

I have conducted no specific research into Polish translations of Arabic non-prose books, specialist publications or older prose. The names and titles given below (with no bibliographical data, for the sake of brevity) should therefore only be considered as examples.

The list of **poets** having their collections published in Polish translation in the years 2010–21 includes: Adonis (Syria), Kholoud Charaf (Syria), Ashur Etwebi (Libya), Hatif Janabi (Iraq/Poland), Nagmeldin Karamalla (Sudan/Poland) and Saadiah Mufarreh (Kuwait).

According to bibliographical sources and library catalogues a collection of Beirut **cartoons** (*Yalla: komiksy z Bejrutu*, 2010) was translated from Arabic but I was unable to verify whether it was indeed the source language.

⁹ <https://szkicownikarabeski.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁰ <https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/utwory/tlumacz-niewierny/>;

<https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/utwory/proroka-szkielko-oko/>.

¹¹ <http://tlenliteracki.pl/ahlam-mosteghanemi-fragment-powiesci/>. Kaźmierczak has also translated poetry by Rami Al-Asheq and Fady Jomar:

<http://tlenliteracki.pl/filip-kazmierczak-i-rami-al-aszek/>;

[http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=367&artykul=7235&kat=17](http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=367&artykul=7235&kat=17;);

https://przekroj.pl/spoleczenstwo/odkrywanie-siebie-rasha-habbal;

https://przekroj.pl/spoleczenstwo/cienka-zolta-struzka-rasha-habbal.

Translations of **specialist publications** (historical, political, academic, etc.) from Arabic into Polish have always been extremely rare unless religious texts published by Islamic institutions are taken into consideration. Here, mention must be made of *Równość i równouprawienie* (Equality and Equal Rights) by Lebanese-Palestinian writer May Ziyade (d.1941), translated by Mustafa Switat.

Older literature is represented in Polish translations by *Kitāb al-istiḡṣā*, a chronicle of Moroccan rulers, by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥālid an-Nāṣirī (d. 1897), translated and commented by Marek M. Dziekan in *XIX-wieczne Maroko w Kitāb al-istiḡṣā* (Morocco in the 19th century in the *Kitāb al-istiḡṣā*) (2018). Two new translations of the Koran appeared, neither made directly from Arabic. *Koran z interpretacją i przypisami w języku polskim* (2013) is a translation by Jarosław Surdel via English, while Musa Çaxarxan Czachorowski's translation (*Koran*, 2018) was translated via both English and Russian. The translation of the Koran by Józef Bielawski (*Koran*), so far the only complete modern direct translation into Polish (1st edn 1986), was reissued by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in 2016.

1.4. Arab authors writing in other languages

Literature created by Arabs writing in other languages, whether they live in or outside the Arab world, is a separate phenomenon which seems to be producing fewer language-related problems, since no Arabic translators are needed to translate it. However, culture-related problems are still there, and it is important for such books to be translated either by specialists in Arabic studies or with their participation in order to avoid some factual or technical (e.g. transliteration) errors, which occur quite often if such a specialist is not involved.

Below, without claiming to present an exhaustive list, I adduce some important examples. For the sake of brevity, only the names of authors and their countries of origin/residence are given.

Authors writing in English: Leila Aboulela (British-Sudanese), Susan Abulhawa (Palestinian origin), Maha Gargash (Emirati origin), Daoud Hari (Sudan), Hisham Matar (British-Libyan).

Authors writing in French: Tahar Ben Jelloun (Morocco), Tahar Djaout (Algerian), Yasmina Khadra (Algeria), Leïla Marouane (Franco-Algerian), Boualem Sansal (Algeria), Leïla Slimani (Franco-Moroccan), Riad Sattouf (Franco-Syrian).¹²

Authors writing in German: Rafik Schami (Syria/Germany).

1.5. Publishers

Following are the profiles of publishers who have brought forth at least three books representing Arabic literature in the years 2010–21 or who stand out through other related activities:

Smak Słowa (sklep.smakslowa.pl), est. 2007 and based in Sopot, is not the biggest publisher in Poland, but in the period covered by the study it has published the greatest number of translations from Arabic: 11 new titles and 2 reissued (one of them three times), including 5 titles by Naguib Mahfouz. The record number of 5 new titles in one year, reached in 2010, is owed to this publishing house, which is the only one in Poland to explicitly declare its interest in Arabic literature on its webpage.¹³ However, the last time it brought a translation from Arabic onto the market was in 2015.

Karakter (www.karakter.pl), est. 2008 and based in Kraków, aims at breaking cultural stereotypes and introducing new issues and new sensitivities into Polish culture.¹⁴ Karakter published 3 translations from Arabic (including 2 titles by Elias Khoury) and 1 bridge translation via English, but also Arab literature written in French (by Tahar Ben Jelloun and Kamel Daoud). As a result of Karakter's activity, 2 authors, Elias Khoury and Samar Yazbek, participated in literary festivals in Poland.

Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga (www.soniadruga.pl), est. 2000 and based in Katowice, has recently (2019) published 3 Arabic books in bridge translations (via French and English), all of which were supported by the Sharjah International Book Fair Translation Grant Fund. It has also published Francophone Arab literature, notably by Yasmina Khadra.

¹² Riad Sattouf is exceptional in this list as author of *L'Arabe du futur*, a graphic memoir in five parts, three of which were translated into Polish by Olga Mysłowska and Małgorzata Jańczak in 2016–19 as *Arab przyszłości: dzieciństwo na Bliskim Wschodzie*.

¹³ <https://sklep.smakslowa.pl/webpage/regulamin.html>.

¹⁴ <https://www.karakter.pl/o-nas>.

Biuro Literackie (www.biuroliterackie.pl), est. 1996 and based in Kołobrzeg (temporarily in Wrocław), is not primarily interested in Arabic or non-Western literature. However, it published 2 translations from Arabic in 2013 and on this occasion invited one of the authors, Hassan Blasim, to its literary festival, Port Literacki (2013), and hosted poets Ramy Al-Asheq from Palestine and Fady Jomar from Syria in 2019. It has published translations of Arabic poetry or passages of prose on its website.

What is striking is that the above list does not include the traditional big players in the Polish book market, e.g. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Czytelnik, Wydawnictwo Literackie or Znak (the latter has published 1 translation from Arabic), or big commercial publishers like Rebis, Prószyński i S-ka or Świat Książki (1 translation from Arabic). This may indicate that publishing Arabic literature in the period under analysis has been an enterprise ventured by relatively new publishers who do not fear the risk of acquainting the readership with a lesser-known literature. There are also some smaller publishers, like Barbelo, Otwarte or Claroscuro (the latter explicitly stating its interest in other cultures, diversity of views, and questions of identity).¹⁵ A singular phenomenon among publishers is the Biblioteka Polsko-Arabska (Polish-Arabic Library), established by Agnieszka Piotrowska, herself a translator, in 2017 with the specific goal, among others, of ‘building a platform for direct and innovative cultural exchange between Poland and the Arab region’ (my translation).¹⁶

There is no literary magazine which deals specifically with Arabic literature in Poland; however, the ‘Literatura arabska’ blog (literaturarabska.wordpress.com) written by Aleksandra Lasota-Barańska is an online attempt to fill this gap. In this context, mention should also be made of the special issue of *Literatura na Świecie* devoted to Arabic literature, described in Section 1.2.

1.6. Selection of titles for translation

The general impression I have, on the basis of my own experience and information I gathered from the translators, is that the vast majority of publishers are uneager to publish Arabic literature because it is considered to be ‘a niche area’, not very popular among readers and unpromising in terms of sales. If a publisher decides to publish a title from

¹⁵ https://www.claroscuro.pl/o_nas.php.

¹⁶ <https://egipcjanka.pl/biblioteka-polsko-arabska/>.

Arabic, it is very often because the author has received an important literary award. Naguib Mahfouz's success with his 10 titles is owed to a great extent to the Nobel Prize for Literature he received in 1988. Several other authors might have been chosen by the publishers because of awards received in the Arab countries: 3 (Raja Alem, Rabee Jaber and Ahmed Saadawi) are winners of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), known as the Arabic Booker, while others have been short- or longlisted for it. The book by Kholoud Charaf was awarded the Moroccan Ibn Battuta Prize for Travel Literature in 2019. However, some of the translators questioned in this study criticized the idea of using success in a competition as the criterion to judge the literary value of a book.

It must be emphasized that many titles have appeared in Polish thanks to the initiative of the translators themselves, who have recommended books in their own translations to publishing houses. The translators are graduates of Arabic or linguistic studies, some working as scholars at Polish universities, and have first-hand knowledge about particular books or general literary trends in the Arab world. But it is frequently the case that for a very long time they cannot find a publisher willing to accept the title that they consider worthy of translation.

The choice of some books can be attributed to the interest in the Middle East as an area due to the political crisis in some of its countries, especially Syria and Iraq. The significance of the tragic events taking place there is reflected in the appearance of books depicting them more or less realistically, written by Khaled Khalifa, Samar Yazbek and Dima Wannous (Syria) and Hassan Blasim, Dunya Mikhail and Ahmed Saadawi (Iraq).

By contrast, one of the reasons for the publishers' unwillingness to publish translations from Arabic is the negative attitude of a significant part of Polish society towards the Arab and Muslim world, which has also been strongly nurtured by the political slogans of the party in power. This was especially visible during the 2015 migration crisis, which coincided with the Polish parliamentary elections, won by the said party, owing to a certain extent to the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hysteria.¹⁷

¹⁷ See, for instance, Jan Cienski, 'Why Poland doesn't want refugees', *Politico* (2017): <https://www.politico.eu/article/politics-nationalism-and-religion-explain-why-poland-doesnt-want-refugees/>; Marc Santora, 'Poland bashes immigrants, but quietly takes Christian ones', *New York Times* (2019):

1 of the 32 prose books, by Kholoud Charaf, was published in Polish in connection with the author's residence in Kraków as beneficiary of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) programme in 2018–2020.¹⁸

2. Dissemination and reception

2.1. Dissemination and availability to readers

Books translated from Arabic are generally available in public **libraries**. They are not usually on sale for a long time in **bookshops**, except in those interested in selling ambitious literature rather than the most commercial. In many cases, translations from Arabic can be quite easily bought, like many other books, second hand at a lowered price online.

Translations from Arabic are not usually published in the form of **audio books** (I am only aware of one such title: *Smak miodu* by Salwa Al Neimi, published by Biblioteka Akustyczna). However, in 2009, Naguib Mahfouz's *Opowieści starego Kairu* (Palace Walk) was read¹⁹ on Channel II of the state-run Polish Radio (not available online).²⁰ In 2011, Khaled Al Khamissi's *Taxi* was read in 21 episodes on Channel III (not available online). In 2014, extracts of Naguib Mahfouz's *Dzieci naszej dzielnicy* (Children of Gebelawi) were read on the Channel Polskie Radio 24 of the Polish Radio (5 episodes available online).²¹

Many recent titles have appeared as **e-books**.

Unfortunately, real Arabic literature tends to disappear among the **low-quality Arab-related literary mass production** that dominates library shelves and also reaches the bestsellers shelves. These books do not represent Arabic literature but are written by Western, mostly Polish, authors, sometimes under pseudonyms, e.g. Marcin Margielewski, Laila Shukri, Tanya Valko. More often than not, they proliferate negative stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims and can easily be recognized by a cover showing a veiled oriental woman and a title

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/europe/immigration-poland-ukraine-christian.html>; Renata Kim, 'Polaka lęk przed Arabem' [The Pole fears the Arab], *Polska Newsweek* (2016): <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/uchodzcy-w-polsce-polaka-lek-przed-arabem/53ctjhg>.

¹⁸ <https://willadecjusza.pl/kholoud-charaf-2>. A book of poetry by this author was also published in Polish in 2019.

¹⁹ I have been unable to ascertain whether the book was read in full or in selected extracts.

²⁰ <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/195/Artykul/166853,To-sie-czyta-Nadzib-Mahfuz-Opowiesci-starego-Kairu>.

²¹ <https://www.polskieradio24.pl/211/3843/Artykul/1222275,Dzieci-naszej-ulicy>.

like *I escaped an Arab brothel, I am an under-age wife* or *Most moving stories about Arab wives*.

There are no **festivals** dealing specifically with Arabic literature, but some most important literary festivals have had editions during which Arabic literature and authors were highlighted. In 2013, as previously noted in section 1.5, the Port Literacki of Biuro Literackie in Wrocław promoted two translations from Arabic issued by the publisher and on this occasion invited one of the authors, Hassan Blasim, and both translators. In 2018, the Stacja Literatura of Biuro Literackie invited the Palestinian writer Mazen Maarouf, and in 2019, hosted poets Ramy Al-Asheq from Palestine and Fady Jomar from Syria and Filip Kaźmierczak as translator. On both occasions the authors were invited as part of a project supported by Creative Europe, coordinated by the UK-based organization Literature Across Frontiers, which encouraged greater representation of exiled writers in European festivals. The festival doubles as a training event for young literary professionals and also includes translators' voices on its webpage.²² Elias Khoury was a guest of the Big Book festival in Warsaw in 2015, promoting the Polish translation of his novel *Jalo*. In 2016, one of the guests of Miłosz Festival (Kraków) was Syrian poet Adonis. In 2016, Samar Yazbek was hosted by the Conrad Festival (Kraków), featuring the Polish edition of her book. In 2017, this festival also hosted Libyan writer Monem Mahjoub, another ICORN beneficiary. In 2019, the Odnalezione w Tłumaczeniu (Found in Translation) festival in Gdańsk devoted to literary translation hosted translator Marcin Michalski. This enumeration is not necessarily exhaustive.

2.2. Media and critical reception

One cannot say that Polish media and literary critics are disinterested in the translations of Arabic literature. Understandably, their interest is a reflection of the presence of the Arabic literature on the market. This also depends on the publisher's will and efforts to promote their books in this way. Below, some examples are given that can be found online.

²² <https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/debaty/arabska-kropla-w-morzu-potrzeb/>;
<https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/debaty/prawda-o-bliskim-wschodzie/>.

On the internet one can find rather isolated **interviews** with authors of the books translated into Polish (e.g. with Elias Khoury²³ or Samar Yazbek,²⁴ both of whom visited Poland) or with their translators (Agnieszka Piotrowska²⁵). A small number of interviews with Arab writers have been made by translators.²⁶ **Radio programmes** with the participation of translators of Arabic literature (Jolanta Kozłowska and George Yacoub,²⁷ Jacek Stępiński²⁸ or its publishers (Małgorzata Szczurek representing *Karakter*)²⁹ have been broadcast by some leading media and published online as audio files. A related fact is that interviews with leading literary translators from various languages into Polish have been published in two **anthologies**,³⁰ but neither of them includes an interview with a translator from Arabic.

Passages of new translations are not often published in the media. Khaled Al Khamissi's *Taxi* was, however, an exception, with extracts published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (both in the print and online versions) – mainly because the appearance of its Polish translation coincided with the outbreak of the 2011 Egyptian revolution – and Huda Shaarawi's *Memoirs* appeared in the daily *Rzeczpospolita*.³¹

Sometimes, recent translations from Arabic are **reviewed** on the radio (and are available online)³²) and in literary or cultural magazines (whether printed, e.g. *Nowe Książki*³³, or

²³ In *Magazyn Wyborczej*: https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,18292473,Jak_Arabowie_wariuja_od_religii.html; in *Kultura Liberalna*: https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2015/06/16/przyszlo-nam-zyc-w-wieku-barbarzyncow/?fb_comment_id=1144163922276239_1715946011764691; in

Rzeczpospolita: <https://archiwum.rp.pl/artykul/1279094-Dzihadyzm-i-dyktatura-to-blizniaki.html>.

²⁴ <https://kultura.onet.pl/wywiady-i-artykuly/samar-yazbek-pisanie-poglebia-we-mnie-bol/bjfdtgs>.

²⁵ <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/9405-odpowiedni-moment.html?fbclid=IwAR2ngurPzdPtU6bnmw4AE6hKbat9BQaGXDLwNwwRs9s5g-BvwakxvDzDTLU>.

²⁶ Filip Kaźmierczak with Rasha Habbal: <http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=370&artykul=7307>; Agnieszka Piotrowska with Khalid al-Maaly, Iraqi poet, translator and publisher living in Lebanon:

<https://ksiazka.net.pl/chalid-al-maali-oni-czekali-na-gombrowicza>.

²⁷ <https://audycje.tokfm.pl/podcast/25171,Jolanta-Kozlowska-i-dr-George-Yacoub-opowiadaja-o-literaturze-Nadziba-Mahfuza>.

²⁸ <http://bi.gazeta.pl/im/6/11843/m11843926.mp3> and <https://www.polskieradio.pl/7/178/Artykul/258353,Bluzniercza-powiesc>.

Both Jolanta Kozłowska and Jacek Stępiński were guests on the following programme:

<https://www.polskieradio.pl/9/396/Artykul/241143,AtTajjibSalih-sudanski-Joseph-Conrad>.

²⁹ <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/3664/Artykul/1603507,Ksiazka-ktora-nie-pozwala-zapomniec-o-dramacie-Syrii>.

³⁰ Zofia Zaleska, *Przejęzyczenie: Rozmowy o przekładzie* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2015), and Adam Pluszka, *Wte i wewte: Z tłumaczami o przekładach* (Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Audiowizualny; Gdańsk: Instytut Kultury Miejskiej/Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2016).

³¹ <https://www.rp.pl/Plus-Minus/301089979-Huda-Szarawi-Odrodzenie-intelektualne-kobiet.html> (passages from the book);

<https://historia.uwazamrze.pl/artykul/1149457/dlaczego-huda-szarawi> (preface by Ihab Umar).

³² <https://www.polskieradio.pl/9/399/Artykul/318218,Historie-z-kairskiej-taksowki>;

electronic, e.g. *Kultura Liberalna*)³⁴ or in the general press. The reviews I am aware of have always been positive and sympathetic. They were not written by specialists in Arabic and thus do not focus on issues relating to the translation process (fidelity, errors, etc.). What the reviewers concentrate on is giving a synopsis of the work, assessing the idea of the book, its plot, sometimes its originality and universalism, the authenticity of the author writing about issues of which they have first-hand knowledge, and the fact that the book represents a region where not much of its literature has been translated into Polish.

3. Public and private support for translation of Arabic literature

There is no form of financial support aimed specifically at translation from Arabic in Poland. However, some publishers have been able to obtain financing from institutions that support literary translation in general. *Karakter* benefited from the financial support of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (although its special target group has recently been defined as ‘works taking up the task of consolidating cultural and national identity,’³⁵; my translation). *Biuro Literackie* published both its Arabic books with the support of the Allianz Cultural Foundation, Berlin, and the Fund for Central & East European Book Projects, Amsterdam. The three Arabic titles published by *Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga* were supported by the Sharjah International Book Fair Translation Grant Fund.

Thanks to the participation of some Polish cities in the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), Arabic writers who face political persecution in their homelands have the option of staying, at least temporarily, in Poland. They include Syrian writer Kholoud Charaf, Egyptian blogger Kareem Amer and Libyan writer, thinker and journalist Monem Mahjoub in Kraków, and Syrian poet Umar Abdul-Nasser in Wrocław.

<https://www.polskieradio.pl/9/399/Artykul/744769,Sudanski-pisarz-oburzyl-swym-dzielem-arabski-swiat>.

³³ <http://noweksiazki.com.pl/pl/numer/07-2013>; <http://noweksiazki.com.pl/pl/numer/numer-4-2020>;

³⁴ <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2014/10/28/recenzja-iljas-churi-jalo-blazej-poplawski/>.

³⁵ <https://instytutksiazki.pl/dotacje,3,programy-ministerstwa-kultury-i-dziedzictwa-narodowego,1,literatura-2020,31.html>.

4. Translation

4.1. Translators

Apart from George Yacoub, the ten translators of books published between 2010 and 2021 (cf. Bibliography in Annex I)³⁶ are graduates of Arabic or linguistic studies at Polish universities (Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań). Some of them are academics, teaching and conducting research there, but they do not always deal with contemporary literature. Short profiles of the authors of translations are given below – their order reflecting the number of translations they have produced within the time frame.

Jolanta Kozłowska. Retired professor of Arabic studies at the University of Warsaw; author, or co-author with George Yacoub, of most Polish translations of Naguib Mahfouz's books. Has also translated works by other Arab authors writing in Arabic or French and books in Arabic and Islamic studies from English and French.

Agnieszka Piotrowska. PhD in Arabic literature from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Lives in Egypt. Founder of the Fundacja Biblioteka Polsko-Arabska (Polish-Arabic Library Foundation). Translates Polish literature into Arabic.

Izabela Szybilska-Fiedorowicz. Author of numerous translations for the Smak Słowa publishing house. Translates also from English, including books related to the Arab world.

Marek M. Dziekan. Professor of Arabic and Islamic studies, who works at the University of Warsaw and the University of Łódź. His translation activity focuses on poetry and older literature. Often prefaces others' translations of Arabic books. Translates books in Arabic and Islamic studies from English and German.

Marcin Michalski. Assistant professor at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Holds a PhD in linguistics but is also interested in translation. Has also translated books from English, Spanish and German.

³⁶ Filip Kaźmierczak has not published translations in book form but is responsible for a number of adaptations of poetry and shorter prose extracts published online and in periodicals.

George Yacoub. Born in Syria; Arabic teacher at the University of Warsaw; has translated books by Naguib Mahfouz in collaboration with Jolanta Kozłowska. Translated Witold Gombrowicz's *Ślub* (The Marriage) into Arabic.

Hanna Jankowska. Apart from being the author of numerous translations of modern Arabic literature, has also translated from English numerous important books concerning culture, history, economy, politics and sociology. Also translates from Russian.

Magdalena Kubarek. Holds a PhD from the University of Warsaw. Works at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, where she conducts research on modern Arabic literature.

Jacek Stępiński. Former Polish ambassador to Morocco, Yemen and Ethiopia; in diplomatic service in Egypt and Iraq.

Magdalena Zawrotna. Holds a PhD from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She teaches Arabic there and does sociolinguistic research on Egyptian Arabic.

4.2. Language training opportunities

In Poland, Arabic studies are offered as 3-year BA courses and 2-year MA courses at the University of Warsaw, Jagiellonian University in Kraków and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Arabic can also be studied at Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, where English-Arabic Applied Linguistics is offered as a 3-year BA course and a 2-year MA course, and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, which offers a 3-year BA course in Applied Linguistics / French and Arabic. Apart from these philological curricula, Arabic is also taught at the University of Łódź (International and Political studies) and at the University of Silesia in Katowice (English studies / Translation with Arabic). Since all of these universities are state run, the courses are free of charge.

No special courses for translators from Arabic are offered by Polish universities at present.

4.3. Nationals of Arab countries living in Poland

According to the data facilitated by the Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców, foreign nationals are not a numerous group in Poland: nearly 200,000 persons in 2015, which makes them 0.5% of the

total population. This number includes around **11,000 nationals of the Arab countries**, especially Egyptians, Tunisians, Syrians, Iraqis and Algerians.³⁷

In this context, it is worth mentioning writers and/or translators who have come from Arab countries (but are not necessarily of Arab origin) and settled in Poland: Michael Abdalla (translator into Arabic), Hatif Janabi (poet, translator into Arabic), Nagmeldin Karamalla (poet), Georges Kass (writer), Georges Yacoub (translator into/from Arabic) and Yousef Sh'hadeh (poet, translator into Arabic).

4.4. Conditions of work and translation quality monitoring

A survey conducted in 2015 by Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy LiteratURY (Polish Literary Translators Association) shows that translators from the most popular languages like English, French, Spanish and German can expect a publisher to pay, on average, 600–700 zlotys (c.130–55 euros) for 40,000 characters (a conventional unit of text length, called *arkusz wydawniczy* in Polish).³⁸ Literary translators from Arabic can expect to receive higher **remuneration** for their work than their colleagues who translate from the popular languages and, in fact, it is possible for them to receive rates higher than 900 zlotys (200 euros), which, according to the survey, has been reported by only 11% of the totality of translators from any language as their maximum rate.

As for **translation quality monitoring mechanisms** in the field of Arabic literature, it is non-existent. Two publications, *Literatura na Świecie* and *Przekładaniec*, contain high-quality analyses of literary translations, but not from Arabic, the reason for this probably being, at least to some extent, the absence of critics competent in this language other than the translators themselves. This factor may also be an obstacle to translators from Arabic (or any other less popular language) being awarded **prizes for literary translation**.

There is no specific **association** for literary translators from Arabic. Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy LiteratURY (Polish Literary Translators Association) has Hanna Jankowska and Marcin

³⁷ <https://biqdata.wyborcza.pl/biqdata/7,159116,22082979,arabowie-i-musulmanie-w-polsce-sprawdzilismy-ilu-ich-z-nami.html>.

³⁸ <http://stl.org.pl/baza-wiedzy/sytuacja-tlumacza/wyniki-ankiety-w-sprawie-stawek-i-warunkow-umow/>.

Michalski among its members, as indicated by the translators' database on its website (a catalogue that can be very useful for publishers).³⁹

5. Conclusions and recommendations

One should see in translating and publishing literature from Arabic an important factor in creating bridges of understanding the differences and similarities between Polish culture and the Arab world. Translation can be a useful tool for developing a greater interest in the Other and tolerance for other traditions. It can help many people to grasp the fact that differences do not have to be divisive and that not everything which is foreign is a threat to their traditional values.

To reach this goal, good books should be translated, i.e. those which have high literary values and show the universalism of human fate and its local particularities. And they should be adapted by good translators. Getting closer to this ideal requires grappling with some fundamental issues:

1. Good books. In this respect publishers should pay more attention to the translators' voice rather than be guided by what is fashionable. A good idea proposed by one of the translators is that a group of translators should be paid to read, for instance, books awarded specific prizes and to review them for publishers.

2. Good translators. It is important that publishers are able to find good translators from Arabic, so as to avoid bridge translations (which are often a source of errors and tend to impoverish the language of the book). Platforms of cooperation should be created between publishers, translators and authors in the Arab countries so that they can more easily find one another.

There will be no good translators without support through education (mastering the art of translating and writing, also by contact with individual specialists; instructing in legal matters concerning contacts with authors and publishers; scholarships).

³⁹ <http://stl.org.pl/baza-tlumaczy/>.

3. Financing. There will be no good *active* translators without sufficient financing that guarantees the satisfaction of both publishers and translators. This factor was stressed by most of the translators I consulted. Translators should receive payment that reflects the efforts they have made to learn a language and a culture which functions differently from the Western in many respects (diglossia and diversity of dialects being the basic obstacles). The efforts to enrich the literary scene with more translations from a specific region should not rely solely on enthusiasts willing to translate books only because they love them. Unfortunately, with Poland's government not being interested in the cultural contacts with the Arab world and Arab countries being rather passive in terms of promoting their literature in Europe, perhaps a third party is needed to make these two meet.

4. Promotion. On the one hand, it has been observed that Polish readers are generally uninterested in Arabic literature. On the other, there is an argument that publishers underestimate the readers' intellectual abilities. Both statements may be true. In any case, wise actions promoting Arabic literature and knowledge about the Arab world to break with stereotypes would be very helpful.

Is the number of 32 new titles translated from Arabic into Polish in the last ten years high or low? The answer might be that it depends with which country or language it is compared. However, seeing the need to make Polish society more familiar with, and more interested in, the culture of the Arab world, one of Europe's closest neighbours, it seems that the number of books – good books – translated from Arabic into Polish can never be too high. There are good translators and their knowledge and skills should be used in the service of Arabic-Polish cultural exchange. A significant rise compared with the previous decades induces optimism.

Annexes

ANNEX 1: Bibliography of translations

Book titles (modern fiction, memoir and reportage) translated from Arabic into Polish in the years 2010–21

The authors' names are given in Polish, Arabic and, in brackets, the English version if different.

The English titles given in brackets are those of the existing English translations. If no English translation exists, a literal translation of the Arabic title is given, in italics. Titles marked in grey colour are reissues. Only the first reissue is indicated in the table as a separate entry.

Year	Author	Author's country of origin	Polish title Arabic title [Transliteration] (English title)	Translator	Publisher	Comments
2010	Abd ar-Rahman Munif عبد الرحمن منيف (Abdelrahman Munif)	Saudi Arabia	<i>Miasta soli: Zagubieni</i> مدن الملح: التيه [<i>Mudun al-milḥ: al-Tih</i>] (Cities of Salt, Part 1)	Magdalena Kubarek	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2010	Ala Al-Aswani علاء الأسواني (Alaa Al Aswany)	Egypt	<i>Chicago</i> شيكاغو [<i>Shīkāḡū</i>] (Chicago)	Izabela Szybilska-Fiedorowicz	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2010	At-Tajjib Salih الطيب صالح (Tayeb Salih)	Sudan	<i>Sezon migracji na północ</i> موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال [<i>Mawsim al-hijra ilā al-shimāl</i>] (Season of Migration to the North)	Jacek Stępiński	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2010	At-Tajjib Salih الطيب صالح (Tayeb Salih)	Sudan	<i>Wesele Zajna</i> عرس الزين [<i>'Urs al-Zayn</i>] (The Wedding of Zein)	Jolanta Kozłowska	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2010	Nadżib Mahfuz نجيب محفوظ (Naguib Mahfouz)	Egypt	<i>Hamida z zaułka Midakk</i> زقاق المدق [<i>Zuqāq al-Midaqq</i>] (Midaq Alley)	Jolanta Kozłowska	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	[Reissue, 1st edn 1982; other reissues: 2014, 2015]

2010	Radża Sani رجاء الصانع (Rajaa al-Sanea)	Saudi Arabia	Dziewczyny z Rijadu بنات الرياض [Banāt al-Riyād] (Girls of Riyadh)	Eryka Lehr	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	[Reissued in 2012]
2011	Chalid al-Chamisi خالد الخميسي (Khaled Al Khamissi)	Egypt	Taxi. Opowieści z kursów po Kairze تاكسي: حواديت المشاوير [Tāksī: Ḥawādīt il-mashāwīr] (Taxi)	Marcin Michalski	Karakter (Kraków)	
2011	Hanan asz-Szajch حنان الشيخ (Hanan al-Shaykh)	Lebanon	Szarańcza i ptak حكايتي شرح يطول [Ḥikāyatī sharḥ yaṭūl] (The Locust and the Bird: My Mother's Story)	Joanna Bogunia & Dawid Juraszek	Nasza Księgarnia (Warszawa)	Via English
2011	Nadžib Mahfuz نجيب محفوظ (Naguib Mahfouz)	Egypt	Karnak الكرنك [al-Karnak] (Karnak Café)	Jolanta Kozłowska & George Yacoub	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2011	Nadžib Mahfuz نجيب محفوظ (Naguib Mahfouz)	Egypt	Ród Aszura ملحمة الحرافيش [Malḥamat al-ḥarāfish] (The Harafish)	Jolanta Kozłowska & George Yacoub	Świat Książki (Warszawa)	
2011	Salwa an-Nu'ajmi سلوى النعيمي (Salwa Al Neimi)	Syria	Smak miodu برهان العسل [Burhān al-'asal] (The Proof of the Honey)	Marek M. Dziekan	Wydawnictwo W.A.B. (Warszawa)	[Reissue, 1st edn 2009]
2012	Jusuf Idris يوسف إدريس (Yusuf Idris)	Egypt	Grzech الحرام [al-Ḥarām] (The Sinners)	Jacek Stępiński	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2012	Khalil Dżubran جبران خليل جبران (Gibran Khalil Gibran)	Lebanon	Połamane skrzydła الأجنحة المتكسرة [al-Ajniḥa al-Mutakassira] (The Broken Wings)	Magdalena Kubarek	Barbelo (Warszawa)	

2012	Nadžib Mahfuz نجيب محفوظ (Naguib Mahfouz)	Egypt	Pensjonat Miramar ميرامار [Mīrāmār] (Miramar)	Jolanta Kozłowska & George Yacoub	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2012	Radża Sani رجاء الصانع (Rajaa al-Sanea)	Saudi Arabia	<i>Dziewczyny z Rijadu</i> بنات الرياض [Banāt al-Riyād] (Girls of Riyadh)	Eryka Lehr	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	[Reissue, 1st edn 2010]
2012	Youssef Rakha يوسف رخا	Egypt	Bejrut jest gdzieś tam بيروت شي محل [Bayrūt shī maḥall] (Beirut is Somewhere)	Agnieszka Piotrowska	Dobra Literatura (Słupsk)	
2013	Hasan Blasim حسن بلاسم (Hassan Blasim)	Iraq	Szaleniec z Placu Wolności مجنون ساحة الحرية [Majnūn Sāḥat al-Ḥurriyyā] (The Madman of Freedom Square)	Agnieszka Piotrowska	Biuro Literackie (Wrocław)	
2013	Nadžib Mahfuz نجيب محفوظ (Naguib Mahfouz)	Egypt	Dzieci naszej dzielnicy أولاد حارتنا [Awlād ḥāratinā] (Children of Gebelawi)	Izabela Szybilska	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2013	Rabi Dżabir ربيع جابر (Rabee Jaber)	Lebanon	Drużowie z Belgradu: Historia Hanny Jakuba دروز بلغراد: حكاية حنا يعقوب [Durūz Bilghrād: Ḥikāyat Ḥannā Ya‘qūb] (The Druze of Belgrade: The Story of Hanna Yaqub)	Marcin Michalski	Biuro Literackie (Wrocław)	Arabic Booker 2012
2013	Raja Alem رجاء عالم	Saudi Arabia	Wszystkie drogi prowadzą do Mekki طوق الحمام [Ṭawq al-ḥamām] (The Dove's Necklace)	Izabela Szybilska- Fiedorowicz	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	Arabic Booker 2011
2014	Iljas Churi إلياس خوري (Elias Houry)	Lebanon	Jalo يالو [Yālū] (Yalo)	Marcin Michalski	Karakter (Kraków)	

2014	Mourid Barghouti مريد البرغوثي	Palestine	Jestem stamtąd, jestem stąd ولدتُ هناك، ولدتُ هنا [Wulidtu hunāk, wulidtu hunā] (I Was Born There, I Was Born Here)	Hanna Jankowska	Czarne (Wołowiec)	
2014	Salwa an-Nu'ajmi سلوى النعيمي (Salwa Al Neimi)	Syria	Moje ciało nie ma historii شبه الجزيرة العربية [Shibh al-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya] (The Arabian Peninsula)	Marek M. Dziekan & Karolina Bober	Wydawnictwo W.A.B. (Warszawa)	
2015	Amir Tadż as-Sirr أمير تاج السر (Amir Tag Elsir)	Sudan	Łowca larw صائد اليرقات [Ṣā'id al-yaraqāt] (The Grub Hunter)	Agnieszka Piotrowska	Wydawnictwo Claruscuro (Warszawa)	
2015	Georges Kass جورج قس	Syria / Poland	Bajki arabskie: nie tylko dla dorosłych مذكرات عصفور؛ القطار الأحمر العجوز [Mudhakkirāt 'uṣfūr & Al-Qiṭār al-aḥmar al-'ajūz] (Memoirs of a Sparrow & The Old Red Train)	Barbara Wrona & Marek M. Dziekan	Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog (Warszawa)	[Reissue, 1st edn 1992]
2015	Nadżib Mahfuz نجيب محفوظ (Naguib Mahfouz)	Egypt	Chan al-Chalili خان الخليلي [Khān al-Khālīlī] (Khan al-Khalili)	Jolanta Kozłowska	Smak Słowa (Sopot)	
2016	Samar Yazbek سمير يزبك	Syria	Przeprawa: moja podróż do pękniętego serca Syrii بوابات أرض العدم [Bawwābāt arḍ al-'adam] (The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria)	Urszula Gardner	Karakter (Kraków)	Via English
2018	Jamal Fayeż جمال فايز	Qatar	Opowiadania katarskie القصص القصيرة القطرية [Al-Qiṣaṣ al-qaṣīra al-qaṭariyya] (Qatari short stories)	Several translators. Edited by Barbara Michalak- Pikulska	Księgarnia Akademicka (Kraków)	

2019	Ahmed Saadawi أحمد سعداوي	Iraq	Frankenstein w Bagdadzie فرانكشتاين في بغداد [Fränkinshtäyn fī Baghdād] (Frankenstein in Baghdad)	Magdalena Zawrotna	Znak Litera Nova (Kraków)	Arabic Booker Winner 2014
2019	Chalid Chalifa خالد خليفة (Khaled Khalifa)	Syria	Śmierć to udreka الموت عمل شاق [al-Mawt ‘amal shāqq] (Death Is Hard Work)	Bożena Sęk	Sonia Draga (Katowice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via French • Sharjah International Book Fair Translation Grant Fund
2019	Dima Wannous ديمة ونوس	Syria	Dyktatura strachu الخائفون [al-Khā’ifūn] (The Frightened Ones)	Krystyna Szeżyńska-Maćkowiak	Sonia Draga (Katowice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via French • Sharjah International Book Fair Translation Grant Fund • Shortlisted for the 2018 Arabic Booker
2019	Dunya Mikhail دنيا ميخائيل	Iraq	Pszczelarz z Sindżaru في سوق السبایا [Fī sūq al-sabāyā] (The Beekeeper: Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq)	Robert Sudół	Otwarte (Kraków)	Via English
2019	Iman Humaydan Younes إيمان حميدان يونس	Lebanon	B jak Bejrut باء مثل بيت.. مثل بيروت [Bā’ mithl bayt... mithl Bayrūt] (B as in Beirut)	Zofia Szachnowska-Olesiejuk	Sonia Draga (Katowice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via English • Sharjah International Book Fair Translation Grant Fund
2020	Chulud Szaraf خلود شرف (Kholoud Charaf)	Syria	Powrót do Gór. Dziennik w cieniu wojny رحلة العودة إلى الجبل: يوميات في ظلال الحرب [Riḥlat al-‘awda ilā al-jabal: yawmiyyāt fī zīlāl al-ḥarb] (Return Journey to the Mountains: Journal in the Shadow of War)	Marek M. Dziekan	Instytut Kultury Willa Decjusza (Kraków)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICORN • Ibn Battuta Prize for 2019 in the Memoirs category
2020	Huda Szarawi هدى شعراوي (Huda Shaarawi)	Egypt	Egipcjanka مذكرات هدى شعراوي [Mudhakkirāt Hudā Sha’rāwī] (Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist)	Agnieszka Piotrowska	Biblioteka Polsko-Arabska (Łódź)	

2021	Iljas Churi إلياس خوري (Elias Khoury)	Lebanon	Dzieci getta. Mam na imię Adam. أولاد الغيتو - اسمي آدم [Awlād al-ghītū - Ismī Ādam] (My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto Volume 1)	Hanna Jankowska	Karakter (Kraków)	Shortlisted for Arabic Booker 2017
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ANNEX 2. Survey I: The translators

This study would not be complete without reflecting the voices of translators themselves. I thank the translators who kindly agreed to share with me their opinions: Marek M. Dziekan, Hanna Jankowska, Agnieszka Piotrowska, Izabela Szybilska-Fiedorowicz and Magdalena Zawrotna. I have considered myself entitled to add my own views to theirs.

Since the number of respondents is too small to conduct any quantitative analysis or make generalizations, I have decided to present the respondents' answers, more or less reformulated, as expressing some typical opinions.

1. Do you often receive offers from publishers to translate literature from Arabic?

- Only a few times although I have worked many years as Arabist.
- Once in several years.
- Once in 1–2 years but the offers do not always concern a book.
- Hardly ever.
- I did only once.
- I haven't had such a proposal for five years.

2. Do you propose translations of literature from Arabic to publishers? Are you satisfied with their response? Have you had problems finding a publisher willing to publish your translation into Polish?

- I don't make such proposals.
- I used to make such proposals but I stopped since I do not expect good cooperation and good conditions of work (delay in payment, unsatisfying rates).
- In recent years, I have rather been contacted by publishers.
- I used to make such proposals but now I don't. I had difficulties in finding a publisher for one job.
- I used to make such proposals but the publishers' interest in Arabic literature is very small.
- I had made some proposals to publishers to no avail some years ago, but finally it worked. They are not generally interested; one needs to come across the right publisher. Nowadays it seems that the opportunities have grown as there are more publishers interested in this area.
- I used to cooperate with one publishing house and it was the publisher who proposed to me the titles for translation.

3. Would you like to dedicate more time to translating fiction books from Arabic? If yes, what is the main obstacle?

- No, I have other duties.
- No, I have other duties. The kind of scholarly activity I pursue and translation I do (classical and older literature) suffices me.
- For the time being, my life situation does not allow me to translate from Arabic. Otherwise I would be happy to do this.
- I would like to, if the topic (preferably non-fiction) and style of the work as well as work conditions suited me.
- Yes but interest from the publishers is insufficient.
- Yes, if my professional duties allow me (I do not live on translating).

4. Do you find the remuneration offered by publishers for translating literature from Arabic satisfactory? Do you think the rates are higher than those paid for translation into more popular languages (English, Spanish, French, German)?

- I was satisfied in the case of the translations I have made, but I find it difficult to compare the fees to those paid for other languages.
- I do not have objections to the rates but I cannot compare them with those for other languages.
- I was moderately satisfied, considering that literary translation from any language is not a lucrative occupation in Poland.
- The rates for Arabic are higher or slightly higher but not satisfactory, considering the amount of work needed to learn the language, the culture, etc.
- The translation rates for literary translation from Arabic have never come up to my expectations but I accepted them because at the time I translated from Arabic I also had other, more profitable work, and, in addition, I wanted the books to be published in Polish.
- The rates for 'exotic' languages are said to be higher but this depends. My impression is that the translators' situation on the market is perhaps beginning to improve, thanks to the activities of Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy LiteratURY (Polish Literary Translators Association).

5. Is the number of sources of financial support for translating Arabic literature into Polish sufficient in your opinion?

- I am sure there are too few.
- Definitely too few, this is a serious obstacle to introducing Arabic literature to Polish readers.
- Definitely too few. In addition, considering the low number of Arab nationals in Poland and absence of strong – and non-political – organizations promoting the Arabic culture and language, there is no one able to provide such support. The diplomatic posts of particular countries represent their respective interests, cultures and literatures.
- As far as I know there are definitely too few.
- There is no special programme for financing translations from Arabic. General programmes tend to neglect the Arab region. The support from Arab countries is underdeveloped, lacks transparency and often ideologically tainted.
- Too few possibilities, especially considering that some Arab countries are so rich and could be expected to invest in the promotion of literature written in their language. But there are political issues at stake.

6. What difficulties of non-textual and non-linguistic nature do the translators of literature from Arabic into Polish usually face?

- First of all, too little interest in this literature from the publishers.
- Too little interest from the publishers. Absence of any support, even moral, and acknowledgement, from the Arab states and Arab cultural institutions.
- The negative atmosphere concerning anything related to Arabs and Islam, expressions of which can easily be found in the comments of internet users.
- Anti-Arab (and anti-Muslim) stereotypes among publishers and readers, official promotion of xenophobia (e.g. on the state-run TV) under the mask of patriotism.
- Since it is impossible to live on translating Arabic literature, this activity has always been an addition to a translator's other occupations which often prevent him or her from pursuing it.
- The difficulty in finding publishers willing to publish the titles considered good by the translator.
- The lack of direct communication between the Mediterranean region and the Arab world and the ideologization of their relations (domination of the Western point of view). Arabic literature needs to be included into the general literary debate, and the editors of literary magazines should get interested in it.
- Arabic literature is considered a risk by publishers so the titles that have the best chance of being accepted here are those which had success elsewhere (abroad).

7. In your opinion, what prevents Polish publishers from publishing translations of literature written in Arabic?

- The ignorance of this literature and neglecting its significance for world culture, reducing it to a marginal phenomenon, unworthy of dissemination. This can result from the lack of readers' interest, which, in turn, could be a consequence of the generally negative reception of Arab – or Muslim – culture in Poland.
- In short, it doesn't pay. A publisher who tried and had success in the early 2000s eventually gave up. Publishers are aware that Arabic literature cannot win on the Polish market against mass production (like that of Tanya Valko, Laila Shukri and Marcin Margielewski), which is published and bought in large numbers and thus is profitable for the publisher.
- No structural framework for cooperation between the two regions, ignorance of the Arab market, publishers not cooperating with people able to help them and being compelled to use foreign language versions; poorly developed literary criticism, exoticism of the literature (resulting from the aforesaid).
- Financial issues are the main obstacle.
- Absence of financial support from the Polish institutions, but chiefly from the Arab states.
- Prejudices, underestimating the intellectual abilities and open-mindedness of the Polish readers, fear of unprofitability of such projects.

8. In your opinion, how can the number of titles translated from Arabic into Polish be increased and the quality of translations achieved at the same time?

- Through external initiatives financially supporting translation and through promoting Arabic literature.
- I have no specific proposals. But I want to remark that among the few translations from Arabic we have, there are some which have been 'killed' by bad translation.
- By supporting translators through scholarships and similar programmes (perhaps involving individual specialists rather than international institutions), but this would require a different way of thinking about what Poland's diplomacy should be, which at present is too bureaucratic.
- By offering financial support for the translations, good and active marketing actions that would make readers interested in translations from Arabic. Fair remuneration for translators, and reasonable deadlines for translations.
- It would be great if every year a group of translators or publishers had a budget allowing them to read and review books nominated for e.g. the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (and regional prizes, if possible) in order to decide what is likely to interest Polish readers.

9. Any other observations on the translation of Arabic literature into Polish and the translator's situation, the role of publishers, the presence of Arabic literature in the media, etc.

- Arabic literature has no opportunity to promote itself due to low print runs, which prevents even interesting titles from reaching a larger group of readers.
- Arabic literature is rather 'absent' from the media. What is visible is literary, scandalizing and/or Islamophobic rubbish. But I am a realist: it's a demand and supply issue: mass readership expect books about the negative sides of the Muslim world rather than reviews of Arabic literature. On the other hand, Turkish literature, even with the only two 'big names' of O. Pamuk and E. Şafak, does exist on the Polish book market – is it because there are no Arabic writers of that high calibre?
- It is obvious that one cannot live on translating from Arabic. One also has to translate from more popular languages. But this does not seem to explain why there are so few active literary translators from Arabic compared with those translating from, say, Chinese or Turkish.
- There is no support in the form of Arabic cultural institutes, but for the time being Arab countries have other problems to solve.
- Perhaps one could activate the potential of publishing houses which already exist, such as Dialog.
- More enthusiasts are needed, such as Agnieszka Piotrowska, the founder of Biblioteka Polsko-Arabska (Polish-Arabic Library) or Anna Wilczyńska and Karol Wilczyński from Salam Lab (which, however, is not

specifically concerned with literature).⁴⁰ An example to follow is also the Tajfuny publishing house, founded by Karolina Bednarz, specialist in Japanese studies, or Kwiaty Orientu, which promotes Korean culture (but these, I guess, have support from the respective countries, which the Arabists have never had, since I remember).

- What I don't like is the identification of Arab culture with Islam which has taken place in the general consciousness over the last few years.
- Good artistic value should be the first criterion but resisting stereotypes is also crucial with respect to remote cultures about which general knowledge is limited.
- Translations should be made directly from Arabic. Translators should be careful about the target language.
- It is impossible to speak about 'the translator's situation' because the group of translators from Arabic is very small and each of them has his/her specific problems.
- I guess that the publishers' efforts are maximal (since they want to sell their product), but there is no adequate response from the readers, which also determines the efforts of the translators and specialists in Arabic literature. This is a phenomenon that has been there forever.

⁴⁰ Salam Lab is an initiative whose 'priority is to build bridges and a culture of encounter between various ethnic and religious communities' as well as '[...] to disseminate reliable information on different cultures, as well as national, ethnic and religious minorities' (<https://salamlab.pl/en/about-us/>).

ANNEX 3. Survey II: The publishers

In order to include the publishers in the picture of translating Arabic literature into Polish I approached 15 publishing houses with questions concerning the issue as viewed from their perspective. I thank the 4 that were willing to answer: Karakter, Noir Sur Blanc, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy and Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga.

Since the number of the respondents is too small to conduct any quantitative analysis or make generalizations, I have decided to present the respondents' answers (more or less reformulated) as expressing some typical opinions.

1. Why do you publish/not publish translations of modern literature written in Arabic?

Why yes:

- Because we had a long-term cooperation with a translator.
- I guess the most important factor is receiving suggestions from translators who have talent and a will to convince a publisher.
- We were inspired at book fairs.
- Cultural changes, globalization, travelling possibilities – all this makes this kind of literature interesting to Polish readers.
- Because there are possibilities of financing.
- Arabic literature is an enormous literary continent, very diverse, but nearly unknown in Poland, often stereotyped. Its absence in Polish bookshops means that we are parochial in this respect.

Why not:

- We don't publish literature from this area because we have a different profile.

2. Do you think that Polish readers are interested in translations of literature written in Arabic? Do such books sell well?

- There is an interest at least in some Arabic authors.
- Arabic literature is a niche literature.
- It is not the readers' first choice, perhaps owing to a cultural barrier.
- Their interest is low, mostly because of a lack of promotion in the media and in literary festivals. Stereotypes and condescending attitudes towards other cultures are very strong.

3. Have you had difficulties finding a good translator from Arabic into Polish?

- We have never looked for one.
- We've had a successful long-term cooperation with one or two translators.
- Yes, we had difficulties finding a translator from Arabic.
- We know some very good translators but once we had difficulties finding a translator for one book. Since it had to be published quickly, we had to translate it via English (which we normally avoid).

4. Have you had difficulties finding a source of financial support for translating literature written in Arabic?

- We have never looked for such as we don't publish Arabic literature.

- I haven't looked for such sources.
- Before 2015,⁴¹ it was possible to obtain subsidies for publishing good Arabic literature from the Ministry of Culture (via the Instytut Książki). Since then, we have not applied for them; we do not try to find financing in Arab countries (because of unclear political implications).
- We knew the source of financing from the very beginning.

5. What guides/would guide your choice of titles from literature written in Arabic for publishing (e.g. literary or informative value, prizes awarded to the book, popularity of its translation into another language, mainly English)?

- Literary value, universalism, interest to Polish readership, potential to expand the readers' mental horizons.
- Prizes and popularity of a book's translations into other languages are of the least importance.
- All of these factors and a belief that books from the Arab region may be a source of knowledge about the world and a means to alleviate fears about migrants and refugees.
- In fiction, the literary value is the decisive factor. In non-fiction, what matters is the subject, but form is also important.

6. Do you receive proposals from translators who wish to publish their adaptations of Arabic literature? Do such contacts result in publishing a book?

- Never.
- For some years we have not, but we used to.
- Yes, we have received such proposals and they resulted in publishing books.

7. What in your opinion is the main factor preventing Polish publishers from bringing forth translations from Arabic?

- Too little interest from the readership.
- Probably a cultural barrier or because it is not fashionable. Preference for what is known.
- Many publishers are guided by prizes and similar glitter in their choices.
- Little insight into Arabic literature (which can be gained, however, for instance through European languages).

8. Any other observations on the translation of Arabic literature into Polish and the role of publishers.

There should be some major movement at the level of various players/institutions, otherwise little will change. We need to have a wide discussion about our attitude towards the Arab world and about Eurocentrism. Ironically, a literary festival hosted a discussion on Arabic literature in its edition devoted to 'smaller' languages, which shows how false our Polish perspective is. It should be noted that in the 1960s and 1970s Poland very actively cooperated with many Arab countries (student exchanges, Polish engineers working in Arab countries) – a fact which has disappeared from our collective conscience after 1989 and Poland joining the Western bloc.

⁴¹ In 2015, following a parliamentary election, power in Poland was seized by a party representing conservative Catholic, nationalist and anti-immigration, often Islamophobic, views [M.M.].