History of translation and translators

By Marie Lebert, 3 October 2019.

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We use translated works all the time. But how about the translators themselves, and their influence on shaping languages and cultures? They were highly regarded alongside authors, scholars and scientists for two millennia, and they played a major role in society. They also had fascinating lives. Here is a tribute to translators of the past — from Antiquity to the 20th century — with the help of Wikipedia. [web version]

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Overview

In our global world, we usually care about translations, while often forgetting the translators’ names. How about the translators themselves, and the key role they played for centuries in shaping languages and cultures? This essay focuses on translators and their translations (and not on translations only). It is a tribute to translators of the past, including the many women translators who, after being anonymous or signing with a male pseudonym, began signing their translations with their own names in the 16th century.

Early translators brought religious texts to other cultures > It all started with the translation of the Hebrew Bible, and the translation of Sanskrit or Indian Buddhist texts.

Translators brought Greek culture to the Arab civilization > Translators offered Arabic editions of all major Greek philosophical and scientific works after the Arabs conquered the Greek Empire.

Translators brought Arab and Greek cultures to the Christian civilization > Translators brought Arab and Greek cultures to the Christian world by translating many works into Latin.

Translators helped develop the English language > Bede and Alfred the Great produced some of the first translations from Latin to English.

Translators made the Bible available in modern languages > Translators produced the Bible in several languages, and helped develop modern languages in Europe.

Women translators started signing their translations > After working anonymously or under a male pseudonym, women translators began signing their translations with their real names, and also fought for gender equality.

Translators were instrumental for the revival of Greek classics > Translators produced new editions of Greek classics by Homer, Plato, Socrates, Plutarch and Thucydides in English, French, German and Polish.

Translators were instrumental for the revival of Latin classics > English poet Geoffrey Chaucer founded a poetic tradition based on translations and adaptations of Latin classics.

Translators were instrumental for the revival of medieval literature > Translators adapted several pieces of medieval literature that became best-sellers.

Translators were instrumental for the development of science > Translators actively contributed to the spread of scientific knowledge across borders and languages.

Translators brought Shakespeare’s plays to other cultures > Translators produced new editions of Shakespeare’s plays in German, Swedish and Russian.
Translators brought German literature to British readers > These translators were Sarah Austin, Lucy Duff-Gordon, and Anna Swanwick.

Translators brought French literature to the English-speaking world > These translators were Aphra Behn, Samuel Johnson, Elizabeth Ashurst, Matilda Hays, Katherine Womeley, Marie Louise Booth, and Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff.

Translators brought English-language literature to other cultures > Translators produced new editions in French, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Persian.

Translators brought foreign literature to the English-speaking world > Translators produced English editions of Portuguese, Swedish, Polish and Italian literature.

Translators brought French-language literature to other cultures > Translators produced English, Italian, Arabic and Persian editions of French literature, and English editions of African French literature.

Translators brought foreign literature to their own cultures > Translators produced new editions of works they liked, for example in Sweden, Poland, Germany and Russia.

Translators brought foreign poetry to Russian readers > Translators introduced German, English and French poetry to the Russian literary world.

Translators brought foreign poetry to the English-speaking world > Translators introduced French, Italian, Spanish and Dutch poetry to a new audience.

All along, translators tried to refine the translation process > The translator’s role as a bridge between languages and cultures has been discussed for two millennia.

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**Early translators brought religious texts to other cultures**

*It started with the translation of the Hebrew Bible, and the translation of Sanskrit or Indian Buddhist texts.*

**The “Septuagint”,** sometimes named the “Greek Old Testament”, is the earliest full Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures from the original Hebrew. The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek in the mid-3rd century BCE is regarded as the first major translation in the Western world. Most Jews had forgotten Hebrew, their ancestral language, and needed the Bible to be translated into Greek to be able to read it. The name “Septuagint” refers to the seventy Jewish scholars who were commissioned by Egyptian pharaoh Ptolemy II to translate the Hebrew Bible in Alexandria. Each translator worked in solitary confinement in his own cell, and according to legend all seventy versions proved identical. The “Septuagint” became
the source text for later translations into Latin, Armenian and other languages. Related biblical texts in Hebrew were also translated into Greek in Alexandria during the two following centuries.

Jerome (347-420) — better known as St. Jerome — was a Roman theologian, historian and writer, and a translator from Greek and Hebrew to Latin. He was commissioned by Pope Damasus I in 382 to revise the “Vetus Latina”, the Latin Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church. After learning Greek and Hebrew, he translated the Hebrew Bible from the original Hebrew. He moved to Jerusalem to improve his knowledge of Jewish Scripture, and completed the new translation, named the “Vulgate”, in 405. Prior to Jerome’s “Vulgate”, all Latin translations of the Old Testament were based on the “Septuagint” (the Greek translation of the Bible) and not on the Hebrew text. Jerome’s decision to use the Hebrew text instead of the “Septuagint” went against the advice of most notable Christians of that time, including Augustine. They believed in the Septuagint’s biblical inspiration, i.e. the doctrine that authors and editors of the Bible were led or influenced by God. Jerome’s translations were “not word for word but sense for sense” (“non verbum e verbo sed sensum de sensu”), as explained in his “Letter to Pammachius” in 396. After completing the “Vulgate”, Jerome wrote many commentaries on the Gospels for fifteen years, until he died. Jerome is regarded as one of the greatest translators in history for having rendered the Bible into Latin. After stirring controversy, his “Vulgate” was widely adopted, and became the most used Latin Bible in the 13th century. The Council of Trent named it the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church in 1546.

The Holy Translators (354-490?) were a group of Armenian scholars — Mesrop Mashtots (362-440), Isaac of Armenia (354-439), Movses Khorenatsi (410?-490?), Yeghishe (410-475) and others — who were all translators from Greek and Syriac to Armenian. Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its official religion in the early 4th century. After losing its independence in 387, the country was divided between the Byzantine Empire and Persia. The Byzantine territory favoured Greek and prohibited Syriac while the Persian territory favoured Syriac and prohibited Greek. Mesrop Mashtots invented in 405 the 36-letter Armenian alphabet (with two more letters added in the 12th century) to strengthen national unity despite political woes. The translation of the Bible into Armenian was completed in 425, with Mesrop Mashtots and Isaac of Armenia as its main translators. The Holy Translators also translated Greek and Syriac literature into Armenian, for example works by Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and Ephrem the Syrian. Mesrop Mashtots founded numerous schools teaching the new Armenian alphabet and using Armenian translations as educational material. Movses Khorenatsi became the Father of Armenian history as the first historian to write a history of Armenia in Armenian in 474 or 482. Yeghishe wrote a major book on the Armenian conflict against the Sassanid Persians, now considered a masterpiece of classical Armenian literature. The Holy Translators’ Bible is still used today in the liturgy of the Armenian Church. A Feast of the Holy Translators is celebrated each year in October.

Kumārajīva (344-413) was a Buddhist monk and scholar, and a translator from Sanskrit to Chinese. He is mostly remembered for translating Buddhist texts, a monumental task carried out during his later life. Among many works, he translated the “Diamond Sutra”, an influential Mahayana sutra in East Asia, that became an object of devotion and study in Zen Buddhism. A later copy (dated 868) of the Chinese version of “Diamond Sutra” is “the earliest complete
survival of a printed book”, according to the website of the British Library (that owns the piece). Kumārajīva had a deep influence on Chinese Buddhism because of the clarity of his translations. His smooth translation style focused on conveying the meaning as opposed to precise literal rendering. His translations have often remained more popular than later, more literal translations.

Amoghavajra (705-774) was a Buddhist monk, and a translator of Buddhist texts from Indian to Chinese. Born in Samarkand (a town now located in Uzbekistan) of an Indian father and a Sogdian (Iranian) mother, he moved to China at age 10 after his father’s death. When all foreign monks were expelled from China in 741, he traveled to gather Buddhist texts in Sri Lanka, Indochina and India. He returned to China in 746 with around 500 manuscripts. His translation of the Indian Buddhist tantric text “Tattvasamgraha Tantra” was the ground for the tantras of Vajrayana Buddhism (a form of Tantric Buddhism). His translation of the East Asian Buddhist apocryphal scripture “Humane King Sutra” helped shape the politics of his time. Amoghavajra translated 77 texts, according to his own account, but many more translations were ascribed to him in the Chinese canons. He became one of the most politically powerful Buddhist monks in Chinese history. Three days of mourning were officially declared after he died, and he posthumously received various titles. He was one of the Eight Patriarchs of the Doctrine in Shingon Buddhism, a prominent school of Buddhism in Japan.

The spread of Buddhism led to large-scale translation efforts spanning more than a thousand years throughout Asia. Major works were sometimes translated in a rather short time. The Tanguts for example took mere decades to translate works that had taken the Chinese centuries to translate. The entire Chinese Buddhist canon was translated into the Tangut language over a span of fifty years, and published around 1090 in about 3,700 fascicles. Contemporary sources described the Emperor and his mother personally contributing to the translation, alongside sages of various nationalities.

Translators brought Greek culture to the Arab civilization

Translators offered Arabic editions of all major Greek philosophical and scientific works after the Arabs conquered the Greek Empire.

Hunayn ibn Ishaq (809-873) was a Nestorian (Christian) physician and scientist, and a translator from Greek to Arabic. Born in Mesopotamia (now in southern Iraq), he settled in Baghdad (now in Lebanon) during the Abbasid Caliphate. He was fluent in four languages (Arabic, Syriac, Greek and Persian). Hunayn wrote 36 treatises, with 21 treaties on medical subjects, including ophthalmology. He became the chief translator of the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement. The movement started in the House of Wisdom, a major intellectual center in Baghdad, to translate Greek works into Arabic, and make them available to scholars throughout the Islamic world. As a prolific translator of Greek works of philosophy, mathematics, natural science and medicine, Hunayn ibn Ishaq became known as the “Sheikh of the translators”. He translated 116 works, for example philosopher Plato’s works (including
“Timaeus”), philosopher Aristotle’s works (including “Metaphysics”), and philosopher and physician Galen of Pergamon’s works (including “On Sects” and “On Anatomy of the Veins and Arteries”). He also translated the Old Testament into Syriac and Arabic. He often translated Greek works into Syriac before translating them into Arabic, which was common at that time, with the help of his son Ishaq ibn Hunayn and his nephew Hubaysh. Unlike some fellow translators, Hunayn ibn Ishaq opposed translating texts word for word. He often rewrote a piece instead of merely translating it, in order to convey knowledge more accurately. He also corrected some pieces later on to include new elements after reading new works about a given subject. His method was widely followed by later translators, and helped gather in one century nearly all the knowledge learned from Greek medicine to include it into Islamic medicine.

Qusta ibn Luqa (820-912) was a Melkite (Byzantine Christian) physician and scientist from Syria, and a translator from Greek to Arabic. Born in Baalbek (now in Lebanon), he traveled in the Byzantine Empire, and gathered major Greek works of his time before settling in Baghdad as a scholar and translator. He wrote 60 treatises, mainly on medical subjects, but also on mathematics and astronomy, for example commentaries on mathematician Euclid’s work, and a treatise on the Armillary sphere (a spherical astrolabe). He translated, revised or supervised the translation from Greek into Arabic of major works in astronomy, mathematics, mechanics and natural science, for example works by mathematicians Diophantus and Hero of Alexandria, by mathematicians and astronomers Theodosius of Bithynia, Autolycus of Pitane and Aristarchus of Samos, by biologist and philosopher Theophrastus, by physician and philosopher Galen of Pergamon, and by philologist and philosopher John Philoponus. Along with Hunayn ibn Ishaq, Qusta ibn Luqa became a prominent figure in the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement, and their translations brought Greek culture to the Arab civilization.

Thābit ibn Qurra (826-901) was an Arab Sabian (Middle Eastern) mathematician, physician and astronomer, and a translator from Syriac (his native language) and Greek to Arabic. Born in Harran, Assyria (now in Turkey), he lived in Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate. His other interests were statics, astrology, magic, medicine and philosophy. He translated major Greek works by mathematician, astronomer and geographer Ptolemy (including his “Geography”), by geometer and astronomer Apollonius of Perga, by mathematician and astronomer Archimedes, and by mathematician Euclid, later named the Father of geometry. He often worked with fellow scholar and translator Hunayn ibn Ishaq, revised his translation of Euclid’s “Elements”, and rewrote his translation of Ptolemy’s “Almagest”. As an astronomer, Thābit ibn Qurra was one of the first reformers of the Ptolemaic system.

Translators brought Arab and Greek cultures to the Christian civilization

Translators brought Arab and Greek cultures to the Christian world by translating many works into Latin.
Abraham bar Hiyya (1070-1145) was a Jewish scientist and philosopher, and a translator from Arabic to Hebrew. Born in Barcelona, a town in the Iberian Peninsula (that later became Spain), he was the first scholar to write all his works in Hebrew, and not in the Judaeo-Arabic language commonly used to write the Jewish scientific literature of that time. As such, he was a pioneer in the use of Hebrew for scientific purposes. His main work was “Treatise on Measurement and Calculation”, a treatise on Islamic algebra and practical geometry. Bar Hiyya also translated scientific literature from Arabic to Hebrew, before further translation of these works into Latin by Plato of Tivoli (Plato Tiburtinus). Both scholars translated several scientific works, including mathematician, astronomer and astrologer Ptolemy’s “Tetrabiblos” (1138), an authoritative work on the philosophy and practice of astrology. Bar Hiyya may also have translated works by Arab mathematician Ahmad ibn Yusuf, and by Flemish astronomer Rudolf of Bruges.

Adelard of Bath (1080?-1152?) was an English natural philosopher, and a translator from Arabic to Latin. Born in Bath, a town in southwestern England, he studied astronomy and science in Tours, in central France, and taught in Laon, in northern France, before traveling in southern Italy and Sicily in 1116. He then traveled in Greece, Anatolia, West Asia, Spain, Turkey (in Tarsus and Antioch) and may be Palestine, and became acquainted with Arabic and Greek mathematics, astronomy and geometry. He returned to England in 1126 with the intention of spreading the knowledge he had gained during his travels. He wrote “De eodem et diverso” on the study of philosophy, “Quaestiones naturales” on physics and natural sciences, “De avibus tractatus” on birds and falconry, “Regulae abaci” on the abacus (a calculating tool), and other works. He translated Arabic and Greek (from Arabic editions) works of astrology, astronomy, philosophy and mathematics. He was the first scholar to introduce the Arabic numeral system in Europe. His translation of Euclid’s “Elements” — a mathematical treatise consisting of 13 books — was used later on by Italian mathematician Campanus of Novara to produce one of the first printed mathematical books in 1482. It became the main textbook in European mathematical schools in the 16th century.

Plato Tiburtinus (1100?-1138), also known as Plato of Tivoli, was an Italian mathematician and astronomer, and a translator from Hebrew and Arabic to Latin. He lived in Barcelona, a town of the Iberian Peninsula, from 1116 to 1138, and worked with Jewish mathematician Savasorda. His translations included Arab astrologer Albohali’s “Book of Birth” (1136), Ptolemy’s “Tetrabiblos” (1138) on the philosophy and practice of astrology, and Arab works on the astrolabe. His writings on astronomy were widely circulated, and later used by 13th-century astronomers Albertus Magnus and Fibonacci.

Herman of Carinthia (1100?-1160?) was an Eastern European philosopher and scientist, and a translator from Arabic to Latin. Born in Istria, a peninsula in the Adriatic Sea, he studied in two French cathedral schools, first in Chartres and then in Paris. He traveled in the Middle East in 1134-37 with fellow student and friend Robert of Ketton, and got acquainted with Arabic works in Constantinople (now Istanbul), Palestine and Damascus. He returned to Europe in 1138, and settled as a scholar in 1142, first in Spain and then in southern France. He wrote treatises on philosophy (“De essentiis” on philosophical categories), meteorology (“Liber imbrium” on precipitations), astrology (“De indagatione cordis” on astrological research), mathematics (“De mensura” on measurements), and astronomy (“De utilitatis astrolabii” and “De compositione et usu astrolabii” on astrolabes). At the request of Peter the Venerable, abbot
of the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny, France, who visited the Iberian Peninsula in 1142, Herman of Carinthia translated religious texts on Islam from Arabic to Latin, with the help of other translators. He was the main translator of “De generatione Muhamet et nutritura eius” and “Doctrina Muhamet”. He probably participated in the translation of “Lex Mahumet pseudopropheete”, the first known translation of the Quran into Latin (1143), with Robert of Ketton as its main translator. He also translated Arab and Greek astronomical works such as Sahl ibn Bishr’s “Liber sextus astronomie” (1138), Abu Ma’shar’s “Liber introductorius ad astronomiam” (1140), Euclid’s “Elements” (1140) (possibly with Robert of Ketton), and Ptolemy’s “Planisphaerium” and “Canon of Kings” (1143). Some translations were not based on the Greek originals but on their Arabic editions. These translations popularized Arabic and Greek culture in Europe, and influenced the development of medieval European astronomy.

John of Seville (1110?-1153) was a baptized Jewish scholar, and a translator from Arabic to Latin and Castilian (Spanish). Born in Seville, a town in the Iberian Peninsula, he wrote a book of algorithms on practical arithmetic, that later inspired 13th-century Italian mathematician Fibonacci’s “Liber abaci”. John of Seville was a translator at the Toledo School of Translators during its early days, with Dominic Gundissalinus and other scholars. The division of the Iberian Peninsula between Muslim and Christian rulers since the Reconquista (the Christian campaign to regain the peninsula) made it a natural base for translators from Arabic to Latin. Toledo was one of the few places in medieval Europe where a Christian could be exposed to Arabic language and culture. John of Seville translated major Arab works of astrology, astronomy, philosophy and medicine, for example Arab philosopher Qusta ibn Luqa’s “De differentia spiritus et animae”, and works by astronomer Al-Farghani and by astrologers Abu Ma’shar al-Balkhi and Albohali. He also translated (from its Arabic version) “Secretum secretorum”, a letter from Greek philosopher Aristotle to his student Alexander the Great.

Robert of Ketton (1110?-1153) was an English theologian and astronomer, and a translator from Arabic to Latin. Born in Ketton, near Stamford, in eastern England, he studied at the Cathedral School in Paris, France. He traveled in 1134-37 with fellow student and friend Herman of Carinthia, and visited Constantinople (now Istanbul), Palestine and Damascus. He settled in the Iberian Peninsula in 1141. At the request of Peter the Venerable, abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny, France, who visited the Iberian Peninsula in 1142, he became the main translator of “Lex Mahumet pseudopropheete” (1143), the first known translation of the Quran into Latin, with the help of Herman of Carinthia and other translators. His translation remained the standard Latin edition of the Quran until the 18th century. Robert of Ketton also translated scientific works into Latin, for example works by Arab scientists Al-Battani and Avicenna. With fellow translators Herman of Carinthia, Adelard of Bath, John of Seville, Gerard of Cremona and Plato Tiburtinus, he popularized Arabic culture in Europe, and influenced the development of medieval European science.

Gerard of Cremona (1114?-1187) (Cremona was his birthplace) was an Italian scholar, and a translator from Arabic and Greek to Latin. He first came to Toledo, a town in the Iberian Peninsula, to learn Arabic from Jews and Mozarabs. Toledo was a city of libraries with a vibrant intellectual life. Gerard of Cremona read Greek mathematician and astronomer Ptolemy’s “Almagest”, a treatise on the apparent motions of the stars and planetary paths. He also read works that were only available in Arabic (with no Greek or Latin edition yet). He wrote treatises on algebra, arithmetic and astrology. He translated Ptolemy’s “Almagest” from
Arabic to Latin circa 1175. He joined the Toledo School of Translators, a group of translators who made Arab and Greek knowledge available in Latin for European scholars. Throughout his life, he translated 87 works into Latin: works originally written in Arabic, Greek editions of Arabic works, and works originally written in Greek. His translations of works originally written in Arabic included Arab mathematician al-Khwarizmi’s “On Algebra and Almucabala”, and Arab astronomer Jabir ibn Aflah’s “Elementa Astronomica”. His translations of Greek editions of Arabic works included Arab astronomer Alfraganus’ “Elements of Astronomy”. His translations of works originally written in Greek included Arab mathematician and astronomer al-Zarqali’s “Toledan Tables” (or “Tables of Toledo”), regarded as the most accurate compilation of astronomical data of that time.

Dominicus Gundissalinus (1115?-1190?) was a philosopher, and a translator from Arabic to Latin. Born in the Iberian Peninsula, he studied in the Cathedral School in Chartres, France. He moved to Toledo in 1148 to join the Toledo School of Translators, together with John of Seville, Abraham ibn Daud, Johannes Hispalensis and other scholars. Gundissalinus wrote several philosophical treatises. He was one of the first scholars to contribute to the assimilation of Arab philosophy into Latin culture, for example Persian philosopher Avicenna’s doctrines, long before these doctrines became well known in the 13th century. He translated Avicenna’s “Liber de philosophia prima” and “De anima”, Persian theologian Al-Ghazali’s “Summa theoricae philosophiae”, and Jewish philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol’s “Fons vitae”. He spent twenty years in Toledo before retiring in Segovia, Castile (now in Spain).

Michael Scot (1175-1232?) was a Scottish mathematician and scholar, and a translator from Arabic to Latin. He studied at Oxford University and in Paris, and learned Latin, Greek, Arabic and Hebrew. He settled in Toledo as a translator for the Toledo School of Translators. One of his first translations was the translation of Arab astronomer al-Bitruji’s “On the Motions of the Heavens” (1217). King of Sicily Frederick II attracted Michael Scot to his court in 1225, and asked him to supervise (along with Hermannus Alemannus) the translation of Greek philosopher Aristotle’s works from Arabic to Latin. Scot translated himself three works (“Historia animalium”, “De anima” and “De coelo”), and Muslim philosopher Averroes’ commentaries on these works. His translation of Aristotle’s “De verificatione motuum coelestium”, a book on homocentric spheres, was later used by English philosopher Roger Bacon.

Samuel ibn Tibbon (1150?-1230?) was a Jewish philosopher and physician, and a translator of Jewish rabbinic literature from Arabic to Hebrew. Born in Provence (that later became part of France), he was taught rabbinic literature by his father, and medicine and Arabic by other teachers. He traveled in Barcelona, Toledo and Alexandria in 1210-13 before settling back in Provence. His main work was the translation of Jewish philosopher Maimonides’ “The Guide for the Perplexed”, originally written in Arabic. Maimonides sent himself instructions for the translation, and explained difficult passages while praising the translator’s ability and knowledge. Samuel ibn Tibbon added a glossary of foreign words used in the translation. His translation was praised for its accuracy and faithfulness to the original text. When the struggle between Maimonists and anti-Maimonists arose, Samuel ibn Tibbon was criticized for contributing to the spread of Maimonides’ ideas. Maimonides’ opponents strongly opposed his
translation, and gave it the satirical title of “Perplexity of the Rebellious”. Samuel ibn Tibbon translated other works by Maimonides, and works written by other authors, for example three treatises by Muslim philosopher Averroes, and “Meteorology” by Greek philosopher Aristotle (translated into Hebrew from Yahya of Antioch’s Arabic translation).

**Yehuda Alharizi** (1165-1225) was a Jewish poet, and a translator from Arabic to Hebrew and Latin. He lived in the Iberian Peninsula, and undertook long journeys in the Middle East. He wrote “Tahkemoni” (1218-20), a series on scriptural texts, followed by another series on ethical self-discipline and fear of heaven. He was also a literary critic — writing for example about Andalusian Hebrew poets — and a rationalist whose translations helped convey Maimonides’ works. Alharizi’s translation of “The Guide for the Perplexed” from Arabic to Hebrew was less used by Jewish scholars than Samuel ibn Tibbon’s more precise translation. But his translation of the same work from Hebrew to Latin had some influence in the Christian world. Alharizi also translated Maimonides’ “Commentary on the Mishnah”, and Arab poet Al-Hariri of Basra’s “Mahbarot Iti’el”.

**William of Moerbeke** (1215-1286?) was a Greek Dominican, and a translator from Greek to Latin. He translated philosophical, medical and scientific works, including works by philosopher Thomas Aquinas, mathematician John Campanus, physician Witelo, and astronomer Henri Bate of Mechelen, who dedicated his treatise on the astrolabe to his translator. At Thomas Aquinas’ request, William of Moerbeke undertook the translation of Aristotle’s works directly from the Byzantine Greek manuscripts (that were lost later on). Until then, most Latin translations of Aristotle’s works were based on Syriac or Arabic translations. William of Moerbeke translated “De anima” (in 1267), “Rhetoric” (as a new Latin translation) and “Politics” (available in Latin for the first time). These literal translations (“de verbo en verbo”), faithful to Aristotle’s spirit, became standard classics, and are still respected by modern scholars. William of Moerbeke also translated other Greek works, for example Hero de Alexandria’s and Archimedes’ mathematical treatises, and Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus’ “Elements of Theology”.

**Gemistus Pletho** (1355?-1452) was a Byzantine scholar, and a translator from Greek to Latin. He reintroduced Greek philosopher Plato’s thought during the 1438-39 Council of Florence, in a failed attempt to reconcile the East-West Schism, an 11th-century schism between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. Pletho wrote “De Differentiis”, a detailed comparison between Plato and Aristotle’s conceptions of God, arguing that Plato credited God with more exalted powers as the “creator of every kind of intelligible and separate substance, and hence of our entire universe”, while Aristotle considered God mainly as the motive force of the universe. Plato’s God was both the end and the final cause of existence, while Aristotle’s God was the end of movement and change. Pletho’s meeting with Italian ruler Cosimo de Medici during the Council of Florence led to the foundation of the Platonic Academy. Under the leadership of Italian scholar and translator Marsilio Ficino, the Platonic Academy took over the translation into Latin of all Plato’s works, as well as philosopher Plotinus’ “Enneads” and other Neoplatonist works.
Translators helped develop the English language

Bede and Alfred the Great produced some of the first translations from Latin to English.

**Bede** (672?-735) was an English monk, writer and scholar, and a translator from Greek to Latin and Old English. He wrote the “Ecclesiastical History of the English People” (“Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum”), that gained him the title of Father of English History. He translated the Greek “Passion of St. Anastasius” into Latin. During the last 40 days of his life, he translated the Gospel of St. John into Old English. After translating the last passage, he is believed to have said: “All is finished” before dying. As a skilled translator, Bede made Greek works by the early Church Fathers more accessible to his fellow Anglo-Saxons, contributing significantly to the development of English Christianity. Latin was still the main language in England.

**Alfred the Great** (849-899) was the King of Wessex in England, and a translator from Latin to English. He was far ahead of his time in commissioning Anglo-Saxon translations of Latin works, for example Bede’s “Ecclesiastical History of the English People”. Latin was still the “lingua franca” in England, with few translations available in English. In 880, Alfred the Great started an ambitious programme to translate into English the books he deemed “most necessary for all men to know”, while promoting primary education in English. The earliest work to be translated at his command was Pope Gregory the Great’s “Dialogues”, translated by Werferth, Bishop of Worcester. Alfred the Great translated several works himself, including Gregory the Great’s “Pastoral Care”, philosopher Boethius’ “Consolation of Philosophy”, theologian Augustine’s “Soliloquies”, the Psalter’s first fifty psalms, and the “Book of Exodus” (included in the “Vulgate”). In the introduction of his translation of “Pastoral Care”, he explained that he was translating “sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense”. He ordered his translation to be distributed to all bishops for them to train and supervise priests, and become royal officials and judges themselves. Interest in his translation was so enduring that copies were still produced in the 11th century. His translation of Boethius’ “Consolation of Philosophy” dealt freely with the original text, and became the most popular philosophical handbook of that time. All these new translations contributed to improve the English prose.

Translators made the Bible available in modern languages

Translators produced the Bible in several languages, and helped develop modern languages in Europe.
In Latin > Erasmus (1466-1536) was a Dutch scholar and theologian, and a translator from Greek to Latin. As a classical scholar, he wrote in a pure Latin style, studied Greek, improved humanist critical thinking, and corresponded with many politicians and thinkers of his time. Erasmus produced a Latin edition of the New Testament by collecting several manuscripts of the Latin “Vulgate” and by polishing the Latin texts to create a critical edition in 1516. He synchronized, unified and updated simultaneously the Latin and Greek editions — both being part of the canonical tradition — and made the two editions “compatible”, meaning that he edited the Latin edition to reflect the Greek edition, and vice versa. For example, as the last six verses of the “Book of Revelation” were missing in the Greek manuscript, Erasmus translated these verses back into Greek from the “Vulgate”. Erasmus’ Latin and Greek editions of the New Testament were influential in the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Erasmus’ Latin edition of the New Testament — and Italian philosopher Marsilio Ficino’s Latin edition of all Plato’s works — led to a new attitude to translation. For the first time, readers demanded rigour in rendering the exact words of Jesus and Plato as the ground for their philosophical and religious beliefs.

In English > John Wycliffe (1320-1384) was an English scholastic philosopher, theologian and reformer, and a translator from Latin to English. He was a seminary professor at Oxford University, and a dissident in the Roman Catholic priesthood. Wycliffe advocated for the translation of the Bible into English. At his own initiative, he directed in 1382-84 the first English edition of the Bible, based on the Latin “Vulgate” and named “Wycliffe’s Bible”. The translation contributed to improve the still underdeveloped English prose of that time. Wycliffe probably translated himself the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and may be the entire New Testament, while his friend Nicholas of Hereford translated the Old Testament. After Wycliffe’s death, the “Wycliffe’s Bible” was revised in 1388 by Wycliffe’s assistant John Purvey, with a second revised edition in 1395. To this day there are still 150 complete or partial manuscripts of the translation in its revised form.

In English > William Tyndale (1494?-1536) was an English scholar, and a translator from Hebrew and Greek to English. He produced a new English edition of the Bible during the Tudor period. Translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek texts, the “Tyndale New Testament” was regarded as the first accurate translation into English of the New Testament. After translating the New Testament, Tyndale started translating the Old Testament, and translated half of it. He became a leading figure in Protestant Reformation before being sentenced to death for the unlicensed possession of the Scripture in English. After his death, his translation was completed by one of his assistants. With the recent invention of the printing press, the “Tyndale Bible” (1525) became the first mass-produced English Bible. It was replaced by the “Great Bible” (1539).

In English > Myles Coverdale (1488-1569) was an English ecclesiastical reformer and preacher, and a translator from Latin to English. Coverdale produced the first complete English edition of the Bible, named the “Great Bible” (1539) and based on the “Tyndale Bible” (1525). Objectionable paragraphs of the “Tyndale Bible” were revised, and lacking parts (some books of the Old Testament, and the Apocrypha) were added. Coverdale worked under the commission of Thomas Lord Cromwell, vicar general and secretary to King Henry VIII of England. Cromwell wanted the clergy to have “one book of the Bible of the largest volume in English, and the same set up in some convenient place within the said church that we have care
of, whereas your parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and read it.” The “Great Bible” — also named “Cromwell Bible” — became the first authorized edition of the Bible in English, meaning that it was authorized by King Henry VIII of England to be read aloud in the church services of the Church of England. The “Great Bible” was later followed by the “Bishops’ Bible” (1558) and the “King James Bible” (1604-11).

**In English > The “King James Bible” (1604-11)** was a major translation of the Bible into English, with 39 books for the Old Testament (translated from Greek), 27 books for the New Testament (translated from Greek and Latin), and 14 books for the Apocrypha (translated from Hebrew and Aramaic). The 47 translators — all of them scholars and members of the Church of England — were given instructions to ensure that the new translation would conform to the ecclesiology, and reflect the episcopal structure of the Church of England and its belief in an ordained clergy. The “King James Bible” was the third translation into English to be approved by the English Church, after the “Great Bible” (1535) and the “Bishops’ Bible” (1568). It was also regarded as a literary achievement, with lasting effects on the English language and culture. It supplanted the Latin “Vulgate” as the standard Bible for English scholars in the 18th century. It became the most printed book in history in the early 19th century. In the late 19th century, the “English Revised Version of the King James Bible” (1881-94) became the new official authorized version of the Bible in England. American scholars were invited to cooperate by correspondence with 50 English scholars for the publication of the New Testament (1881), the Old Testament (1885) and the Apocrypha (1894). Debates over different translations continue to this day. The King James Only movement advocates the use of the original “King James Bible” instead of more recent editions.

**In English > Julia Evelina Smith** (1792-1886) was an American feminist, and a translator from Latin, Greek and Hebrew to English. Her family, the Smiths of Glastonbury, lived in Connecticut, and all the women in her family were active in championing women’s education, women’s suffrage and abolitionism. Julia Evelina Smith was well educated, with a working knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. After reading the Bible in its original languages, she decided to undertake her own translation of the Bible into English, with an emphasis on literalism. She completed her translation in 1855, after eight years of work. Her translation was published in 1876, before the publication of the “English Revised Version of the King James Bible” (1881-94), regarded as the official authorized version of the Bible in England. Julia Evelina Smith’s family (as a whole) was inducted in 1994 into the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame.

**In German > Martin Luther** (1483-1546) was a German professor of theology, a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation, and the translator of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek to German in his later years. He first translated the New Testament (1522) before translating the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. The complete “Luther Bible” (1522-34) was not the first Bible available in German, but was regarded as the best. Previous translations were based on the Latin “Vulgate” and not on the original texts, and the German text was much poorer. The “Luther Bible” offered new translations for crucial words and passages, thus contributing to some extent to the split of western Christianity into Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. (The main reason of the split was the wish to reform the Roman Catholic Church to eliminate corruption.) With the recent invention of the printed press, the “Luther Bible” was widely disseminated, and became the “People’s Book” in churches, schools and homes. It contributed
to the development of the German language and the creation of a German national identity. Luther was the first European scholar to assess that one translates satisfactorily only towards his own language, a statement that became the norm in the 18th century.

**In Polish** > Jakub Wujek (1541-1597) was a Polish Jesuit and religious writer, and a translator from Latin to Polish. He translated the Bible from the Latin “Vulgate” after being granted the official permission to undertake such work by Pope Gregory XIII and the Jesuit Order. The first edition of the “Jakub Wujek Bible” (“Biblia Jakuba Wujka”) was completed in 1593. The full authorized edition was completed in 1599, two years after Wujek’s death. The “Jakub Wujek Bible” replaced the “Leopolita’s Bible” (1561) as the main Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. It became the official Polish Bible for four centuries, before being replaced by the “Millennium Bible” (1965). Wujek’s translation of the Bible was recognized as both an excellent translation and a major literary work, and contributed to the development of the Polish language.

**In Dutch, French, Spanish, Czech and Slovene** > The Bible was also translated into several other languages. The Dutch translation was published in 1526 by Jacob van Liesveldt. The French translation was published in 1528 by Jacques Lefevre d’Étaples (Jacobus Faber Stapulensis). The Spanish translation was published in 1569 by Casiodoro de Reina. The Slovene translation was published in 1584 by Jurij Dalmatin. The Czech translation was published in 1579-93. All these translations were a driving force in the use of vernacular languages in Christian Europe, and contributed to the development of modern European languages.

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**Women translators started signing their translations**

*After working anonymously or under a male pseudonym, women translators began signing their translations with their real names, and also fought for gender equality.*

**Anne Bacon** (1527-1610) was an English scholar, a Puritan (Reformed Protestant) advocate, and a translator from Latin and Italian to English. Born in Essex, in southeastern England, she was the daughter of Anthony Cooke, the tutor of King Henry VIII’s only son Edward (who later became King Edward VI of England). Cooke made sure that all his children — four sons and five daughters — received a humanist education and learned several languages (Latin, Italian, French, Greek, and may be Hebrew). Anne Bacon first translated “Ochines Sermons”, a series of sermons by Italian evangelist Bernardino, who became a Protestant reformer. She translated “Apologie of the Anglican Church”, originally written in Latin in 1564 by John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, to clarify the differences between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. Her translation was a significant step in the intellectual justification of Protestantism in England, and helped support the religious policies implemented by Queen Elizabeth I of England. A deeply religious woman, Anne Bacon wrote many letters conveying
her passion for religion. Many of her later letters were addressed to her two sons, Anthony Bacon and Francis Bacon (the philosopher), with advice on their spiritual welfare and religious lives.

**Margaret Tyler** (1540?-1590?) was a translator from Spanish to English, and the first English woman to translate a Spanish romance. The dedicatory letter introducing her translation was addressed to Lord Thomas Howard. She was probably a servant to the Howard family, a Catholic aristocratic family. The source of her knowledge of Spanish is unknown. In the 16th century, Spanish was valued by English merchants because of their economic ties with Spain, and some merchants’ daughters and servants may have learned the language. Margaret Tyler translated Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra’s Spanish romance “Espejo de príncipes y caballeros” under the title “The Mirrour of Princely Deeds and Knighthood” (1578). Her translation closely followed the original text, with only minor changes, and with clarity preferred to the flowing elegance of the original. Her translation became a best-seller, despite some criticisms because its masculine and secular topic was considered inappropriate for a woman. Women translators were supposed to translate religious literature, in line with the fact that female education should promote piety. In her “Letter to the reader”, Margaret Tyler protested against these restrictions, insisted on the seriousness and importance of literary work by women, and proposed that both women and men should be treated as equal rational beings. The second volume of Ortúñez de Calahorra’s Spanish romance was translated later on by Welsh poet Robert Parry, probably because Margaret Tyler was reaching the end of her life.

**Anna Hume** (1600?-1650?) was a Scottish writer and poet, and a translator from Latin to English. Born and raised in Wedderburn Castle, she was the daughter of historian and poet David Hume of Horscroft, a major political figure in Scotland. Anna Hulme translated her father's Latin poems, and Italian poet Petrarch’s “Trionfi” under the title “The Triumphs of Love, Chastitie, Death: Translated Out of Petrarch by Mrs. Anna Hulme”. Petrarch’s poems “tell of love’s triumph over the poet (Petrarch falls in love with Laura), superseded by the triumph of chastity over lust (in that Laura does not yield to Petrarch’s love), which is followed by the triumph of death over Laura (as Laura dies and reminds both author and reader of death’s power)” (Wikipedia). Anna Hulme’s translation was published in 1644 by printer Evan Tyler in Edinburgh. A book published by a woman belonging to a prominent family was very unusual at that time, but it was well received and her translation was praised as faithful and spirited. Anna Hulme later supervised the posthumous publication of her father’s last book “History of the Houses of Douglas and Angus”, published in 1644 by Evan Tyler as a 440-page quarto volume. Controversy surrounded its publication as Scottish nobleman William Douglas was dissatisfied with her work.

**Lucy Hutchinson** (1620-1681) was an English poet and biographer, and a translator from Latin to English. She translated Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius’ “On the Nature of Things” (“De rerum natura”), a didactic philosophical poem exploring Epicurean philosophy to explain the natural world. Lucretius’ ideas were at odds with her Puritan faith, and she emphasized their sinfulness in the dedication introducing her translation. Her translation was never published during her lifetime. Her heirs sold the manuscript to the British Library in 1853. Her translation was only published in 1996 under the editorship of Hugh de Quehen. Lucy Hutchinson’s own works as a poet included “Elegies”, a set of poems that stayed unpublished, and “Order and Disorder”, a verse rendition of the “Book of Genesis”, and
possibly the first epic poem written by an English woman, with only five cantos published during her lifetime. Both works were discovered much later by English literary critic David Norbrook, and published respectively in 1997 and 2001. Lucy Hutchinson wrote “On the Principles of the Christian Religion”, a comprehensive personal statement of the Puritan theology of her time, and “Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson”, a biography of her husband with insights on a good Puritan life. Intended for her family only, these memoirs were printed by a descendant in 1806, and cleared away false impressions about the narrowness and austerity of educated Puritans.

**Ellen Francis Mason** (1846-1930) was an American civic leader and philanthropist living in Boston, Massachusetts, United States, and a translator from Greek to English. She was a trustee of Radcliffe College, a women’s liberal arts college near Harvard University, and she befriended American novelist Sarah Orne Jewett. Ellen Francis Mason translated some works by Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates, and her annotated translations were published anonymously by American publisher Scribner’s in 1879. Although her name didn’t appear on the title pages of her translations, her identity as the translator was known to librarians by the following year. American novelist Jo Walton wrote that Ellen Francis Mason’s life “is like a type-example of how difficult it was for women to lead a life of the mind” (note in her novel “The Just City”, Tor Books, 2015).

Translators were instrumental for the revival of Greek classics

*Translators produced new editions of Greek classics by Homer, Plato, Socrates, Plutarch and Thucydides in English, French, German and Polish.*

**Homer In English > Alexander Pope** (1688-1744) was an English poet, and a translator from Greek to English. Pope is the second most frequently quoted author in the “Oxford Dictionary of Quotations” after Shakespeare. Pope read classics by Greek poet Homer, Roman poets Horace, Juvenal and Virgil, and English poets Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dryden, before being introduced in the London literary society. His main translations were the translations of Homer’s epic poems “Iliad” and “Odyssey”. Pope, who was fascinated by Homer since his childhood, started translating the “Iliad” in 1713. He was paid 200 guineas a volume (the equivalent to £28,200 now) by publisher Bernard Linto, who released one volume per year over the course of six years (1715-20). His translation of the “Iliad” became a best-seller. Pope started translating the “Odyssey” with equivalent wages. His translation of the “Odyssey” was published in 1726, and became a best-seller too. However Pope only translated twelve books of the “Odyssey” himself, and secretly enlisted the help of two other poets and translators, William Broome (who translated eight books) and Elijah Fenton (who translated four books). The secret leaked out and damaged Pope’s reputation for some time, as well as some criticisms relating to Homer’s “wild paradise” reduced to “order”, with no incidence on the sales of his two best-selling translations.
Homer in French > Anne Dacier (1654-1720) was a French translator and editor of classics from Greek to French. Born in Saumur, in central France, she was taught Latin and Greek by her father Tanneguy Le Fèvre. After her father’s death in 1672, she moved to Paris and worked with Pierre Daniel Huet, a friend of her father who was in charge of the Delphin Classics, a comprehensive edition of Latin classics. Anne Dacier produced editions of poets Publius Annius Florus, Anacreon and Sappho, playwrights Terence, Plautus and Aristophanes, and historians Dictys Cretensis, Sextus Aurelius Victor and Eutropius. After moving with her husband to Castres, in southern France, in 1685, Anne Dacier produced prose translations of Homer’s “Iliad” (1699) and “Odyssey” (1708), and her translations introduced Homer to the French literary world. Her translations were praised by her contemporaries, including English poet Alexander Pope, who translated Homer’s epic poems into English (1715-20 and 1726). Anne Dacier published an essay on Pope’s translation of the “Odyssey”, that gained her some fame in England as well. Another French translation of the “Odyssey” was Antoine Houdar de la Motte’s verse edition (1714) founded on Anne Dacier’s prose edition. The two translators began a long literary controversy, with the participation of French scholars Jean Terrasson and Claude Buffier. Anne Dacier and Houdar de la Motte later agreed about Homer being one of the greatest literary geniuses in the world, met at supper and drank to the health of Homer.

Homer in German > Johann Heinrich Voss (1751-1826) was a German scholar and classicist, and a translator from Greek, Latin and English to German. Voss studied philology at the University of Göttingen before being appointed rector in Otterndorf in 1778 and in Eutin in 1792. After writing poetry, essays and treatises, he produced a first translation of Homer’s “Odyssey” (1781), which introduced Homer to the German literary world. He then translated Roman poet Virgil’s “Bucolics” and “Georgics” (1789) before translating Homer’s “Iliad” (1793), published with a revised translation of the “Odyssey”. After retiring in 1802, Voss accepted a professorship of classical literature at the University of Heidelberg in 1805. His high wages allowed him to devote himself to his translations until his death. Voss translated Latin and Greek classics by Ovid (1798), Horace and Hesiod (1806), Theocritus, Bion of Smyrna and Moschus (1808), Tibullus (1810) and Propertius (1830), as well as all Virgil’s works (1799, revised edition in 1821). Voss also produced a 9-volume translation of Shakespeare’s works (1818-29) into German, with the help of his sons Heinrich and Abraham.

Plato, Thucydides and Aristotle in English > Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893) was an English scholar, and a translator from Greek, Latin and English to German. He began teaching Greek at Oxford University in 1855. He also began translating philosopher Plato’s works, which grew into a full translation of Plato’s “Dialogues” with introductory essays. He translated historian Thucydides’ works for several years. Every year, Jowett used his six or seven weeks of vacation, often spent with some students, to work on his translations. He revised Plato’s and Thucydides’ translations several times, and translated Aristotle’s “Politics”. Because of his duties as a vice-chancellor at Oxford and a failing health from 1887, Jowett focused mainly on translation, and didn’t have much time left for original writing, except a commentary on Plato’s “Republic” and some essays on Aristotle.

Plato in German > Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a German theologian, philosopher and biblical scholar, and a translator from Greek and Latin to German. After studying at the University of Halle (1787-90), he became a university preacher and a professor of theology in the same university (1804-07) before teaching at the University of Berlin (1810-
His 6-volume translation of Plato’s works (vol. 1-5 in 1804-10, vol. 6 in 1826) was influential during German Romanticism. In his seminal lecture “On the Different Methods of Translating” (1813), Schleiermacher opposed translation methods that moved the writer towards the reader, i.e. transparency, and translation methods that moved the reader towards the author, i.e. an extreme fidelity to the foreignness of the source text. Schleiermacher favoured the latter approach. His distinction between “domestication” (bringing the author to the reader) and “foreignization” (taking the reader to the author) later inspired the “non-transparent” theories developed by 20th-century linguists Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti.

Plutarch in French > Jacques Amyot (1513-1593) was a French Renaissance writer, and a translator from Greek and Latin to French. After studying at the Sorbonne in Paris, he went to Bourges, a town in central France, where he graduated as a doctor of civil law before becoming a professor of Greek and Latin. He translated Greek writer Heliodorus of Emesa’s novel “Æthiopica” (1547), for which King Francis I of France rewarded him with the Bellozanne Abbey. Amiot translated several Greek classics, for example historian Diodorus Siculus’ “Bibliotheca historica” (1554), novelist Longus’ “Daphnis et Chloé” (1559), and biographer and essayist Plutarch’s “Vies des hommes illustres” (1559-65) (later known as “Parallel Lives” in English) and “Moralia” (1572). “Vies des hommes illustres” — a translation that read like an original work — became very popular, and influenced many French writers. The French edition was translated into English by Thomas North under the title “Parallel Lives” (1579). French philosopher Montaigne wrote: “I give the palm to Jacques Amyot over all our French writers, not only for the simplicity and purity of his language in which he surpasses all others, not for his constancy to so long an undertaking, not for his profound learning… but I am grateful to him especially for his wisdom in choosing so valuable a work.” Amyot was named Bishop of Auxerre (a town in Burgundy) by Pope Pius V in 1570. He was suspected of approving the murder of the Guise Princes ordered by King Henry III of France in 1588, and left Auxerre for some time. He died in 1593 bequeathing 1,200 crowns to the hospital in Orléans (111 kilometers [69 miles] from Paris) for the twelve deniers he had received there when he was young, “poor and naked” on his way to Paris.

Plutarch in English > Thomas North (1535-1604) was an English judicial and military officer, and a translator from French to English. He first translated “Reloj de principces” (1557), also known as “Libro áureo”, a compendium of moral counsels by Spanish chronicler and moralist Antonio de Guevara. North probably translated “Reloj de principces” from a French edition, and not from the original Spanish edition. North’s next translation was “The Morall Philosophie of Doni” (1570), an Indian collection of animal fables commonly known as “The Fables of Bidpai”. North’s main translation was the translation of Plutarch’s “Parallel Lives” (1579, 1595 and 1603), based on Jacques Amyot’s French translation. According to “Encyclopaedia Britannica” (1911), “It is almost impossible to overestimate the influence of North’s vigorous English on contemporary writers, and some literary critics have called him the first master of English prose.” North’s translation of “Parallel Lives” was one of the sources of Shakespeare’s Roman plays “Julius Caesar”, “Coriolanus” and “Antony and Cleopatra”. Shakespeare copied or adapted many speeches translated by North in “Antony and Cleopatra”, a common practice because modern ideas of intellectual property didn’t exist in these days. “Parallel Lives” was reprinted in 1895 in the Tudor Translations series, with an introduction by English politician and writer George Wyndham.
Plutarch in Polish > Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801) was a Polish poet, a translation theorist, and a translator from Greek and French to Polish. His “Fables and Parables” (1779) earned him the name “Poland’s La Fontaine” (La Fontaine was a famed French fabulist). Krasicki translated into Polish several works by Greek biographer and essayist Plutarch, by Greek poets Anacreon, Hesiod and Theocritus, and by French poet Boileau, as well as fragments of Italian poet Dante’s “Divine Comedy”, and Scottish writer James Macpherson’s Ossian cycle of poems. Krasicki’s first essay “On the Translation of Books” (“O przekładaniu książ”) was published in 1772, and his second essay “On Translating Books” (“O tłumaczeniu książ”) was published posthumously in 1803. In his second essay, he wrote that “translation is in fact an art both estimable and very difficult, and therefore is not the labour and portion of common minds; it should be practiced by those who are themselves capable of being actors, when they see greater use in translating the works of others than in their own works, and hold higher than their own glory the service that they render their country.”

Translators were instrumental for the revival of Latin classics

English poet Geoffrey Chaucer founded a poetic tradition based on translations and adaptations of Latin classics.

Latin to English > Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) was an English poet, philosopher and astronomer, and a translator from Latin and French to English. He had an active career in the civil service as a bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat. He wrote “The Canterbury Tales”, and is often regarded as the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages. He promoted the literary use of Middle English at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were Latin and French. Chaucer translated Roman philosopher Boethius’ “Consolation of Philosophy” from Latin to English, and French poet Guillaume de Lorris’ “The Romance of the Rose” (“Le Roman de la rose”) from French to English. He also produced loose translations and adaptations of some works, for which he received some of his earliest critical praise. For example, he adapted Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio’s works to produce his own “Knight’s Tale” and “Troilus and Criseyde” circa 1385. As a genius translator and adapter, Chaucer founded an English poetic tradition based on translations and adaptations into English of literary works in Latin and French, two languages that were more “established” at that time. Often named the Father of English Literature, he was the first poet to be buried in the Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey in London.

Latin to English > John Dryden (1631-1700) was an English poet and playwright, and a translator from Latin to English. He became England’s first Poet Laureate in 1668. His translations introduced Latin classics by Horace, Juvenal, Ovid and Lucretius to English readers. Dryden’s most ambitious work as a translator was “The Works of Virgil”, that required four years of his time. Its publication in 1697 was a national event. His final translations appeared in 1700 in the volume “Fables Ancient and Modern”, with fables by Greek poet
Homer, Latin poet Ovid, Italian poet Boccaccio, English poet Chaucer, and Dryden himself. Dryden described translation as the judicious blending of two modes of phrasing — metaphrase (literal translation) and paraphrase (restatement with other words) — when selecting equivalents for the phrases used in the original language. He wrote that, “When words appear literally graceful, it were an injury to the author that they should be changed. But since what is beautiful in one language is often barbarous, nay sometimes nonsense, in another, it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author’s words: it is enough if he chooses out some expression which does not vitiate the sense” (cited in Christopher Kasparek, “The Translator’s Endless Toil”, 1983).

**Latin to German > Johann Gottfried Herder** (1744-1803) was a German literary critic and language theorist, and a translator from Latin to German. He studied at the University of Königsberg with German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Herder wrote his first works of literary criticism when he was a clergyman and teacher in Riga (now the capital of Latvia). He then traveled to France, and met young German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in Strasbourg. Herder published his “Treatise on the Origin of Language” (1772), and established the foundations of comparative philology. Goethe used his influence at the Court of Weimar to secure a position for Herder as general superintendent in 1776. As a literary critic, Herder contributed to the Enlightenment and to the Sturm und Drang movement, a Romantic movement for German literature and music. He later endorsed the French Revolution, which earned him the enmity of many colleagues. Herder became a translator later in life. His two main translations were “Terpsichore” (1795-96), a translation and adaptation of German latinist Jakob Balde’s poems, and “The Cid” (1805), a free translation of “El Cantar de Mio Cid”, the oldest preserved Castilian epic poem. According to Herder, a translator should translate towards (and not from) his own language, a statement already expressed two centuries earlier by Martin Luther, who was the first European scholar to assess that one translates satisfactorily only towards his own language.

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**Translators were instrumental for the revival of medieval literature**

*Translators adapted several pieces of medieval literature that became best-sellers.*

**“Le Morte d’Arthur” > Thomas Malory** (1415?-1471) was an English writer, and a translator from French to English. His main work, “Le Morte d’Arthur” (1485), was a free translation and adaptation of Arthurian romances, with legendary King Arthur and his literary companions Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin and the Knights of the Round Table. Malory adapted existing French and English stories while adding original material, for example the “Gareth” story as one of the stories of the Knights of the Round Table. “Le Morte d’Arthur” was a milestone in English literature, and introduced the Great Age of English prose.
Several classics > William Caxton (1422?-1491) was an English merchant and printer, and a translator from French and Latin to English. He introduced the first printing press in England in 1476, and became the first English retailer of printed books. Born in Kent, in southwestern England, he was the apprentice of Robert Large (a wealthy merchant and the mayor of London) from 1438 until Large’s death in 1441. Caxton moved to Bruges, Belgium, in 1453, became a successful merchant, and developed an interest in reading fine literature. During one of his travels, he observed the new printing industry in Cologne, Germany, and started a printing press in Bruges with Flemish printer Colard Mansion (who was also a translator). Caxton’s first translation was the translation into English of the “Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye”, a French courtly romance written in 1464 by Raoul Lefèvre, chaplain to Philip III, duke of Burgundy. The translation was completed in 1471 and printed in Bruges in 1473. The English edition became a best-seller in the Burgundian court. In the wake of this success, Caxton set up a new printing press in 1476 in the almonry of Westminster Abbey, to print English poet Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales”, and his own translation of the “Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye”. He printed in 1477 the compendium “Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers”, translated from French by Anthony Woodville. Caxton translated other works, for example Italian chronicler Jacobus da Varagine’s “Golden Legend” (printed in 1483, 1487 and 1493), French nobleman Geoffroy IV de la Tour Landry’s “The Book of the Knight in the Tower” (printed in 1484), Greek fabulist Aesop’s “Fables” (printed in 1484), Roman poet Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” (printed in 1484), and English author Thomas Malory’s “Le Morte d’Arthur” (printed in 1485). Caxton printed 87 works (some of them printed two or three times) and 108 books. 70 works were in English, and 26 works were translated by Caxton himself. His translations helped standardize the regional English dialects into a “London dialect” that became the standard English language. After Caxton’s death, his business partner Wynkyn de Worde took over the printing business, modernized it and published 800 “relatively inexpensive” books that brought 400 different works to a wider audience.

“One Thousand and One Nights” in French > Antoine Galland (1646-1715) was a French orientalist and archaeologist, and a translator from Arabic to French. He was the chair of Arabic studies at the Collège de France in Paris (1709-15), and the first European translator of “One Thousand and One Nights”, a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age. His 12-volume French translation “Les Mille et une nuits” (1704-1717) became a best-seller in the wake of French author Charles Perrault’s fairy tales (1697), and is still the standard French translation to this day. Galland first translated “The Tale of Sindbad the Sailor” (1701) after finding the text in Constantinople (now Istanbul) in the 1690s. His translation of the “Arabian Nights” (1704) was based on a 14th-century Syrian manuscript. Hanna Diab, a Syrian Christian monk from Aleppo, recounted him more tales from memory in 1709. Mystery still surrounds the origins of some tales, called the “orphan tales”, for example “Aladdin” and “Alibaba”, that could have been invented by Galland himself. The publication of “Les Mille et une nuits” popularized oriental tales in European literature and nascent Romanticism. “Les Mille et une nuits” was then translated from French into English in 1706, into German in 1712, into Italian in 1722, into Dutch in 1732, into Russian in 1763, and into Polish in 1768. Other translations by Galland were the translation of an Arabic manuscript on the origin and development of coffee (“De l’origine et du progrès du café”, 1699), and a translation of the Quran that stayed unpublished.
“One Thousand and One Nights” in French > Joseph Charles Mardrus (1868-1949) was a French physician, and a translator from Arabic to French. He was a physician in Morocco and the Far East for the French government. His main translation was a new translation of “One Thousand and One Nights” into French under the title “Le Livre des mille et une nuits”. The 12-volume translation was published in 1898-1904 by Henri Piazza, before being translated from French to English by English poet and translator Edward Powys Mathers. Mardrus published a second edition of the French translation in 1926-32. Mardrus’ elegant translation was mentioned by French novelist Marcel Proust in “Remembrance of Things Past” (“À la recherche du temps perdu”). Mardrus inserted some material of his own to satisfy the tastes of his time, and is not entirely authentic translation is now less praised than other translations.

“Mabinogion” > Charlotte Guest (1812-1895) was an English scholar and liberal educator, and a translator from Middle Welsh to English. Born in an aristocratic family, she studied Latin, Greek, French and Italian with her brother’s tutor, and Arabic, Hebrew and Persian by herself. Her first husband was Welsh engineer and entrepreneur John Josiah Guest, who built pioneering schools for his workers’ children. On his death, his company, the Dowlais Iron Company, was the largest producer of iron in the world. Her second husband was classical scholar Charles Schreiber. After learning Welsh and meeting Welsh literary scholars such as historian Thomas Price and writer Ioan Tegid, Charlotte Guest translated several medieval songs and poems with their support and encouragement. She began translating the “Mabinogion” in 1837 from the manuscript transcription made by Tegid when he was a young scholar at Oxford University. The “Mabinogion” was a series of medieval stories compiled from 12th- and 13th-century oral traditions, and the earliest prose stories in Britain. Charlotte Guest’s 7-volume translation was published in 1838-45. A new 3-volume edition was published in 1849 by the Tonn Press in Wales and by Longmans in London. Both editions were bilingual, with the Welsh transcription and the English translation. These editions included many scholarly footnotes and were lavishly produced, with full illustrations and gold-tooled leather covers. A one-volume edition was published in 1877 with the English translation only, and became the standard edition.

“The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám” > Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883) was an English poet and writer, and a translator from Arabic to English and Latin. His major work, “Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám”, was the first English translation and adaptation of the many poems written by Omar Khayyám, an 11th-century Persian mathematician, astronomer and philosopher. FitzGerald authorized four editions (1859, 1868, 1872, 1879) of his translation. A fifth posthumous edition (1889) was edited after his death on the basis of the revised manuscript he had left. FitzGerald translated some rubáiyát into Latin. The term “rubáiyát” now also defines the quatrain rhyme scheme used in his translation. FitzGerald’s work was not noted for its fidelity. Many verses were paraphrased, and some of them could not be traced to any original poem. It is now believed that a significant portion of the “Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám” was FitzGerald’s own creation, but it has stayed the most famous translation of Khayyám’s poems to this day, despite more recent and accurate translations.

“The Song of Roland” > Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930) was a Scottish writer, and a translator from French and Italian to English. He earned his living by translating French medieval and modern works. He first translated French medieval classics, including “The Song of Roland” (“La Chanson de Roland”), the oldest surviving work of French

Translators were instrumental for the development of science

Translators actively contributed to the spread of scientific knowledge across borders and languages.

The Toledo School of Translators > The Toledo School of Translators was a meeting point for scholars from all over Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. The division of the Iberian Peninsula (that later became Spain) between Muslim and Christian rulers since the Reconquista (the Christian campaign to regain the peninsula) made it a natural base for translators. Toledo was a city of libraries with a vibrant intellectual life, and one of the few places in medieval Europe where Christians could be exposed to Arabic language and culture. Scholars settled in Toledo to translate all major scientific and medical works from Arabic and Greek to Latin (in the 12th century) and to Castilian (in the 13th century), which helped develop the Spanish language. Their many translations made Arab and Greek knowledge available to European scholars. Some translations were not based on the Greek originals but on their Arabic editions, which was common at that time. All these translations influenced the development of medieval European science, astronomy and medicine, and were used to produce new works in modern languages.

Dijon Academy > Claudine Picardet (1735-1820) was a French chemist, mineralogist and meteorologist, and a translator from several languages (Swedish, English, German, Italian and Latin) into French. Born in Dijon, in eastern France, she lost her first husband in 1796, and remarried in 1798 with French scientist Louis-Bernard Guyton de Morveau. As the only woman in the Dijon Academy, and the only scientist who was proficient in five foreign languages, she undertook translations into French of the scientific literature produced by leading foreign scientists. The demand was high, especially in the fields of chemistry and mineralogy. Claudine Picardet translated three books and dozens of scientific papers originally written in Swedish (works by Carl Wilhelm Scheele and Torbern Bergman), English (works by John Hill, Richard Kirwan and William Fordyce), German (works by Johann Christian Wiegleb, Johann Friedrich Westrumb, Johann Carl Friedrich Meyer, and Martin Heinrich Klaproth), and Italian (works by Marsilio Landriani). Her translations contributed to the spread of scientific knowledge during the Chemical Revolution, a movement led by French chemist Antoine Lavoisier, often called the Father of modern chemistry. Claudine Picardet also hosted renowned scientific and literary salons in Dijon and Paris, where she moved later on, and actively participated in the collection of meteorological data.
Darwin’s evolutionary theory > Clémence Royer (1830-1902) was a self-taught French scholar, and a translator from English to French. She translated English naturalist Charles Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species” (1859). His concept of evolutionary adaptation through natural selection attracted widespread interest, and Darwin was anxious to have his book published into French. In the translation’s first edition (1862), Clémence Royer went beyond her role as a translator, with a 60-page preface expressing her own views and detailed explanatory footnotes. Her preface promoted her own concept of progressive evolution, which had more in common with French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s ideas than with Darwin’s ideas. After reading her translation, Darwin criticized her lack of knowledge in natural history, and was unhappy with her preface and footnotes. The translation’s second edition (1866) included some changes made at Darwin’s request to correct some errors and inaccuracies. The translation’s third edition (1873) was produced without Darwin’s consent, with a second preface that also made Darwin unhappy, and with no mention of the additions to the fourth and fifth English editions. The translation only included an appendix stating the additions to the sixth English edition (1872). However her controversial translation brought fame to Clémence Royer, who extensively lectured on philosophy, feminism, economics and science, including on Darwinism.

Translators brought Shakespeare’s plays to other cultures

Translators produced new editions of Shakespeare’s plays into German, Swedish and Russian.

English to German > August Schlegel (1767-1845) was a German poet and literary critic, and a translator from several languages (English, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese) into German. He was one of the leaders of Jena Romanticism, along with poets Friedrich Schlegel (his younger brother), Ludwig Tieck and Novalis. Named after the town where they all lived in 1798-1804, Jena Romanticism was the first phase of Romanticism in German literature. Schlegel translated Shakespeare’s plays into German (1797-1810), and his highly praised translation turned them into German classics. Young composer Felix Mendelssohn, at age 17, drew his inspiration from Schlegel’s translation of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” to write a concert overture. Schlegel’s translation of Shakespeare’s plays was edited by fellow poet and translator Ludwig Tieck, and completed by Dorothea Tieck, Ludwig Tieck’s daughter, and by Wolf Heinrich Graf von Baudissin. Schlegel also translated five plays by Spanish dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca in the two-volume “Spanisches Theater” (1803-09). He produced translations of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese poetry — by Italian poet Dante, Portuguese poet Luís de Camões, and others — in “Blumensträuße italienischer, spanischer und portugiesischer Poesie” (1804). He translated into Latin the Sanskrit texts “Bhagavad Gita” (1823) and “Ramayana” (1829) during his time as the first professor of Sanskrit in continental Europe. The “Encyclopædia Britannica” (1911) stated that, “As an original poet Schlegel is unimportant, but as a poetical translator he has rarely been excelled.”
English to German > Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), who edited August Schlegel’s translation of Shakespeare’s plays, was a German poet, writer and literary critic, and a translator from English and Spanish to German. Tieck was one of the founding members of Jena Romanticism with August Schlegel, his brother Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. Tieck attended the universities of Halle, Göttingen and Erlangen. In Göttingen, he studied Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama. He then attempted to make a living as a writer. He wrote “Der blonde Eckbert” (a fairy tale), “Minnelieder aus der schwäbischen Vorzeit” (an essay about love poetry in early medieval literature), and “Phantasus” (a collection of stories and dramas in three volumes). Tieck translated Spanish novelist Cervantes’ novel “Don Quixote” (1799-1804) with his daughter Dorothea Tick. He also translated Elizabethan dramas in the two-volume “Altenglisches Theater” (1811).

English to Swedish > Carl August Hagberg (1810-1864) was a Swedish linguist, and a translator from English to Swedish. After studying at Uppsala University, Sweden, he taught ancient Greek there in 1833. He traveled in Germany and France in 1835-36, and met with notable writers, for example Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Ludwig Tieck in Germany, and Victor Hugo in France. When he returned to Sweden, Hagberg became a strong advocate of English and French literature, at a time when Swedish universities were dominated by German influences. Hagberg wrote an essay on contemporary French literature (“Om den nya franska vitterheten”, 1837). He taught aesthetics and modern languages at Lund University in 1840-1859, before teaching Nordic languages there. He translated Shakespeare’s plays into Swedish (12 volumes, 1847-51). Some of his work was based on a previous translation by Johan Henrik Thomander (1825). Hagberg was a member of the Swedish Academy from 1851 until his death.

English to Russian > Boris Pasternak (1890-1960) was a Russian poet and novelist, and a translator from English, German and Spanish to Russian. His first book of poems, “My Sister, Life” (1921), had a deep influence on Russian poetry. Outside Russia, Pasternak was mainly known as the author of “Doctor Zhivago” (1957). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958, which led the Soviet Union to harass and demonize him until his death. Pasternak had to turn to translation in order to provide for his family, despite the fact that translation was not a genuine vocation. He soon produced acclaimed translations of works by German poets Goethe, Rilke and Schiller, French poet Verlaine, Spanish dramatist Calderón de la Barca, and English playwright Shakespeare. His translations of Shakespeare’s plays were popular with Russian audiences because of their colloquial and modernized dialogues. Pasternak wrote in 1956 in an essay that “Translating Shakespeare is a task which takes time and effort. Once it is undertaken, it is best to divide it into sections long enough for the work not to get stale and to complete one section each day. In thus daily progressing through the text, the translator finds himself reliving the circumstances of the author. Day by day, he reproduces his actions and he is drawn into some of his secrets, not in theory, but practically, by experience.”

English to Russian > Samuil Marshak (1887-1964) was a Russian writer, and a translator from several languages (English, German, Hungarian, Armenian and Italian) into Russian. He moved to England in 1912 to study philosophy at the University of London, and got acquainted with English culture and poetry. He returned to Russia in 1914 and devoted himself to translation, with a focus on English poetry. Marshak’s main translation was the translation of
Shakespeare’s sonnets into Russian (1948), that inspired several Russian classical, pop and rock musicians over the years. Marshak’s poetic translations are now so entrenched in Russian culture that their translator is regarded as a co-author more than a translator. Over his career, Marshak won four Stalin Prizes (1942, 1946, 1949 and 1951). His third Stalin Prize was awarded for his translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets.

**English to Russian** > **Mikhail Lozinsky** (1886-1955) was a Russian poet, and a translator from Italian, Spanish and English to Russian. Lozinsky’s poetry failed to attract public attention because of its lack of substance and originality. But, “In the difficult and noble art of translation, Lozinsky was for the twentieth century what Zhukovsky was for the nineteenth”, according to Russian modernist poet Anna Akhmatova in her book “My Half-Century”. Russian lyrical poet Alexander Blok even credited Lozinsky’s translations as superior to Zhukovsky’s translations. Lozinsky’s translations of Shakespeare’s plays were less popular than contemporary translations by Pasternak and Marshak. Some literary critics found Lozinsky’s translations “obscure, heavy and unintelligible” because they did not try to modernize Shakespeare’s style by stripping it of obscure details and puns. But Anna Akhmatova thought that Lozinsky brilliantly achieved his aim of “conveying the age of Shakespeare’s language and the complexity about which even the English complain.” Lozinsky’s main translation was Italian poet Dante’s “Divine Comedy”, completed in seven years (1939-45) despite his poor health, and for which he earned the Stalin Prize in 1946.

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**Translators brought German literature to British readers**

*These translators were Sarah Austin, Lucy Duff-Gordon, and Anna Swanwick.*

**Sarah Austin** (1793-1867) was an English writer, and a translator of German and French to English. As a child, she studied Latin, French, German and Italian. She married legal philosopher John Austin in 1819. The couple moved from London to Bonn, Germany, in 1827, largely living on Sarah Austin’s earnings as a translator and writer. Her translations from German to English included “Characteristics of Goethe from the German of Falk, von Müller, etc., with notes, original and translated, illustrative of German literature” (1833), German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Carové’s “The Story without an End” (1834), and German historian Leopold von Ranke’s “History of the Popes” (1840). One of her translations from French to English was the “Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia” (1834) that French philosopher Victor Cousin wrote for the Count de Montalivet, then French Minister of Public Instruction. In the preface to the translation, Sarah Austin personally pleaded for the cause of national education. She also argued for the need to create a national system of education in England in a pamphlet published in 1839 in the “Foreign Quarterly Review”. Her other translations included books by German prince Hermann and French historian François Guizot. Sarah Austin always stood for her intellectual rights as a translator, writing that “It has been my invariable practice, as soon as I have engaged to translate a work, to write to the author to it, announcing my intention, and adding that if he has any correction, omission, or addition to make, he might depend on my paying attention to his suggestions.”
corresponded extensively with authors and thinkers of her time. She published her own survey of German institutions and manners under the title “Germany from 1760 to 1814, or Sketches of German Life, from the Decay of the Empire to the Expulsion of the French” (1854). She produced new editions of her husband John Austin’s works after his death, and she edited her daughter Lucy Gordon’s “Letters from Egypt” (1865) and “Last Letters from Egypt” (1875).

**Lucy Duff-Gordon** (1821-1869) grew up in London surrounded by the literary figures who befriended her parents, and who became her own friends when she reached adulthood. She traveled to Paris and Germany with her family for extended periods, and learned French and German along the way. She married English civil servant Alexander Duff-Gordon. She was a translator before becoming a writer (under the name Lucy Gordon). She translated German historian Barthold Niebuhr’s “Studies of Ancient Grecian Mythology” (1839), German priest Wilhelm Meinhold’s “Mary Schweidler, the Amber Witch” (1844), French writer Clemens Lamping’s “The French in Algiers” (1845), German legal scholar Paul Johann Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach’s “Narrative of Remarkable Criminal Trials” (1846), and (with her husband) German historian Leopold von Ranke’s “Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg” (1847). After contracting tuberculosis, Lucy Duff-Gordon left England in 1862 to settle permanently in Egypt. In her letters to her husband, her mother and other family members, she gave vivid descriptions of domestic manners and customs, with many observations on Egyptian culture and religion. Her letters were edited by her mother Sarah Austin, and published as “Letters from Egypt, 1863-1865” (1865) and “Last Letters from Egypt” (1875), that became best-sellers. One of her daughters, Janet Ross, also settled in Egypt after marrying English banker Henry Ross, and became a historian and bibliographer, including for her own family in “Three Generations of English Women” (1893).

**Anna Swanwick** (1813-1899) was an English feminist author, and a translator from German and Greek to English. Born in Liverpool, England, she moved in 1839 to Berlin, Germany, to study German, Greek and Hebrew. When she returned to England in 1843, she began translating some works by German poets Goethe and Schiller, and published them as “Selections from the Dramas of Goethe and Schiller” (1843), with Goethe’s “Torquato Tasso” and “Iphigenia in Tauris”, and Schiller’s “Maid of Orleans”. She produced blank-verse translations of other works by Goethe (1850, 2nd edition in 1878). Her translation of Goethe’s “Faust” was highly praised and republished several times. She also produced a blank-verse translation of Greek tragedian Aeschylus’ “Trilogy” (1865), followed by a translation of all his plays (1873). She was interested in many social issues of her day, especially the education of women and the working classes. She helped extending the King’s College lectures to women. She advocated the study of English literature in universities, and gave private lectures to young working men and women.

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Translators brought French literature to the English-speaking world
These translators were Aphra Behn, Samuel Johnson, Elizabeth Ashurst, Matilda Hays, Katherine Wormeley, Marie Louise Booth, and Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff.

Aphra Behn (1640-1689) was an English playwright, poet and novelist, and a translator from French to English, and from English to French. She was the first woman to earn her living from writing. As such, she broke cultural barriers, and became a literary role model for later generations of women writers. After working as a spy in Antwerp (now in Belgium) for King Charles II, she returned to London for a brief stay in a debtors’ prison. She began writing for the stage under the pseudonym Astrea, and was part of a coterie of poets and libertines with John Wilmot and Lord Rochester. She wrote and staged 19 plays, and contributed to many more. She became a major playwright in England, second only to Poet Laureate John Dryden, who was a friend of hers. After writing a prologue and an epilogue that brought her some legal trouble during the Exclusion Crisis, she decided to devote herself to prose genres and to translations. Her last translations were the translation (from French to English) of French astronomer Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle’s “A Discovery of New Worlds” (“Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes”) in 1688, and the translation (from English to French) of English poet Abraham Cowley’s “Six Books of Plants” in 1689. Plagued by a failing health, poverty and debt, Aphra Behn died in April 1689. She was buried in the east cloister of Westminster Abbey instead of being buried in the Poets’ Corner inside the church like John Dryden. The inscription on her tombstone reads: “Here lies a proof that wit can never be defence enough against mortality.” Much later, English writer and feminist Virginia Woolf wrote that “All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds” (in “A Room of One’s Own”, 1929).

Matilda Hays (1820-1897) was an English journalist and novelist, and a translator from French to English. She was also one of the first openly gay women and, with her friend Elizabeth Ashurst, the first translator of French novelist George Sand’s works. She liked George Sand’s free-love and independent lifestyle, still unusual in the 19th century, and the political and social issues tackled in her books. Matilda Hays and Elizabeth Ashurst translated George Sand’s “Spiridon” (“Spiridon”), “Letters of a Traveller” (“Lettres d’un voyageur”), “The Master Mosaic-Workers” (“Les maîtres mosaïstes”) and “André” (“André”). Matilda Hays translated “La Dernière Aldini” alone, before meeting with Elizabeth Ashurst, and translated “Fadette” alone after Elizabeth Ashurst’s death. Like George Sand, Matilda Hays was determined to use her writing to improve the condition of women. She wrote in her own novel “Helen Stanley” (1846) that women couldn’t secure their financial and social future until they “teach their daughters to respect themselves to work for their daily bread, rather than prostitute their persons and hearts” in marriages. She co-founded the “English Woman’s Journal”, a monthly journal published in 1858-64.

Elizabeth Ashurst (1813-1850) was an English radical activist, and a translator from French to English. She belonged to a family of radical activists, who supported causes ranging from women’s suffrage to Risorgimento (Italian unification). She befriended Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, and exchanged correspondence with him from 1844 until her death. She attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 with her father and her sister Matilda Ashurst, but was not permitted to speak at the conference because women were not
regarded as full delegates. She and her friend Matilda Hays became the first translators of George Sand’s works into English. Elizabeth Ashurst married French artist Jean Bardonneau after meeting him in Paris in 1847, and died in childbirth in 1850.

Katherine Prescott Wormeley (1830-1908) was an American nurse, a writer, and a translator from French to English. Born in England as the daughter of a naval officer, she emigrated to the United States at a young age. She became a nurse in the U.S. Sanitary Commission during the American Civil War, and wrote about it in “The U.S. Sanitary Commission” (1863). She later published her letters sent from the Commission’s headquarters in “Letters from Headquarters during the Peninsular Campaign. The Other Side of War” (1888). She was also a translator of French literary classics. She translated all Honoré de Balzac’s novels (40 volumes, 1883-97), Molière’s plays (6 volumes, 1892), Henri de Saint-Simon’s memoirs, and novels by Alexandre Dumas and Alphonse Daudet. She wrote a “Life of Balzac” in 1892.

Mary Louise Booth (1831-1889) was an American writer and editor, and a translator from French to English. Born in Millville (now Yaphank) in the State of New York, she was of French descent on her mother’s side. After moving to New York City at age 18, she wrote many pieces for newspapers and magazines, and translated around 40 books. Her first translation was “The Marble-Worker’s Manual” (1856), followed by “The Clock and Watch Maker’s Manual”. She translated works by French writers Joseph Méry and Edmond François Valentin About, and by French philosopher Victor Cousin. She assisted American translator Orlando Williams Wight in producing a series of translations of French classics. She wrote the “History of the City of New York” (1859), that became a best-seller. When the American Civil War started in 1861, she translated French anti-slavery advocate Agénor de Gasparin’s “Uprising of a Great People” in a very short time by working twenty hours a day for one week. The English edition was published in a fortnight by American publisher Scribner’s. Mary Louise Booth translated other books by anti-slavery advocates, including Agénor de Gasparin’s “America before Europe” (1861), Pierre-Suzanne-Augustin Cochin’s “Results of Emancipation” and “Results of Slavery” (1862), and Édouard René de Laboulaye’s “Paris in America” (1865). She received praise and encouragement from president Abraham Lincoln, senator Charles Sumner, and other statesmen. Sumner wrote her a letter stating that her translations had been of more value to the cause “than the Numidian cavalry to Hannibal”. Mary Louise Booth translated other French books, including Gasparin’s religious works (written with his wife), Laboulaye’s “Fairy Book”, educator Jean Macé’s “Fairy Tales”, historian Henri Martin’s “History of France”, and philosopher Blaise Pascal’s “Provincial Letters”. She became the editor-in-chief of the American weekly magazine “Harper’s Bazaar”, from 1867 until her death. Under her leadership, the magazine steadily increased its circulation and influence, and became very popular. After struggling financially for decades as a writer and translator, she earned a larger salary than any woman in America.

Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930) was a Scottish writer, and a translator from French and Italian to English. He earned his living with his translations of French medieval and modern works. He first translated French medieval classics, for example “The Song of Roland” (“La Chanson de Roland”) and “Letters of Abelard and Heloise” (“Lettres d’Abélard et d’Héloïse”). Much later, he translated French writer Marcel Proust’s 7-volume novel “Remembrance of Things Past” (“À la recherche du temps perdu”), from 1922 until his death in 1930. The translation of the seventh volume was unfinished. He decided for a non-literal
translation of the novel’s French title, and chose the second verse of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 30 as the English title. The title “Remembrance of Things Past” was replaced by “In Search of Lost Time” in later translations. Scott Moncrieff’s translation contributed to the fame of Proust in the English literary sphere. However Proust wrote Scott Moncrieff that he was not happy with some translation choices, offending his translator who replied with irony. On the contrary, Polish-English novelist Joseph Conrad thought that Scott Moncrieff’s translation was of higher quality than the original text. Scott Moncrieff also translated French novels by Stendhal (“The Red and the Black” and “The Charterhouse of Parma”), and Italian plays by Luigi Pirandello.

Translators brought English-language literature to other cultures

Translators produced new editions in French, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Persian.

English to French > Louise Swanton Belloc (1796-1881) was a French writer, and a translator from English to French. Born in La Rochelle, a seaport in western France, she received an education with a focus on English language and culture. She advocated for women’s education, and contributed to the creation of the first circulating libraries. Her writings and translations introduced English literary works to a French audience. Her first translation was the translation of Irish poet and novelist Adelaide O’Keeffe’s “Patriarchal Times; or, the Land of Canaan: a Figurate History” (1818), a retelling of the first five books of the Bible. Louise Swanton Belloc wrote articles for the French “Revue encyclopédique” under the supervision of its founder and editor Marc-Antoine Jullien. She wrote several books in French, for example a life of Lord Byron and a series of books for children. She befriended many literary figures, including French writers Victor Hugo, Emile Souvestre and Alphonse de Lamartine, English writer Charles Dickens, Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth, and American writer Harriet Beecher Stowe. She translated Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, a book depicting the harsh living conditions of enslaved African-Americans. She also translated Scottish writer Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel “Cranford”, Irish poet Oliver Goldsmith’s novel “The Vicar of Wakefield”, Irish poet Thomas Moore’s “Irish Melodies”, Lord Byron’s memoirs, and works by Charles Dickens, Maria Edgeworth and Scottish writer Walter Scott.

English to Russian > Samuil Marshak (1887-1964) was a Russian writer, and a translator from several languages (English, German, Hungarian, Armenian and Italian) into Russian. He moved to England in 1912 to study philosophy at the University of London, and got acquainted with English culture and poetry. He translated works by English poets William Blake and William Wordsworth, and Scottish poet Robert Burns. In 1913, a visit to an experimental school in Wales sparked his interest to become a poet and translator for children. He returned to Russia in 1914 and devoted himself to translation, with a focus on English poetry. He translated works by poets Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, William Butler Yeats and Edward Lear, by novelists Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling, and by children’s writers Lewis Carroll and A.A. Milne. He also translated works by
German poet Heinrich Heine, Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi, Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanyan, and Italian children’s writer Gianni Rodari. Marshak’s main translation was the translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets into Russian (1948), that inspired several Russian classical, pop and rock musicians over the years. Marshak’s poetic translations are now so entrenched in Russian culture that their translator is regarded as a co-author more than a translator. Over his career, Marshak won four Stalin Prizes (1942, 1946, 1949 and 1951). His third Stalin Prize was awarded for his translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets.

**English to Spanish > Jorge Luis Borges** (1899-1986) was an Argentine short-story writer, essayist and poet, and a translator from several languages (English, French, German, Old English and Old Norse) into Spanish. He translated Irish poet Oscar Wilde’s children stories “The Happy Prince” at age 9, and his translation was published in a local journal in Buenos Aires. He translated — while subtly transforming — works by English writers Rudyard Kipling and Virginia Woolf, by American writers William Faulkner and Walt Whitman, by German writers Hermann Hesse and Franz Kafka, by French writer André Gide, and others. He also translated 13th-century Icelandic writer Snorri Sturluson’s “Prose Edda” from Old Norse into Spanish. Borges wrote and lectured extensively on the art of translation, “holding that a translation may improve upon the original, may even be unfaithful to it, and that alternative and potentially contradictory renderings of the same work can be equally valid” (Wikipedia).

**English to Italian > Cesare Pavese** (1908-1950) was an Italian poet, novelist and literary critic, and a translator from English to Italian. Pavese graduated from the University of Turin, Italy, with a thesis on American poet Walt Whitman. He translated English and American writers who were then new to the Italian literary sphere. He was arrested in 1935 for belonging to antifascist circles, and convicted for keeping a political prisoner’s letters. After several months in prison and one year in internal exile, he returned to Turin, where he worked as an editor and translator for left-wing publisher Giulio Einaudi. During his years in Turin, Pavese was the mentor of Fernanda Pivano, who later became a writer and translator herself. After Pavese translated American poet Edgar Lee Masters’ “Spoon River Anthology”, a collection of free verse poems, he gave Fernanda Pivano both editions (English and Italian) for her to better understand the difference between an original work and a translated work. The Italian edition of “Spoon River Anthology” was published by Einaudi in 1943. Pavese took his own life in 1950. His last novel “La luna e i falò” (1950) was translated into English in 1952 by Louise Sinclair, before being translated again in 2002 by R.W. Flint under the title “The Moon and the Bonfires”.

**English to Italian > Fernanda Pivano** (1917-2009) was an Italian writer, journalist and literary critic, and a translator from English to Italian. Her thesis on American novelist Herman Melville’s “Moby Dick” (1941) earned her a prize from the Center for American Studies in Rome. She contributed to the translation of Lee Masters’ “Spoon River Anthology” by Cesare Pavese. She was quoted as saying: “I was just a kid when I read ‘Spoon River’ for the first time: Cesare Pavese brought it to me one morning.” She met Ernest Hemingway in 1948, resulting in an intense collaboration and friendship. Her translation of his novel “A Farewell to Arms” was published by Mondadori in 1949. She went to the United States for the first time in 1956. Her translations introduced American writers to an Italian audience, from the great icons of the Roaring Twenties (F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker, and William Faulkner) through
the writers of the 1960s (Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Gregory Corso, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti) to a new generation of young writers (Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis, David Foster Wallace, Chuck Palahniuk, and Jonathan Safran Foer). She conveyed African-American culture by translating works by African-American novelist Richard Wright into Italian.

**English to Japanese > Saiichi Maruya** (1925-2009) was a Japanese writer and literary critic, and a translator from English to Japanese. As a child, he read many books from the large personal library of his father, who was a physician. In 1947, after completing his high school studies in Niigata, Japan, he studied English and Japanese literature at the University of Tokyo. While studying, he started to translate works into Japanese in order to develop his own writing style. He translated two works by Irish author James Joyce, “Ulysses” (in collaboration with Takamatsu Yūichi and Nagai Reiji) in 1964, and “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” in 1969. Both works had a major influence on his own writing. Maruya taught English literature at Kokugakuin University and at the University of Tokyo. He wrote several novels, and was a literary critic. His essay “A Quick Guide to the History of Japanese Literature” was published in 1976.

**English to Persian > Simin Daneshvar** (1921-2012) was an Iranian novelist, and a translator from English and Russian to Persian. Born in Shiraz, Iran, she attended a bilingual school when she was a child, and wrote both in Persian and English for various media outlets to support herself after her father’s death. She earned a doctorate in 1949 from the University of Tehran with her dissertation “Beauty as Treated in Persian Literature”. She married Iranian philosopher Jalal Al-e-Ahmad in 1950, and lived with him until his death in 1969. (She published his biography in 1981.) She traveled to the United States in 1952 as a Fulbright Fellow at Stanford University. When she returned to Iran, she joined the University of Tehran, but was never named professor despite being an excellent teacher. She took up translation work into Persian to support her family on top of her salary as a teacher. She translated works by Russian writers Anton Chekhov (“The Cherry Orchard”) and Maxim Gorki (“Enemies”), by American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne (“The Scarlet Letter”), by Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler (“Beatrice”), by Armenian-American writer William Saroyan (“The Human Comedy”), and by South African writer Alan Paton (“Cry, the Beloved Country”). She wrote two collections of short stories, “Quenched Fire” (1948) and “Daneshvar’s Playhouse” (1989). Her short stories reflected the lives of Iranian women, with social issues like child theft, adultery, marriage, childbirth, sickness, death, treason, profiteering, illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and loneliness. She drew her inspiration from the people around her. In her own words, “Simple people have much to offer. They must be able to give freely and with peace of mind. We, too, in return, must give to them to the best of our abilities. We must, with all our heart, try to help them acquire what they truly deserve” (in the afterword of “Daneshvar’s Playhouse”). She became the chairwoman of the Iranian Writers Union in 1968. Her novel “Savushun” (1969) was the first novel in Persian written by a female author, and became a best-seller.
Translators brought foreign literature to the English-speaking world

Translators produced English editions of Portuguese, Swedish, Polish, Italian and German literature.

Portuguese to English > Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was an English scholar, and a translator from French to English. His tutor at Oxford University asked him to produce a Latin translation of English poet Alexander Pope’s “Messiah” as an exercise for Christmas. Johnson is said to have completed the first half of the translation in one afternoon, and the second half the next morning. His translation was published in 1728 and brought him praise, but not the material benefit he had hoped for. After being turned down for a job in Ashbourne in 1734, Johnson spent time with his friend Edmund Hector, who was living in publisher Thomas Warren’s home. Warren enlisted Johnson’s help for his new “Birmingham Journal”. Johnson offered to produce an English edition of Portuguese Jesuit missionary Jerónimo Lobo’s “Itinerário” on his journey in Ethiopia. There was a French translation (“Voyage historique d’Abyssinie”, translated by Joachim Le Grand in 1728), but no English translation yet. Johnson thought that a short edition translated from French could be “useful and profitable” to English readers. Instead of writing down the translation himself, Johnson dictated it to Hector, who edited the text before bringing the manuscript to the printing house. Johnson’s translation “A Voyage to Abyssinia” was published in 1735.

Swedish to English > Mary Howitt (1799-1888) was an English poet and writer, and a translator from German, Swedish and Danish to English. Born in a Quaker family living in Gloucestershire, a county in southwestern England, she started writing verses at an early age, long before writing her famous poem “The Spider and The Fly” (1828). She married fellow Quaker writer William Howitt in 1821, and began a lifelong career of joint authorship and travels with him, except during his Australian journey in 1851-54 when he tried to make a fortune there. The first of their joint productions was “The Forest Minstrels and Other Poems” (1821), followed by “The Desolation of Eyam and Other Poems” (1827) and other publications, for example “Abbeys and Castles of Great Britain” (1862). They befriended English literary figures such as novelists Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, and poets Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth. When living in Heidelberg, Germany, in 1840, Mary Howitt got acquainted with Scandinavian literature, and learned Swedish and Danish. She translated Swedish writer Fredrika Bremer’s novels in 1842-63. Her 18-volume translation helped introduce Fredrika Bremer to English readers, including her ideas as a feminist reformer. Mary Howitt also translated Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales, for example “Only a Fiddler” (1845), “The Improvisators” (1845), “Wonderful Stories for Children” (1846), and “The True Story of Every Life” (1847). She translated German physician Joseph Ennemoser’s “History of Magic” (1854), for his ideas to reach an English audience. She received a Silver Medal from the Literary Academy of Stockholm for conveying Scandinavian literature through translation.
**Polish to English > Aniela Zagórska** (1881-1943) was a Polish translator who, from 1923 to 1939, translated from English into Polish nearly all the novels by her uncle Joseph Conrad, a Polish-English writer who wrote in English. At the beginning of the First World War in 1914, Conrad returned to his native Poland for the first time since leaving it in 1874. He and his family took refuge in Zakopane, a mountain resort town in southern Poland. They lived in a pension run by Aniela Zagórska’s mother, who introduced Conrad to fellow Polish writers and artists who had also taken refuge in Zakopane. Aniela Zagórska kept him company, provided him with books, and became his translator. In Conrad’s view, translation, like other arts, involved choice, and choice implied interpretation. When Aniela Zagórska started translating his books, Conrad would advise her: “Don’t trouble to be too scrupulous. I may tell you that in my opinion it is better to interpret than to translate. It is, then, a question of finding the equivalent expressions. And there, my dear, I beg you to let yourself be guided more by your temperament than by a strict conscience” (cited in Zdzisław Najder, “Joseph Conrad: A Life”, 2007).

**Italian to English > Francesca Alexander** (1837-1917) was an American writer and illustrator, and a translator from Italian to English. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, United States, she moved to Florence, Tuscany, Italy, at age 16 with her family. She started collecting folk songs, tales and customs in Tuscany, and translated them while adding her own drawings. In 1882, she met English art critic John Ruskin, who became a close friend and correspondent until his death. Ruskin purchased her two manuscripts, and published “The Story of Ida” (1883) and “Roadside Songs of Tuscany” (1884-85), before publishing her third manuscript “Christ’s Folk in the Apennines” (1887-89). After Ruskin’s death, Francesca Alexander published herself “Tuscan Songs” (1897), and “The Hidden Servants and Other Very Old Stories Told Over” (1900). She was blind and in poor health in her final years. Her archives now belong to the Boston Athenaeum, one of the oldest independent libraries in the United States.

**German to English > Eleanor Marx** (1855-1898) was a socialist activist, and a translator from German, French and Norwegian to English. Known to her family as Tussy, she was the English-born youngest daughter of German revolutionary socialist Karl Marx. As a child, Eleanor Marx often played in Karl Marx’s study while he was writing “Capital” (“Das Kapital”), the foundational text of Marxism. According to her biographer Rachel Holmes, “Tussy’s childhood intimacy with Marx whilst he wrote the first volume of ‘Capital’ provided her with a thorough grounding in British economic, political and social history. Tussy and ‘Capital’ grew together” (in “Eleanor Marx: A Life”, Bloomsbury, 2014). Eleanor Marx became her father’s secretary at age 16, and accompanied him to socialist conferences around the world. She translated some parts of “Capital” from German to English. She edited the translations of Marx’s lectures “Value, Price and Profit” (“Lohn, Preis und Profit”) and “Wage Labour and Capital” (“Lohnarbeit und Kapital”) for them to be published into books. After Karl Marx’s death, she published his unfinished manuscripts and the English edition of “Capital”. In London, she met with French revolutionary socialist Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, who had fled to England after participating in the Paris Commune, a revolutionary socialist government that briefly ruled Paris in 1871. She translated Lissagaray’s “History of the Paris Commune of 1871” (“L’histoire de la Commune de 1871”) in 1876. She also translated various literary works, for example French novelist Gustave Flaubert’s “Madame Bovary”. She expressly learned Norwegian to translate Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s works. She
translated “An Enemy of the People” (“En folkefiende”) in 1888, and “The Lady from the Sea” (“Fruen fra havet”) in 1890. She took her own life at age 43 after discovering that her partner, English Marxist Edward Aveling, had secretly married a young actress the previous year.

Translators brought French-language literature to other cultures


**French to Italian > Giuseppa Barbapiccola** (1702-1740?) was an Italian natural philosopher and poet, and a translator from Latin and French to Italian. Her uncle was Tommaso Maria Alfani, a Dominican preacher in Naples, and a correspondent and friend of Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico. Giuseppa Barbapiccola was an advocate for the education of women. Her main translation was the translation of French philosopher René Descartes’ “Principles of Philosophy” (1722). Her goal for translating “Principles of Philosophy” was not only to convey Descartes’ philosophy to an Italian audience, but also to inspire women to educate and empower themselves. She demonstrated that Descartes created a philosophy that praised the female intellect, and her translation gave her the opportunity to express her own ideas. In the preface, she wrote that “women should not be excluded from the study of the sciences, since their spirits are more elevated and they are not inferior to men in terms of the greatest virtues.” She defended the right for women’s learning, and was eager to persuade women to educate themselves. She asserted that women’s inherent nature, being the weaker sex, was not the cause of women’s ignorance. The cause for women’s ignorance was no education or bad education. Her claim was that women always had the ability and capacity to learn. Her translation also included a history of women’s learning and a history of philosophy.

**French to Arabic > Rifa’a el-Tahtawi** (1801-1873) was an Egyptian scholar and Egyptologist, and a translator from French to Arabic. He studied in Paris, France, for five years (1826-31). According to his memoir “Rihla” (“Journey to Paris”), he studied ethics, philosophy, mathematics and geometry, and he read works by French philosophers Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and others. After Tahtawi returned to Cairo, Egypt, he was among the first Egyptian scholars to write about western cultures. He was an early adopter of Islamic Modernism, a movement that attempted to integrate Islamic principles with European social theories. He founded in 1835 the School of Languages, also known as the School of Translators (that became part of Ain Shams University in 1973). He supervised the translation of 2,000 foreign works into Arabic, including military, geography and history books. The translations produced by the School of Languages contributed to the emerging grassroots mobilization against British colonialism in Egypt. Tahtawi’s own works were influential in the development of science, law, literature and Egyptology in his country. Three of his books were works of political and moral philosophy showing that the principles of Islam were compatible with European modernity. His works introduced Enlightenment ideas such as secular authority,
political rights and freedom, public interest and public good, and the principles of a modern
civilized society. They influenced many scholars, and were the first effort towards the “Al-
Nahda” (Egyptian renaissance) from 1860 to 1940.

French to Persian > Jalal Al-e-Ahmad (1923-1969) was an Iranian philosopher and
ethnographer, and a translator from French and Russian to Persian. Born in Tehran, Iran, he
earned a master’s degree in Persian literature in 1946. He became a teacher, broke ties with his
religious family, and married Persian novelist Simin Daneshvar in 1950. He popularized the
term “gharbzadegi” (“westoxification”, i.e. criticism of western technology) in his book
“Occidentosis: A Plague from the West” (1962), published clandestinely in Iran. He criticized
for example the decline of traditional Iranian industries such as carpet weaving. His message
was embraced by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1971, the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and president
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2003. All of them called for the nationalization of industry, self-
sufficiency in economics, and independence from the western and Soviet influences. Al-e-
Ahmad’s main translations into Persian were “The Gambler” by Russian novelist Fyodor
Dostoyevsky, and several works by French writers Albert Camus (“L’étranger”), Jean-Paul
Sartre (“Les mains sales”), André Gide (“Return from the USSR”), and Eugène Ionesco
(“Rhinocéros”).

African French to English > Charlotte Bruner (1917-1999) was an American scholar, and a
translator from French to English. She wrote extensively about African women writers, and
translated their works for them to reach a wider audience. Born in Urbana, Illinois, she received
a Bachelor of Art from the University of Illinois in 1938, and a Master of Art from Colombia
University in 1939. She was a professor of French at Iowa State College for three decades
(1954-87). She became a pioneer in both African studies and world literature, at a time when
American universities mainly taught European classics. In the early 1970s, Charlotte Bruner
and her husband David Kincaid Bruner spent one year in Africa interviewing African writers,
and on their return they aired their interviews in the series “Talking Sticks”. Charlotte Bruner
then co-hosted “First Person Feminine” (1980-86), a weekly series in which she read and
discussed international women’s literature. She was one of the editors of “The Feminist
Companion to Literature in English” (1990). She edited two volumes of short stories by African
women, “The Heinemann Book of African Women’s Writings” (1993) and “Unwinding
Threads” (1994). She was inducted into the Iowa Women’s Hall of Fame in 1997.

Translators brought foreign literature to their own
cultures

Translators produced new editions of foreign works they liked, for example in Sweden, Poland,
Germany, Albania and Russia.

German and English to Swedish > Catharina Ahlgren (1734-1800?) was a Swedish
feminist writer and poet, and a translator from English, French and German to Swedish. She
translated German poet Christoph Martin Wieland’s “The Trial of Abraham’s Faith” (“Die
Prüfung Abrahams”). She dedicated her first poem (written in French) to Ulrika of Prussia, Queen of Sweden, for her birthday. She wrote essays on the role of women in society and on gender equality for two Swedish periodicals, “Then Swänska Argus” (“Den Svenska Argus” in modern Swedish) and “Samlal emellan Argi Skugga och en obekant Fruentimbers Skugga”. Likely through her second marriage, Catharina Ahlgren acquired a printing press, and published works by Swedish poet and feminist Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, who was a close friend and correspondent. Catharina Ahlgren emigrated to Finland in 1782, and also played a pioneer role there by launching the first Finnish periodical “Om att rätt behaga” (Of the Art to Please Properly).

**French to Polish > Barbara Sanguszko** (1718-1791) was a Polish poet and moralist, and a translator from French to Polish. She was a noblewoman known for her piety and philanthropy. She restored many Catholic churches and convents, and laid the foundations of new religious houses. She also hosted a salon modeled after French 18th-century salons. Among her guests were Stanisław August Poniatowski, the future King of Poland, and Polish poet Ignacy Krasicki, often called Poland’s La Fontaine. Barbara Sanguszko translated into Polish two religious tracts by Louise de La Vallière, a former French royal mistress turned Carmelite nun. She also translated Italian cardinal Giovanni Bona’s series of reflections on religious and moral themes, her personal physician Francis Curtius’ manual of medicine, and Philippe-Louis Gérard’s anti-Voltaire novel “The Count of Valmont, or the Loss of Reason” (“Le Comte de Valmont, ou les égaremens de la raison”). She wrote a guide for mothers whose daughter was about to be married, based on her own experience, with a first edition published in 1756 in Warsaw and several revised editions then. She also wrote poems on a variety of themes, published with an introduction by Ignacy Krasicki.

**French to Polish > Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński** (1874-1941) was a Polish stage writer, poet and literary critic, and a translator from French to Polish. A pediatrician and gynecologist by profession, he was a notable personality in the Young Poland movement and on the Polish literary scene. Over the years, he translated around 100 French literary classics, now regarded as some of the best translations of foreign literature into Polish. He was admitted to the Polish Academy of Literature in 1933. At the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, he moved to Lviv, Poland (now in Ukraine), and joined the University of Lviv as the head of the Department of French Literature. He was murdered by the Germans in July 1941 during the Nazi occupation of Poland, together with other Polish academics and artists, in what became known as the massacre of Lviv professors.

**Serbian to German > Therese Albertine Louise Robinson** (1797-1870) was a German-American writer and linguist, and a translator from English and Serbian to German. Born in Germany, she translated Scottish writer Walter Scott’s novels “Old Mortality” and “The Black Dwarf” (1822) under the pseudonym Ernst Berthold. She published a series of literary criticisms without signing them. She was reluctant to use her own name to publish her poetry and short stories, so she invented the pen name Talvj, formed with the initials of her birth name (Therese Albertine Louise von Jacob), to sign her collection of short stories “Psyche” (1825) and other works. She learned Serbian after reading German philologist Jacob Grimm’s translations and comments on Serbian folk songs. She translated Serbian folk songs herself with Goethe’s support and encouragement. Her translation “Volkslieder der Serben” (Folk Songs of the Serbs) appeared in 1826, and was praised by Goethe and the German literary world.
Therese Albertine Louise Robinson married American theologian Edward Robinson in 1828, and moved with him to Massachusetts, United States, in 1830. She assisted her husband in introducing and publishing German theology in America. She studied Native American languages, and wrote a handbook. She translated American linguist John Pickering’s seminal article “On Indian languages of North America” published in “Encyclopedia Americana” (1830-31), under the title “Über die Indianischen Sprachen Amerikas” (1834). In his article, Pickering advocated for a phonetic transcription of Native American words, in order to remedy inconsistent schemes adopted by scholars from different nationalities. Therese Albertine Louise Robinson wrote a history of Slavic languages with her husband (1834, 2nd edition in 1850). The poems she translated into German were first published anonymously in an essay on popular poetry in the German nations (1836), and later published as a book (1840). Her poems were also included in “The Poets and Poetry of Europe” (1847), an anthology of translated poems edited by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Greek, Arabic and Spanish to Albanian > Fan Noli (1885-1995) was an Albanian scholar and politician, and a translator from Greek, Arabic and Spanish to Albanian and English. As a young man, he traveled in the Mediterranean region, living in Athens, Greece, Alexandria, Egypt, and Odessa, Russia, and supporting himself as an actor and translator. After the Greek Orthodox Church opposed the Albanian nationalist cause, Noli founded the Orthodox Church of Albania in 1908. He translated liturgy into Albanian to counter the Greek influence. He served as prime minister and regent of Albania in 1924 during the June Revolution. He consolidated Albanian as the national language with numerous translations into Albanian of world literature classics by English playwright Shakespeare, Persian scholar Omar Khayyám, Spanish novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, and others. Noli wrote works in English on Shakespeare, on German composer Beethoven, and on Albanian national hero Skanderbeg. He also wrote religious texts, and produced a translation of the New Testament in English, published under the title “The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the approved Greek text of the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Greece” (1961). Two days after Noli’s death in 1965, Albanian leader Enver Hoxha wrote in his diary: “Noli was one of the prominent political and literary figures of the beginning of this century. He today enjoys a great popularity in our country, deserved as a literary translator and music critic. He was a prominent promoter of the Albanian language. He was also respected as a realistic politician, and as a revolutionary democrat in ideology and politics.”

Various languages to Russian > Boris Pasternak (1890-1960) was a Russian poet and novelist, and a translator from English, German and Spanish to Russian. His first book of poems, “My Sister, Life” (1921), had a deep influence on Russian poetry. Outside Russia, Pasternak was mainly known as the author of “Doctor Zhivago” (1957). After his novel was rejected for publication in the Soviet Union due to Pasternak’s refusal to glorify communist values, it was smuggled to Italy, and published in Milan in 1957 before being distributed worldwide. Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958, which led the Soviet Union to harass and demonize him until his death. Pasternak had to turn to translation in order to provide for his family, despite the fact that translation was not a genuine vocation. He soon produced acclaimed translations of works by German poets Goethe, Rilke and Schiller, French poet Verlaine, Spanish dramatist Calderón de la Barca, and English playwright Shakespeare. Pasternak also translated works by Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi, Polish poet Juliusz Słowacki, Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, and Georgian poet Nikoloz Baratashvili. In a letter written
in 1942 to Russian poet Olga Ivinskaya, who was his friend and lover, Pasternak stated: “I am completely opposed to contemporary ideas about translation. The work of Lozinski, Radlova, Marshak, and Chukovsky is alien to me, and seems artificial, soulless, and lacking in depth. I share the nineteenth century view of translation as a literary exercise demanding insight of a higher kind than that provided by a merely philological approach.”

**English to Russian > Vladimir Nabokov** (1899-1977), a Russian-American novelist, translated his own works from Russian to English, and from English to Russian. His first nine novels were written in Russian. His works written in English brought him international fame, including his novel “Lolita” (1955) and his autobiographical memoir “Speak, Memory” (1967). Nabokov translated his early works into English, with the help of his son Dmitri, who became a translator himself (as well as an opera singer). Nabokov also translated into Russian two books that he had originally written in English, his first autobiographical memoir “Conclusive Evidence” and his novel “Lolita”. The Russian version of “Conclusive Evidence” was more a rewriting of the book than a mere translation, and was then retranslated and rewritten in English to become “Speak, Memory”. On translating “Lolita” into Russian, Nabokov wrote: “I imagined that in some distant future somebody might produce a Russian version of ‘Lolita’. I trained my inner telescope upon that particular point in the distant future and I saw that every paragraph, pock-marked as it is with pitfalls, could lend itself to hideous mistranslation. In the hands of a harmful drudge, the Russian version of ‘Lolita’ would be entirely degraded and botched by vulgar paraphrases or blunders. So I decided to translate it myself.” The Russian edition was published by Phaedra Publishers in 1967. Nabokov also translated Russian poet Alexander Pushkin’s “Eugene Onegin”, and the 4-volume English edition was published in 1964. Nabokov’s beloved wife Véra was his personal translator and assistant during her entire life.

**Juhuri and Avar to Russian > Sergey Izgiyayev** (1922-1972) was a poet belonging to a Russian Jewish community living in the Caucasus Mountains, and a translator from Juhuri, Avar and Azerbaijani to Russian, and vice versa. Izgiyayev wrote nine books of poetry and five plays in Juhuri, and also wrote or translated thirty lyrics. He translated Azerbaijani playwright Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s opera libretto “Layla and Majnun”, and poems by Russian writers Mikhail Lermontov, Suleyman Stalsky, Rasul Gamzatov, and others. He translated Avar poet Rasul Gamzatov’s “High Star” into Russian. According to Izgiyayev’s son David in his article “Memories of my father” (2010), his “songs, especially ‘Gyulboor’, are still sung by people in Russia, Israel, America and Europe.” Many composers living in Dagestan (a republic of Russia) wrote music based on Izgiyayev’s poetry.

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**Translators brought foreign poetry to Russian readers**

*Translators introduced German, English and French poetry to the Russian literary world.*
German and English to Russian > Vasily Zhukovsky (1783-1852) was a Russian poet, and a translator from German and English to Russian. His free translations covered a wide range of poets, from ancient poets such as Homer and Ferdowsi to his contemporaries Goethe, Schiller and Byron. Zhukovsky published in 1802 a free translation of English poet Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” in “The Herald of Europe”, a literary journal founded and run by Nikolay Karamzin. Zhukovsky’s sentimental melancholy style, very original at the time, made him well known among Russian readers, and Karamzin asked him in 1808 to become the journal’s editor. Zhukovsky explored Romantic themes, motifs and genres, largely by way of translation, and introduced the Romantic movement to the Russian literary world. He translated from a wide range of sources, often without attribution, given that modern ideas of intellectual property didn’t exist in these days. His melodious translations of German and English ballads, especially the ballads “Ludmila” (1808) and “Svetlana” (1813), became landmarks in Russian poetry. Both were free translations of German poet Gottfried August Bürger’s ballad “Lenore”. Zhukovsky later translated “Leonore” a third time, as part of his lifelong effort to develop a natural-sounding Russian dactylic hexameter. His translations of Friedrich Schiller’s poems became Russian classics, and were considered to be of equal if not higher quality than the originals. Zhukovsky also produced a verse translation of German author Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s prose novella “Undine”. Written in a waltzing hexameter, Zhukovsky’s version inspired an opera libretto by Russian composer Tchaikovsky. In his remaining years, Zhukovsky wrote hexameter translations of Eastern poetry, including Greek epic poet Homer’s “Odyssey” and Persian epic poet Ferdowsi’s “Shahnameh”. After being criticized for its distortions from the original text, Zhukovsky’s translation of the “Odyssey” (1849) became a classic in its own right in the history of Russian poetry.

English and French to Russian > Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) was a Russian poet and novelist, and a translator from English and French to Russian. He “was noted for the strict artistry with which he carried on the classical Russian tradition in the writing of prose and poetry. He was a revered figure among anti-communist white emigres, European literary critics, and many of his fellow writers, who viewed him as a true heir to the tradition of realism in Russian literature established by Tolstoy and Chekhov” (Wikipedia). Bunin was awarded the Pushkin Prize twice, first in 1903 for his collection of poetry “Falling Leaves” (1901) and his translation of American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha”, and then in 1909 for his collection of poetry “Poems 1903-1906” and his two translations of Longfellow’s “The Golden Legend” and English poet Byron’s “Cain”. Bunin joined the Russian Academy in 1909. He translated some works by English Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson, and by French poets François Musset and François Coppée. He was the first Russian writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1933, while he was in exile in France, “for following through and developing with chastity and artfulness the traditions of Russian classic prose.” His last years were spent writing a book of memoirs on Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, who was his friend and major influence. After Bunin died, the book was completed by his wife Vera Muromtseva and by young Russian writer Leonid Zurov. It was published in New York in 1955, and translated into English much later by Thomas Gaiton Marullo (“About Chekhov: The Unfinished Symphony”, 2007). Bunin’s wife became well known in her own right for “Life of Bunin”, her husband’s biography. Bunin became the first Russian writer in exile to be
officially published in the Soviet Union. The 9-volume heavily censored “Complete Bunin” was published in Moscow in 1965. His controversial books, including his anti-Bolshevik diary “Cursed Days” (1918-20), remained banned in the Soviet Union until the late 1980s.

Translators brought foreign poetry to the English-speaking world

Translators introduced French, Italian, Spanish and Dutch poetry to a new audience.

French, Italian and Spanish to English > Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was an American scholar and poet, and a translator from French, Italian and Spanish to English. After graduating at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, United States, Longfellow toured Europe in 1826-29, and traveled to France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany and England while learning languages along the way, mostly without formal instruction. He became a professor of modern languages at Bowdoin College and at Harvard College, as well as a poet and translator. He translated in 1833 medieval Castilian poet Jorge Manrique’s funeral eulogy “Verses on the Death of his Father” (“Coplas a la muerte de su padre”). Longfellow’s debut book of poetry, “Voices of the Night” (1839), was mainly based on translations, with a few original poems. He edited “The Poets and Poetry of Europe” (1845), an 800-page compilation of translated poems, including poems translated by his colleague and friend Cornelius Conway Felton. The anthology was meant “to bring together, into a compact and convenient form, as large an amount as possible of those English translations which are scattered through many volumes, and not accessible to the general reader.” Longfellow spent several years translating Italian poet Dante’s “Divine Comedy”. He organized weekly meetings with a group of friends (called the Dante Club) to help him perfect the translation and to review proofs. The 3-volume translation was published in 1867, and went through four printings in its first year. Longfellow’s last years were spent translating Italian artist Michelangelo’s poetry, with a posthumous edition published in 1883. In honor of Longfellow’s major role as a translator and editor, Harvard founded the Longfellow Institute in 1994 to support the study of non-English writings in the United States.

1865). Baudelaire was not the first to translate Poe’s works into French, but his scrupulous translations were highly praised and considered the best. He also wrote two essays on Poe’s poetry. In his later years, he translated and adapted English essayist Thomas De Quincey’s “Confessions of an English Opium-Eater” (“Confessions d’un mangeur d’opium”).


Dutch to English > James S. Holmes (1924-1986) was an American-Dutch poet, and a translator of poetry from Dutch to English. Born in Collins, Iowa, United States, he moved permanently to Amsterdam, Netherlands, in 1950. Together with his partner Hans van Marle, he translated many works by Dutch and Belgian poets, as well as Indonesian poetry. Holmes’ reputation as a translator grew, and he received the Martinus Nijhoff Award (named after Dutch poet and essayist Nijhoff) in 1956. When the literary magazine “Delta” was founded in 1958 to report on Dutch culture in the Netherlands and Belgium, Holmes became its poetry editor, and translated contemporary Dutch poetry for the magazine. Holmes was hired as an associate professor in the new Institute of Interpreters and Translators (later renamed the Institute of Translation Studies) founded in 1964 at the University of Amsterdam, and created specific courses for the Institute. He was the first to coin the term “Translation Studies” in his paper “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (1972), that became the founding statement of the new discipline. He wrote a number of influential articles about translation.

All along, translators tried to refine the translation process

The translator’s role as a bridge between languages and cultures has been discussed for two millennia.
**In Antiquity** > The translator’s role as a bridge for “carrying across” values between cultures has been discussed since Terence, a Roman playwright who adapted Greek comedies in the 2nd century BCE.

Cicero cautioned against translating “word for word” (“verbum pro verbo”) in “On the Orator” (“De Oratore”, 55 BCE): “I did not think I ought to count them [the words] out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were.” Cicero, a Roman statesman, orator, lawyer and philosopher, was also a translator from Greek to Latin, and he compared the translator to an artist.

The debate on sense-for-sense translation vs. word-for-word translation has been an ongoing debate for centuries. The coiner of the term “sense for sense” is said to be Jerome (also known as St. Jerome) in his “Letter to Pammachius” (396). While translating the Bible into Latin (a translation known as the “Vulgate”), Jerome stated that the translator needed to translate “not word for word but sense for sense” (“non verbum e verbo sed sensum de sensu”).

Kumārajīva, a Buddhist monk and scholar, translated Buddhist texts from Sanskrit to Chinese in the late 4th century. His translations had a deep influence on Chinese Buddhism because of their clarity. Kumārajīva’s smooth translation style focused on conveying the meaning as opposed to precise literal rendering. His translations have often remained more popular than later, more literal translations.

**In the Middle Ages** > The Toledo School of Translators became the meeting point of translators from all over Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. They settled in Toledo, in the Iberian Peninsula (that later became Spain), to translate all major Arab and Greek philosophical, religious, scientific and medical works into Latin. Some translations were not based on the Greek originals but on their Arabic editions, which was common at that time. All these translations influenced the development of medieval European philosophy, science, astronomy and medicine, and were used to produce new works in modern languages.

Roger Bacon, a 13th-century English scholar, was the first to assess that a translator should have a thorough knowledge of both the original language and the end language to produce a good translation, and that he should also be well versed in the discipline of the work he was translating.

**In the 15th century** > After the Platonic Academy was founded around 1440, Italian scholar and translator Marsilio Ficino translated or supervised the translation into Latin of all Plato’s works, Plotinus’ “Enneads”, and other Neoplatonist works. Ficino’s work — and Erasmus’ Latin edition of the New Testament — led to a new attitude to translation. For the first time, readers demanded rigour in rendering the exact words of Plato and Jesus (and Aristotle and others) as the ground for their philosophical and religious beliefs.

**In the 16th century** > Martin Luther, a German professor of theology and a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation, translated the Bible into German in his later years (1522-34). He was the first European scholar to assess that one translates satisfactorily only towards his own language, a bold statement that became the norm two centuries later. The publication of the
“Luther Bible” also contributed to the development of the modern German language. Translations of the Bible in other languages (English, Polish, Dutch, French, Spanish, Czech and Slovene) helped develop modern languages in Europe.

**In the 17th century** > Miguel de Cervantes, a Spanish writer who wrote the famed novel “Don Quixote” (1605-15), expressed his own views on the translation process. According to Cervantes, translations of his time — with the exception of those made from Greek to Latin — were like looking at a Flemish tapestry by its reverse side. While the main figures of a Flemish tapestry could be discerned, they were obscured by the loose threads, and they lacked the clarity of the front side.

Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt, a member of the French Académie Française and a translator of Greek and Latin classics, regularly modified or modernized original expressions for reasons of style. His method was based on the practice popularized by Valentin Conrart, the Académie Française’s founder. A disparaging remark by French author Gilles Ménage gave rise to the term “belle infidèle” (beautiful unfaithful). Ménage wrote that Perrot d’Ablancourt’s translations “remind me of a woman whom I greatly loved in Tours, who was beautiful but unfaithful” (cited in Amparo Hurtado Albir, “La notion de fidélité en traduction”, Didier Érudition, 1990). The term “belle infidèle” was later popularized by Voltaire.

John Dryden, an English poet and translator, described translation as the judicious blending of two modes of phrasing — metaphrase (literal translation) and paraphrase (restatement with other words) — when selecting equivalents for the phrases used in the original language. He wrote that, “When words appear literally graceful, it were an injury to the author that they should be changed. But since what is beautiful in one language is often barbarous, nay sometimes nonsense, in another, it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author’s words: it is enough if he choose out some expression which does not vitiate the sense” (cited in Christopher Kasparek, “The Translator’s Endless Toil”, 1983).

Alexander Pope, a fellow poet and translator, was said to have reduced Homer’s “wild paradise” to “order” while translating the Greek epic poet’s “Iliad” and “Odyssey” into English. After translating the whole “Iliad”, Pope only translated twelve books of the “Odyssey” himself, and secretly enlisted the help of two other poets and translators, William Broome (who translated eight books) and Elijah Fenton (who translated four books). The secret leaked out and damaged Pope’s reputation for some time, with no incidence on the sales of his two best-selling translations.

**In the 18th century** > “Faithfulness” and “transparency” were better defined as dual ideals in translation, while often being at odds. “Faithfulness” is the extent to which a translation accurately renders the meaning of the source text, without distortion, by taking into account the text itself (subject, type and use), its literary qualities and its social or historical context. “Transparency” is the extent to which the end result of a translation stands as a text of its own that could have been originally been written in the language of the reader, and conforms to its grammar, syntax and idiom. A “transparent” translation is often qualified as “idiomatic” (source: Wikipedia).
But there was still not much concern for accuracy, and the watchword was ease of reading. Dictionaries and thesauri were not regarded as adequate guides for translating into a foreign language. In his “Essay on the Principles of Translation” (1791), Scottish historian Alexander Tytler emphasized that assiduous reading was more helpful than using dictionaries. Polish poet and grammarian Onufry Andrzej Kopczyński expressed the same views a few years earlier (1783), while adding the need to listen to the spoken language.

Often named Poland’s La Fontaine, Polish poet and translator Ignacy Krasicki described the translator’s special role in society in his posthumous essay “On Translating Books” (“O tłumaczeniu książ”, 1803). He wrote that “translation is in fact an art both estimable and very difficult, and therefore is not the labour and portion of common minds; it should be practiced by those who are themselves capable of being actors, when they see greater use in translating the works of others than in their own works, and hold higher than their own glory the service that they render their country.”

In the 19th century > There were new standards for accuracy and style. For accuracy, the policy became “the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text (except for bawdy passages), with the addition of extensive explanatory footnotes” (in J.M. Cohen’s “Translation” entry in “Encyclopedia Americana”, 1986, vol. 27). For style, the aim was to constantly remind readers that they were reading a foreign classic.

According to Johann Gottfried Herder, a German literary critic and translator, a translator should translate towards (and not from) his own language, a statement already expressed two centuries earlier by Martin Luther, who was the first European scholar to assess that one translates satisfactorily only towards his own language.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German theologian, philosopher and biblical scholar, developed the “non-transparent” translation theory. In his seminal lecture “On the Different Methods of Translating” (1813), Schleiermacher distinguished between translation methods that moved the writer towards the reader, i.e. transparency, and those that moved the reader towards the author, i.e. an extreme fidelity to the foreignness of the source text. Schleiermacher favoured the latter approach. His distinction between “domestication” (bringing the author to the reader) and “foreignization” (taking the reader to the author) inspired 20th-century prominent theorists Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti.

Sarah Austin, an English author and translator, always stood for her intellectual rights as a translator, writing that “It has been my invariable practice, as soon as I have engaged to translate a work, to write to the author to it, announcing my intention, and adding that if he has any correction, omission, or addition to make, he might depend on my paying attention to his suggestions.”

Yan Fu, a Chinese scholar and translator, developed in 1898 his own translation theory, that included three facets: faithfulness, i.e. be true to the original in spirit; expressiveness, i.e. be accessible to the target reader; and elegance, i.e. be written in an “educated” language. Yan Fu’s theory of translation was based on his experience with translating works in social sciences from English to Chinese. Of the three facets, he considered the second facet as the most important. If the meaning of the translated text was not accessible to the reader, there was no difference
between having translated the text and not having translated the text at all. In order to facilitate comprehension, the word order could be changed, Chinese examples could replace English ones, and people’s names could be rendered Chinese. His theory had much impact worldwide, but was sometimes wrongly extended to the translation of literary works.

**In the 20th century** > From 1923 to 1939, Aniela Zagór ska translated into Polish nearly all the works by her uncle Joseph Conrad, a Polish-British novelist who wrote in English. In Conrad’s view, translation, like other arts, inescapably involved choice, and choice implied interpretation. Conrad would later advise his niece: “Don’t trouble to be too scrupulous. I may tell you that in my opinion it is better to interpret than to translate. It is, then, a question of finding the equivalent expressions. And there, my dear, I beg you to let yourself be guided more by your temperament than by a strict conscience” (cited in Zdzisław Najder, “Joseph Conrad: A Life”, 2007).

Boris Pasternak, a Russian poet and novelist, was a prolific translator from English, German and Spanish to Russian. His translations of Shakespeare’s major plays were popular with Russian audiences because of their colloquial and modernized dialogues. Pasternak wrote in 1956 in an essay that “Translating Shakespeare is a task which takes time and effort. Once it is undertaken, it is best to divide it into sections long enough for the work not to get stale and to complete one section each day. In thus daily progressing through the text, the translator finds himself reliving the circumstances of the author. Day by day, he reproduces his actions and he is drawn into some of his secrets, not in theory, but practically, by experience.”

Pasternak also wrote in a letter to poet and writer Olga Ivinskaya, who was his friend and lover: “I am completely opposed to contemporary ideas about translation. The work of Lozinski, Radlova, Marshak, and Chukovsky is alien to me, and seems artificial, soulless, and lacking in depth. I share the nineteenth century view of translation as a literary exercise demanding insight of a higher kind than that provided by a merely philological approach.”

Cesar Pavese was an Italian poet, novelist and translator. During his years in Turin, he was the mentor of Fernanda Pivano, who later became a writer and translator herself. After Pavese translated “Spoon River Anthology”, a collection of free verse poems by American poet Edgar Lee Masters, he gave Fernanda Pivano both editions (English and Italian) for her to better understand the difference between an original work and a translated work. Fernanda Pivano was quoted as saying: “I was just a kid when I read ‘Spoon River’ for the first time: Cesare Pavese brought it to me one morning.”

Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian-American novelist and translator, wrote his first nine novels in Russian, and translated them into English later on. His novel “Lolita” (1955), written in English, brought him international fame. On translating “Lolita” into Russian, Nabokov wrote: “I imagined that in some distant future somebody might produce a Russian version of ‘Lolita’. I trained my inner telescope upon that particular point in the distant future and I saw that every paragraph, pock-marked as it is with pitfalls, could lend itself to hideous mistranslation. In the hands of a harmful drudge, the Russian version of ‘Lolita’ would be entirely degraded and botched by vulgar paraphrases or blunders. So I decided to translate it myself.”
Jorge Luis Borges, a short-story writer, essayist and poet living in Argentina, translated literary works from English, French, German, Old English or Old Norse to Spanish. Borges wrote and lectured extensively on the art of translation, “holding that a translation may improve upon the original, may even be unfaithful to it, and that alternative and potentially contradictory renderings of the same work can be equally valid” (Wikipedia).

Timeline

2nd century BCE > Terence, a Roman playwright, translated and adapted Greek comedies into Latin. He discussed the translator’s role as a bridge for “carrying across” values between cultures.

55 BCE > Cicero, a Roman statesman, orator, lawyer and philosopher, was a translator from Greek into Latin. In his dialogue “On the Orator” (“De Oratore”, 55 BCE), he cautioned against translating “word for word” (“verbum pro verbo”): “I did not think I ought to count them [the words] out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were.”

405 > Jerome, a Roman theologian and historian also known as St. Jerome, completed in 405 the translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew into Latin, a translation known as the “Vulgate”. In his “Letter to Pammachius” (396), Jerome stated that a translation should be “not word for word but sense for sense” (“non verbum e verbo sed sensum de sensu”). After stirring controversy, his “Vulgate” was widely adopted and became the most used Latin Bible in the 13th century. The Council of Trent named it the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church in 1546.

425 > The Holy Translators — a group of Armenian scholars (Mesrop Mashtots, Isaac of Armenia, Movses Khorenatsi, Yeghishe and others) — completed in 425 the translation of the Bible from Greek and Syriac into Armenian. They also translated Greek and Syriac literature into Armenian, for example works by Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and Ephrem the Syrian. The Holy Translators’ Bible is still used today in the liturgy of the Armenian Church, and a Feast of the Holy Translators is celebrated each year in October.

735 > Bede, an English monk, writer and scholar, translated the Gospel of St. John into Old English during the last forty days of his life in 735, after producing many translations from Greek into Latin. Latin was still the main language in England. Bede is believed to have said: “All is finished” before dying. He made Greek works by the early Church Fathers more accessible to his fellow Anglo-Saxons, contributing significantly to the development of English Christianity.

840-873 > Hunayn ibn Ishaq, a Nestorian (Christian) physician and scientist, was the chief translator of the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in the House of Wisdom, a major intellectual center in Baghdad, from 840 to 873. Greek works of philosophy, mathematics, natural science and medicine were translated into Arabic, for them to be available to scholars
throughout the Islamic world. Hunayn ibn Ishaq translated 116 works himself (Old Testament
and many works by Plato, Aristotle, Galen of Pergamon and others) while supervising the work
of other translators. Another major translator was Qusta ibn Luqa for works of astronomy and
mechanics. A third major translator was Thābit ibn Qurra for works by Ptolemy, Archimedes
and Euclides. All these translations brought Greek knowledge to the Arab civilization.

880? > Alfred the Great, King of Wessex in England, started an ambitious programme circa
880 to translate from Latin into English the books he deemed “most necessary for all men to
know”, while promoting primary education in English at a time when Latin was still the
standard language. Alfred the Great translated several works into English himself, including
Pope Gregory I’s “Pastoral Care”, philosopher Boethius’ “Consolation of Philosophy”,
theologian Augustine’s “Soliloquies”, the Psalter’s first fifty psalms, and the Vulgate’s “Book of
Exodus”. All these translations contributed to improve the English prose.

1040-90 > The Tanguts translated all Buddhist works from Chinese into the Tangut language
and produced 3,700 fascicles in a collective effort over a span of fifty years (1040-90).
Contemporary sources described the Emperor of the Tangut Empire and his mother personally
contributing to the translation, alongside sages of various nationalities.

1125-1284? > The Toledo School of Translators was founded around 1125 as a meeting point
for scholars from all over Europe. Many scholars settled in Toledo to translate all major
scientific and medical works from Arabic and Greek into Latin (in the 12th century) and
Castilian (in the 13th century), and made Arab and Greek knowledge available to their
colleagues in Europe. Some translations were not based on the Greek originals but on their
Arabic editions, which was common at that time. All these translations influenced the
development of medieval science, astronomy and medicine in Europe, and were used to
produce new works in modern languages.

1136-38 > Plato of Tivoli (also known as Plato Tiburtinus), an Italian mathematician and
astronomer, produced two major translations from Arabic into Latin: Arab astrologer Albohali’s
“Book of Birth” (1136) and (from its Arabic version) Greek astronomer and astrologer
Ptolemy’s “Tetrabiblos” (1138), an authoritative work on the philosophy and practice of
astrology.

1138 > Abraham bar Hiyya, a Jewish scientist and philosopher, translated Ptolemy’s
“Tetrabiblos” from Arabic into Hebrew in 1138.

1138-43 > Herman of Carinthia, an Eastern European philosopher and scientist, translated Arab
and Greek astronomical works into Latin, for example Sahl ibn Bishr’s “Liber sextus
astronomie” (1138), Abu Ma'shar’s “Liber introductorius ad astronomiam” (1140), Euclid’s
“Elements” (1140) (possibly with Robert of Ketton), and Ptolemy’s “Planisphaerium” and
“Canon of Kings” (1143). His translations popularized Arab and Greek knowledge in Europe,
and influenced the development of medieval European astronomy. Herman of Carinthia also
translated religious texts on Islam from Arabic into Latin, including “De generatione Muhamet
et nutritura eius” and “Doctrina Muhamet”, with the help of other translators. These translations
were produced at the request of Peter the Venerable, abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny,
France, during his visit in the Iberian Peninsula in 1142.
**1140?** > English philosopher Adelard of Bath translated Greek mathematician Euclid’s “Elements” — a treatise consisting of 13 books — from Arabic into Latin circa 1140. His translation was later used by Italian mathematician Campanus of Novara to produce one of the first printed mathematical books in 1482, that became the main textbook in European mathematical schools in the 16th century.

**1140?** > John of Seville, a baptized Jewish scholar, joined the Toledo School of Translators during its early days circa 1140, with Dominic Gundissalinus and other scholars, and translated major Arab works of astrology, astronomy, philosophy and medicine from Arabic into Latin, for example Arab philosopher Qusta ibn Luqa’s “De differentia spiritus et animae”, and several works by astronomer Al-Farghani and by astrologers Abu Ma’shar al-Balkhi and Albohali. John of Seville also translated (from its Arabic version) “Secretum secretorum”, a letter written by Greek philosopher Aristotle to his student Alexander the Great.

**1143** > Robert of Ketton, an English theologian and astronomer, translated “Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete”, the first known translation of the Quran from Arabic into Latin in 1143, with the help of Herman of Carinthia and other translators. The translation was produced at the request of Peter the Venerable, abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny, France, during his visit in the Iberian Peninsula in 1142, and remained the standard Latin edition of the Quran until the 18th century.

**1160?** > Spanish philosopher Dominic Gundissalinus translated Persian philosopher Avicenna’s “Liber de philosophia prima” and “De anima” from Arabic into Latin circa 1160, contributing to the spread of Avicenna's doctrines in the 13th century.

**1175** > Italian scholar Gerard of Cremona translated Greek astronomer Ptolemy’s “Almagest” — a treatise on the apparent motions of the stars and planetary paths — from Arabic into Latin in 1175, after travelling to Toledo to read the Arabic version. After joining the Toledo School of Translators, he translated 87 major works from Arabic and Greek into Latin throughout his life — works originally written in Arabic (by al-Khwarizmi and Jabir ibn Aflah), Greek editions of Arabic works (by Alfraganus) and works originally written in Greek (by Archimedes, Euclid and Aristotle).

**1220?** > Samuel ibn Tibbon, a Jewish philosopher and physician, translated Jewish philosopher Maimonides’ “The Guide for the Perplexed” from its Arabic original version into Hebrew circa 1220. Maimonides himself sent instructions for the translation, and praised the translator’s ability and knowledge. Samuel ibn Tibbon also translated other works by Maimonides, as well as works by Muslim philosopher Averroes and by Greek philosopher Aristotle.

**1225?** > Michael Scot, a Scottish mathematician and scholar, supervised — along with Hermannus Alemannus — the translation of Greek philosopher Aristotle’s works from Arabic into Latin at the request of King of Sicily Frederick II. Scot translated himself three works (“Historia animalium”, “De anima” and “De coelo”) circa 1125, as well as Muslim philosopher Averroes’ commentaries on these works.

**1267?** > William of Moerbeke, a Flemish Dominican, translated Aristotle’s works directly from the Byzantine Greek manuscripts (that were lost later on) into Latin, at the request of philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Until then, most Latin translations of Aristotle’s works were
based on Syriac or Arabic editions. William of Moerbeke translated “De anima”, “Rhetoric” (as a new Latin translation) and “Politics” (available in Latin for the first time) circa 1267. These literal translations (“de verbo en verbo”), faithful to Aristotle’s spirit, became standard classics, and are still respected by modern scholars.

1382-84 > John Wycliffe, an English philosopher and theologian, directed in 1382-84 the first English edition of the Bible translated from English into Latin, based on the Latin “Vulgate” and named “Wycliffe’s Bible”. Wycliffe probably translated himself the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and may be the entire New Testament, while his friend Nicholas of Hereford translated the Old Testament. The translation contributed to improve the still underdeveloped English prose of that time. After Wycliffe’s death, the “Wycliffe’s Bible” was revised in 1388 by Wycliffe’s assistant John Purvey. A second revised edition followed in 1395. To this day there are still 150 complete or partial manuscripts of the “Wycliffe’s Bible” in its revised form.

1385? > Geoffrey Chaucer, an English poet and philosopher famous for his “Canterbury Tales”, translated Roman philosopher Boethius’ “Consolation of Philosophy” from Latin into English, and French poet Guillaume de Lorris’ “The Romance of the Rose” (“Le Roman de la rose”) from French into English circa 1385. Chaucer also produced loose translations and adaptations of some works, for example works by Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio that became the base for Chaucer’s own “Knight’s Tale” and “Troilus and Criseyde”. As a genius translator and adapter, Chaucer founded an English poetic tradition based on translations and adaptations of Latin and French literary works, and promoted the literary use of Middle English at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were still Latin and French.

1440? > After the founding of the Platonic Academic, Italian scholar Marsilio Ficino translated or supervised the translation from Greek or Arabic into Latin of all Plato’s works, Plotinus’ “Enneads”, and other Neoplatonist works circa 1440. Ficino’s work — and Erasmus’ Latin edition of the New Testament — led to a new attitude to translation. For the first time, readers demanded rigour in rendering the exact words of Plato and Jesus (and Aristotle and others) as the ground for their philosophical or religious beliefs.

1471-85 > William Caxton, an English merchant and printer, translated into English the “Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye”, a French courtly romance written in 1464 by Raoul Lefèvre, chaplain to Philip III, duke of Burgundy. Caxton’s translation was completed in 1471 and printed in Bruges, Belgium, in 1473. The English edition became a best-seller in the Burgundian court. In the wake of this success, Caxton set up a printing press in 1476 in the almonry of Westminster Abbey, to print English poet Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales” and his own translation of the “Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye”. Caxton translated other works, for example Italian chronicler Jacobus da Varagine’s “Golden Legend” (printed in 1483, 1487 and 1493), French nobleman Geoffroy IV de la Tour Landry’s “The Book of the Knight in the Tower” (printed in 1484), Greek fabulist Aesop’s “Fables” (printed in 1484), Roman poet Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” (printed in 1484), and English author Thomas Malory’s “Le Morte d’Arthur” (printed in 1485). Caxton’s translations helped standardize the regional English dialects into a “London dialect” that became the standard English language.
1485 > English author Thomas Malory produced in 1485 “Le Morte d’Arthur”, a free translation and adaptation of Arthurian romances, with legendary King Arthur and his literary companions Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin and the Knights of the Round Table. Malory adapted existing French and English stories while adding original material, for example the “Gareth” story as one of the stories of the Knights of the Round Table. “Le Morte d’Arthur” was a milestone in English literature, and introduced the Great Age of English prose.

1516 > Dutch scholar and theologian Erasmus produced a Latin edition of the New Testament by collecting several manuscripts of the Latin “Vulgate” and by polishing the Latin texts to create a new critical edition in 1516. Erasmus synchronized, unified and updated simultaneously the Latin and Greek editions — both being part of the canonical tradition — and made the two editions “compatible”, meaning that he edited the Latin edition to reflect the Greek edition, and vice versa. For example, as the last six verses of the “Book of Revelation” were missing in the Greek manuscript, Erasmus translated these verses back into Greek from the “Vulgate”. Erasmus’ Latin and Greek editions of the New Testament were influential in the Protestant Reformation and in the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

1522-34 > German theologian Martin Luther, a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation, translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into German in his later years. He first translated the New Testament (1522) before translating the Old Testament and the Apocrypha (1534). The complete “Luther Bible” was not the first Bible available in German, but was regarded as the best. Previous translations were based on the Latin “Vulgate” and not on the original texts, and the German text was much poorer. The “Luther Bible” contributed to the development of the German language and to the creation of a German national identity. Luther was also the first European scholar to assess that one translates satisfactorily only towards his own language, a statement that became the norm in the 18th century.

1525 > English scholar William Tyndale produced a new English edition of the Bible translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek texts. The “Tyndale New Testament” (1525) was regarded as the first accurate translation of the New Testament into English. After translating the New Testament, Tyndale began translating the Old Testament, and translated half of it. He became a leading figure in Protestant Reformation before being sentenced to death for the unlicensed possession of the Scripture in English. After his death, his translation was completed by one of his assistants. With the recent invention of the printing press, the “Tyndale Bible” became the first mass-produced English Bible. It was replaced by the “Great Bible” in 1539.

1539 > Myles Coverdale, an English ecclesiastical reformer and preacher, produced the first complete English edition of the Bible, named the “Great Bible” (1539) and based on the “Tyndale Bible” (1525), at the request of Thomas Lord Cromwell, vicar general and secretary to King Henry VIII of England. Objectionable paragraphs of the “Tyndale Bible” were revised, and lacking parts (some books of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha) were added. The “Great Bible” was later followed by the “Bishops’ Bible” (1558) and the “King James Bible” (1604-11).

1559-65 > French Renaissance writer Jacques Amyot translated Greek biographer and essayist Plutarch’s “Parallel Lives” from Greek into French. His translation, named “Vies des hommes illustres” (1559-65), read like an original work, became very popular and influenced many
French writers. French philosopher Montaigne wrote: “I give the palm to Jacques Amyot over all our French writers, not only for the simplicity and purity of his language in which he surpasses all others, not for his constancy to so long an undertaking, not for his profound learning (…) but I am grateful to him especially for his wisdom in choosing so valuable a work.” The French edition was translated into English by Thomas North in 1579.

1578 > Margaret Tyler, who was probably a servant to the Catholic Howard family, translated Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra’s Spanish romance “Espejo de principes y caballeros” into English under the title “The Mirrour of Princely Deeds and Knighthood” in 1578. Her translation closely followed the original text, with clarity preferred to the flowing elegance of the original. Her translation became a best-seller, despite some criticisms because its masculine and secular topic was considered inappropriate for a woman. Women translators were supposed to translate religious works, in line with the fact that female education should promote piety. In her “Letter to the reader”, Margaret Tyler protested against these restrictions, insisted on the seriousness and importance of literary work by women, and proposed that both women and men should be treated as equal rational beings.

1579-1603 > Thomas North, an English judicial and military officer, translated Greek biographer and essayist Plutarch’s “Parallel Lives” from Jacques Amyot’s French translation, and produced three editions (1579, 1595 and 1603). According to the “Encyclopaedia Britannica” (1911), “It is almost impossible to overestimate the influence of North’s vigorous English on contemporary writers, and some critics have called him the first master of English prose.” North’s translation of “Parallel Lives” was one of the sources of Shakespeare’s Roman plays “Julius Caesar”, “Coriolanus” and “Antony and Cleopatra”. In “Antony and Cleopatra”, Shakespeare copied or adapted many speeches translated by North, a common practice at that time because modern ideas of intellectual property didn’t exist in these days.

1593 > Polish Jesuit Jakub Wujek translated the Bible from the Latin “Vulgate” after being granted the official permission to undertake such work by Pope Gregory XIII and the Jesuit Order. The first edition of the “Jakub Wujek Bible” (“Biblia Jakuba Wujka”) was completed in 1593. The full authorized edition was completed in 1599, two years after Wujek’s death. The “Jakub Wujek Bible” replaced the “Leopolita’s Bible” (1561) as the main Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. Wujek’s translation of the Bible was recognized as both an excellent translation and a major literary work, and contributed to the development of the Polish language. It became the official Polish Bible for four centuries, before being replaced by the “Millennium Bible” (1965).

1604-11 > 47 translators — all of them scholars and members of the Church of England — produced the “King James Bible” (1604-11), a major translation of the Bible into English, with 39 books for the Old Testament (translated from Greek), 27 books for the New Testament (translated from Greek and Latin) and 14 books for the Apocrypha (translated from Hebrew and Aramaic). The translators were given instructions to ensure that the new translation would conform to the ecclesiology and reflect the episcopal structure of the Church of England and its belief in an ordained clergy. The “King James Bible” was the third translation into English to be approved by the English Church, after the “Great Bible” (1539) and the “Bishops’ Bible” (1568). It was also regarded as a literary achievement, with lasting effects on the English language and culture.
Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt, a member of the Académie Française in Paris and a translator of Greek and Latin classics from 1637 to 1662, regularly modified or modernized original expressions for reasons of style. His method was based on the practice popularized by Valentin Conrart, the Académie Française’s founder. A disparaging remark by French author Gilles Ménage gave rise to the term “belle infidèle” (beautiful unfaithful). Ménage wrote that Perrot d’Ablancourt’s translations “remind me of a woman whom I greatly loved in Tours, who was beautiful but unfaithful” (cited in Amparo Hurtado Albir, “La notion de fidélité en traduction”, Didier Érudition, 1990). The term “belle infidèle” was later popularized by Voltaire.

Anna Hume, a Scottish writer and poet, translated Italian poet Petrarch’s “Trionfi” under the title “The Triumphs of Love, Chastitie, Death: Translated Out of Petrarch by Mrs. Anna Hulme”. Petrarch’s poems “tell of love’s triumph over the poet (Petrarch falls in love with Laura), superseded by the triumph of chastity over lust (in that Laura does not yield to Petrarch’s love), which is followed by the triumph of death over Laura (as Laura dies and reminds both author and reader of death’s power)” (Wikipedia). Anna Hulme’s translation was published by printer Evan Tyler in Edinburgh in 1644. A translation published by a woman belonging to a prominent family was very unusual at that time, but it was well received and her work was praised as faithful and spirited.

Aphra Behn, an English playwright, poet and novelist, devoted herself to prose genres and to translations after writing a prologue and an epilogue that brought her legal trouble during the Exclusion Crisis. Her last translations were the translation (from French to English) of French astronomer Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle’s “A Discovery of New Worlds” (“Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes”) in 1688, and the translation (from English to French) of English poet Abraham Cowley’s “Six Books of Plants” in 1689. Plagued by a failing health, poverty and debt, Aphra Behn died in April 1689. In her essay “A Room of One’s Own” (1929), English feminist author Virginia Woolf wrote that “All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds.”

John Dryden, an English poet and playwright who became England’s first Poet Laureate in 1668, translated “The Works of Virgil” over four years (1693-97). Its publication in 1697 was a national event. Dryden then translated works by Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer, published in “Fables Ancient and Modern” (1700) with his own fables. Dryden described translation as the judicious blending of two modes of phrasing — metaphrase (literal translation) and paraphrase (restatement with other words) — when selecting equivalents for the phrases used in the original language. He wrote that, “When words appear literally graceful, it were an injury to the author that they should be changed. But since what is beautiful in one language is often barbarous, nay sometimes nonsense, in another, it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author’s words: it is enough if he chooses out some expression which does not vitiate the sense” (cited in Christopher Kasparek, “The Translator’s Endless Toil”, 1983).

French editor and translator Anne Dacier produced prose translations of Homer’s “Iliad” (1699) and “Odyssey” (1708). Her translations introduced Homer to the French literary world. They were praised by her contemporaries, including English poet Alexander Pope, who
translated Homer’s epic poems into English (1715-20 and 1726). Anne Dacier published an essay on Pope’s translation of the “Odyssey”, that gained her some fame in England as well.

1704-17 > French orientalist and archaeologist Antoine Galland translated “One Thousand and One Nights”, a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age. His 12-volume French translation “Les Mille et une nuits” (1704-17) became a best-seller, and is still the standard French translation to this day. It popularized oriental tales in European literature and nascent Romanticism. “Les Mille et une nuits” was then translated from French into English (1706), German (1712), Italian (1722), Dutch (1732), Russian (1763) and Polish (1768).

1713-26 > English poet Alexander Pope, an avid reader of Homer’s works since his childhood, began translating the “Iliad” in 1713. He was paid 200 guineas a volume (the equivalent to £28,200 now) by publisher Bernard Linto, who released one volume per year over the course of six years (1715-20). Pope then translated the “Odyssey” with equivalent wages, and his translation was published in 1726. However Pope only translated twelve books of the “Odyssey” himself, and secretly enlisted the help of two other poets and translators, William Broome (who translated eight books) and Elijah Fenton (who translated four books). The secret leaked out and damaged Pope’s reputation for some time, as well as some criticisms on his translation reducing Homer’s “wild paradise” to “order”, with no incidence on the sales of his two best-selling translations.

1722 > Giuseppa Barbapiccola, an Italian natural philosopher and poet, translated French philosopher René Descartes’ “Principles of Philosophy” into Italian in 1722. Her goal was not only to convey Descartes’ philosophy to an Italian audience, but also to inspire women to educate and empower themselves. She demonstrated that Descartes created a philosophy that praised the female intellect, and her translation gave her the opportunity to express her own ideas. In the preface, she wrote that “Women should not be excluded from the study of the sciences, since their spirits are more elevated and they are not inferior to men in terms of the greatest virtues.” She defended the right for women’s learning, and was eager to persuade women to educate themselves. She asserted that women’s inherent nature, being the weaker sex, was not the cause of women’s ignorance. The cause for women’s ignorance was no education or bad education. Her claim was that women always had the ability and capacity to learn. Her translation included a history of women’s learning and a history of philosophy.

1735 > English scholar Samuel Johnson produced in 1735 an English edition of Portuguese Jesuit missionary Jerónimo Lobo’s “Itinerário”, a travelogue on his journey in Ethiopia, from the French edition “Voyage historique d’Abyssinie” (1728) translated by Joachim Le Grand. Johnson thought that a short edition translated from French could be “useful and profitable” to English readers. Instead of writing down the translation himself, Johnson dictated it to his friend Edmund Hector, who edited the text before bringing the manuscript to the printing house.

1750? > In the mid-18th century, “faithfulness” and “transparency” were better defined as dual ideals in translation, while often being at odds. “Faithfulness” is the extent to which a translation accurately renders the meaning of the source text, without distortion, by taking into account the text itself (subject, type and use), its literary qualities and its social or historical context. “Transparency” is the extent to which the end result of a translation stands as a text of
its own that could have been originally been written in the language of the reader, and conforms to its grammar, syntax and idiom. A “transparent” translation is often qualified as “idiomatic” (source: Wikipedia).

1772-1803 > Polish poet Ignacy Krasicki, often named Poland’s La Fontaine after the publication of his own “Fables and Parables” (1779), was also a translator and translation theorist. Krasicki’s first essay “On the Translation of Books” (“O przekładaniu ksiąg”) was published in 1772, and his second essay “On Translating Books” (“O tłumaczeniu książ”) was published posthumously in 1803. In his second essay, he wrote that “Translation is in fact an art both estimable and very difficult, and therefore is not the labour and portion of common minds; it should be practiced by those who are themselves capable of being actors, when they see greater use in translating the works of others than in their own works, and hold higher than their own glory the service that they render their country.”

1772-1805 > Johann Gottfried Herder, a German literary critic and language theorist, published his “Treatise on the Origin of Language” (1772), that established the foundations of comparative philology. According to Herder, a translator should translate towards (and not from) his own language, a statement already expressed two centuries earlier by Martin Luther, who was the first European scholar to assess that one translates satisfactorily only towards his own language. Herder became a translator later in life. His two main translations were “Terpsichore” (1795-96), a translation and adaptation of German latinist Jakob Balde’s poems, and “The Cid” (1805), a free translation of “El Cantar de Mio Cid”, the oldest preserved Castilian epic poem.

1781-93 > Johann Heinrich Voss, a German scholar and classicist, produced a translation of Homer’s “Odyssey” (1781) that introduced Homer to the German literary world. He then translated Roman poet Virgil’s “Bucolics” and “Georgics” (1789) before translating Homer’s “Iliad” (1793), published with a revised translation of the “Odyssey”. After retiring in 1802, Voss accepted a professorship of classical literature at the University of Heidelberg in 1805. His high wages allowed him to devote himself to translating Latin and Greek classics until his death.

1783 > Onufry Andrzej Kopczyński, a Polish poet and grammarian, emphasized in 1783 that assiduous reading in a foreign language and listening to the spoken language was more helpful than using dictionaries to produce good translations.

1791 > In his “Essay on the Principles of Translation” (1791), Scottish historian Alexander Tytler also emphasized that assiduous reading was more helpful than using dictionaries. There was still not much concern for accuracy, and the watchword was ease of reading. Dictionaries and thesauri were not regarded as adequate guides for translating into a foreign language.

1797-1810 > German poet and critic August Schlegel translated Shakespeare’s plays into German from 1797 to 1810, and his highly praised translations turned them into German classics. Young composer Felix Mendelssohn, at age 17, drew his inspiration from Schlegel’s translation of “A Midsummer Night's Dream” to write his concert overture. Schlegel's translation of Shakespeare’s plays was edited by fellow poet and translator Ludwig Tieck, and completed by Dorothea Tieck, Ludwig Tieck’s daughter, and by fellow poet and translator Wolf
Heinrich Graf von Baudissin. Schlegel then translated into German works by Spanish dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1803-09), and works by Italian poet Dante and Portuguese poet Luís de Camões (1804). He translated into Latin the Sanskrit texts “Bhagavad Gita” (1823) and “Ramayana” (1829). According to the “Encyclopædia Britannica” (1911), “As an original poet Schlegel is unimportant, but as a poetical translator he has rarely been excelled.”

1799-1804 > Ludwig Tieck, a German poet and critic, translated Spanish novelist Cervantes’ novel “Don Quixote” into German with his daughter Dorothea Tieck from 1799 to 1804. He translated Elizabethan dramas in the two-volume “Altenglisches Theater” (1811). He edited August Schlegel’s translation of Shakespeare’s plays.

1800-99 > New standards were implemented for accuracy and style throughout the 19th century. For accuracy, the policy became “the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text (except for bawdy passages), with the addition of extensive explanatory footnotes” (in J.M. Cohen’s “Translation” entry, “Encyclopedia Americana”, 1986, vol. 27). For style, the aim was to constantly remind readers that they were reading a foreign classic.

1804-26 > Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German theologian and philosopher, produced a 6-volume translation of Plato’s works (vol. 1-5 in 1804-10, vol. 6 in 1826) that was influential during German Romanticism. In his seminal lecture “On the Different Methods of Translating” (1813), Schleiermacher opposed translation methods that moved the writer towards the reader, i.e. transparency, and translation methods that moved the reader towards the author, i.e. an extreme fidelity to the foreignness of the source text. Schleiermacher favoured the latter approach. His distinction between “domestication” (bringing the author to the reader) and “foreignization” (taking the reader to the author) later inspired the “non-transparent” theories developed in the 20th century.

1808-13 > Russian poet Vasily Zhukovsky’s melodious translations of German and English ballads, especially the ballads “Ludmila” (1808) and “Svetlana” (1813), became landmarks in Russian poetry. Both were free translations of German poet Gottfried August Bürger’s ballad “Lenore”. Zhukovsky later translated “Leonore” a third time, as part of his lifelong effort to develop a natural-sounding Russian dactylic hexameter. His translations of Friedrich Schiller’s poems became Russian classics, and were considered to be of equal if not higher quality than the originals. Zhukovsky also produced a verse translation of German writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s prose novella “Undine”. Written in a waltzing hexameter, Zhukovsky’s version inspired an opera libretto by Russian composer Tchaikovsky. After been criticized for its distortions from the original text, Zhukovsky’s translation of Homer’s “Odyssey” (1849) became a classic in its own right in the history of Russian poetry.

1818 > French writer Louise Swanton Belloc translated Irish poet and novelist Adelaide O’Keeffe’s “Patriarchal Times; or, the Land of Canaan: a Figurate History”, a retelling of the first five books of the Bible published in 1818. She befriended many literary figures, including French writers Victor Hugo, Emile Souvestre and Alphonse de Lamartine, English writer Charles Dickens, Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth and American writer Harriet Beecher Stowe. She translated Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, a book depicting the harsh living conditions of enslaved African-Americans. She also translated Scottish writer

1822-26 > Therese Albertine Louise Robinson, a German-American writer and linguist, translated Scottish writer Walter Scott’s novels “Old Mortality” and “The Black Dwarf” from English into German in 1822 under the pseudonym Ernst Berthold. She learned Serbian after reading German philologist Jacob Grimm’s translations and comments on Serbian folk songs. She translated Serbian folk songs herself with Goethe’s support and encouragement. Her translation “Volkslieder der Serben” (Folk Songs of the Serbs) appeared in 1826, and was praised by Goethe and the German literary world. She later translated American linguist John Pickering’s seminal article “On Indian languages of North America” published in “Encyclopedia Americana” (1830-31), under the title “Über die Indianischen Sprachen Amerikas” (1834).

1833-67 > American scholar and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow translated medieval Castilian poet Jorge Manrique’s funeral eulogy “Verses on the Death of his Father” (“Coplas a la muerte de su padre”) into English in 1833. He edited “The Poets and Poetry of Europe” (1845), an 800-page compilation of translated poems, including poems translated by his colleague and friend Cornelius Conway Felton. The anthology was meant “to bring together, into a compact and convenient form, as large an amount as possible of those English translations which are scattered through many volumes, and not accessible to the general reader.” Longfellow spent several years translating Italian poet Dante’s “Divine Comedy”. He organized weekly meetings with a group of friends named the Dante Club to help him perfect the translation and to review proofs. The 3-volume translation was published in 1867, and went through four printings in its first year. Longfellow’s last years were spent translating Italian artist Michelangelo’s poetry, with a posthumous edition published in 1883.

1834 > English writer Sarah Austin translated from French into English in 1834 the “Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia” that French philosopher Victor Cousin wrote for the Count de Montalivet, then French Minister of Public Instruction. In the preface to the translation, Sarah Austin personally pleaded for the cause of national education. Her other translations included works by German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Carové, German historian Leopold von Ranke, German prince Hermann and French historian François Guizot. Sarah Austin always stood for her intellectual rights as a translator, writing that “It has been my invariable practice, as soon as I have engaged to translate a work, to write to the author to it, announcing my intention, and adding that if he has any correction, omission, or addition to make, he might depend on my paying attention to his suggestions.”

1838-45 > Charlotte Guest, an English scholar and liberal educator, translated the “Mabinogion” from Welsh into English from the manuscript transcription made by Welsh writer Tegid when he was a young scholar at Oxford University. The “Mabinogion” was a series of medieval stories compiled from 12th- and 13th-century oral traditions, and the earliest prose stories in Britain. Charlotte Guest’s 7-volume translation was published in 1838-45. A new 3-volume edition was published in 1849 by the Tonn Press in Wales and by Longmans in London. Both editions were bilingual (Welsh transcription and English translation), with many
scholarly footnotes, full illustrations and gold-tooled leather covers. A new edition in one single volume was published in 1877 with the English translation only, and became the standard edition.

1842-51 > Matilda Hays, an English journalist and novelist, and her friend Elizabeth Ashurst, an English radical activist, teamed up to translate French novelist George Sand’s works into English from 1842 to 1851. George Sand’s free-love and independent lifestyle was still unusual in the 19th century, as well as the political and social issues tackled in her books. They translated George Sand’s “Spiridon” (“Spiridon”), “Letters of a Traveller” (“Lettres d’un voyageur”), “The Master Mosaic-Workers” (“Les maîtres mosaïstes”) and “André” (“André”). Matilda Hays translated “La Dernière Aldini” alone, before meeting with Elizabeth Ashurst, and translated “Fadette” alone too after Elizabeth Ashurst’s death in childbirth. Matilda Hays wrote in her own novel “Helen Stanley” (1846) that women couldn’t secure their financial and social future until they “teach their daughters to respect themselves to work for their daily bread, rather than prostitute their persons and hearts” in marriages. She also co-founded the monthly “English Woman’s Journal” (1858-64).

1842-63 > Mary Howitt, an English poet and writer, translated Swedish writer Fredrika Bremer’s novels into English. Her 18-volume translation (1842-63) helped introduce Fredrika Bremer to English readers, including her ideas as a feminist reformer. Mary Howitt also translated Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales, for example “Only a Fiddler” (1845), “The Improvisators” (1845), “Wonderful Stories for Children” (1846) and “The True Story of Every Life” (1847). She translated German physician Joseph Ennemoser’s “History of Magic” (1854) in the same spirit, for his ideas to reach an English audience too.

1843-78 > English feminist writer Anna Swanwick translated works by German poets Goethe and Schiller, and published her translations as “Selections from the Dramas of Goethe and Schiller” (1843), with Goethe’s “Torquato Tasso” and “Iphigenia in Tauris”, and Schiller’s “Maid of Orleans”. She produced blank-verse translations of other works by Goethe (1850, 2nd edition in 1878). Her translation of Goethe’s “Faust” was highly praised and republished several times. She also translated Greek tragedian Aeschylus’ plays in 1873. She was interested in many social issues of her day, especially the education of women and the working classes. She helped extending the King’s College lectures to women. She advocated the study of English literature in universities, and gave private lectures to young working men and women.

1847-51 > Swedish linguist Carl August Hagberg translated Shakespeare’s plays into Swedish, published in a 12-volume edition (1847-51). Some of his work was based on a previous translation by Johan Henrik Thomander dated 1825. Hagberg was a member of the Swedish Academy from 1851 until his death.

1847-55 > American feminist Julia Evelina Smith produced her own translation of the Bible into English from 1847 to 1855, after reading the Bible in its original languages, with an emphasis on literalism. Her translation was published in 1876, before the publication of the “English Revised Version of the King James Bible” (1881-94), regarded as the official authorized English edition of the Bible.

**1859-89** > English poet Edward FitzGerald produced several editions of “Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám”, the first English translation and adaptation of the many poems written by Omar Khayyám, an 11th-century Persian mathematician, astronomer and philosopher. FitzGerald authorized four editions (1859, 1868, 1872, 1879) of his translation. A fifth posthumous edition (1889) was edited after his death on the basis of the revised manuscript he had left. It is now believed that a significant portion of the “Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám” was FitzGerald’s own creation, but it has stayed the most famous translation of Khayyám’s poems to this day, despite more recent and accurate translations.

**1861-65** > Mary Louise Booth, an American writer and editor, translated major works of her time from French into English. When the American Civil War started in 1861, she translated French anti-slavery advocate Agénor de Gasparin’s “Uprising of a Great People” in a very short time by working twenty hours a day for one week. The English edition was published in a fortnight by American publisher Scribner’s. Mary Louise Booth then translated other books by anti-slavery advocates, including Agénor de Gasparin’s “America before Europe” in 1861, Pierre-Suzanne-Augustin Cochin’s “Results of Emancipation” and “Results of Slavery” in 1862, and Édouard René de Laboulaye’s “Paris in America” in 1865. She received praise and encouragement from president Abraham Lincoln, senator Charles Sumner and other statesmen. Sumner wrote her a letter stating that her translations had been of more value to the cause “than the Numidian cavalry to Hannibal”. Mary Louise Booth translated other French books by Gasparin, Laboulaye, educator Jean Macé, historian Henri Martin and philosopher Blaise Pascal.

**1862-73** > Clémence Royer, a self-taught French scholar, translated English naturalist Charles Darwin’s seminal work “On the Origin of Species” (1859). In the first French edition (1862), Clémence Royer went beyond her role as a translator, with a 60-page preface expressing her own views and detailed explanatory footnotes that made Darwin unhappy. The translation’s second edition (1866) included some changes made at Darwin’s request to correct some errors and inaccuracies. The translation’s third edition (1873) was produced without Darwin’s consent, with a second preface that also made Darwin unhappy, and with no mention of the additions to the fourth and fifth English editions. The translation only included an appendix stating the additions to the sixth English edition published in 1872. However her controversial translation brought fame to Clémence Royer, who extensively lectured on philosophy, feminism, economics and science, including on Darwinism.
1876 > Socialist activist Eleanor Marx translated some parts of her father Karl Marx’s “Capital” from German into English, before translating French revolutionary socialist Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray’s “History of the Paris Commune of 1871” (“L’histoire de la Commune de 1871”) from French into English in 1876. She also translated literary works, for example French novelist Gustave Flaubert’s “Madame Bovary” and Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s “An Enemy of the People” (“En folkefiende”) in 1888, and “The Lady from the Sea” (“Frue fra havet”) in 1890.

1883-97 > Katherine Prescott Wormeley, an American nurse working in the U.S. Sanitary Commission during the American Civil War, was also a writer and translator. She translated many French literary classics into English, for example all Honoré de Balzac’s novels with a 40-volume translation published in 1883-97, Molière’s plays, with a 6-volume translation published in 1892, as well as Henri de Saint-Simon’s memoirs and novels by Alexandre Dumas and Alphonse Daudet. She also wrote a “Life of Balzac” in 1892.

1883-1900 > Francesca Alexander, an American writer and illustrator, collected folk songs, tales and customs in Tuscany, Italy, and translated them into English with her own drawings. In 1882, she met English art critic John Ruskin, who became a close friend and correspondent until his death. Ruskin purchased her two manuscripts, and published “The Story of Ida” (1883) and “Roadside Songs of Tuscany” (1884-85), before publishing her third manuscript “Christ’s Folk in the Apennines” (1887-89). After Ruskin’s death, Francesca Alexander published herself “Tuscan Songs” (1897) and “The Hidden Servants and Other Very Old Stories Told Over” (1900).

1898 > Chinese scholar Yan Fu, who translated many works in social sciences from English into Chinese, developed his three-facet theory of translation in 1898: faithfulness, i.e. be true to the original in spirit; expressiveness, i.e. be accessible to the target reader; and elegance, i.e. be written in an “educated” language. Of the three facets, he considered the second as the most important. If the meaning of the translated text was not accessible to the reader, there was no difference between having translated the text and not having translated the text at all. In order to facilitate comprehension, the word order could be changed, Chinese examples could replace English ones, and people’s names could be rendered Chinese. His theory had much impact worldwide, but was sometimes wrongly extended to the translation of literary works.

1898-1904 > French physician Joseph Charles Mardrus translated “One Thousand and One Nights” into French under the title “Le Livre des mille et une nuits”. His 12-volume translation (1898-1904) was published by Henri Piazza, before being translated from French to English by English poet Edward Powys Mathers. Mardrus published a second edition of the French translation in 1926-32. Mardrus’ elegant translation was mentioned by French novelist Marcel Proust in “Remembrance of Things Past” (“À la recherche du temps perdu”). Mardrus inserted some material of his own to satisfy the tastes of his time, and is not entirely authentic translation is now less praised than other translations.

1903-09 > Russian poet and novelist Ivan Bunin was awarded the Pushkin Prize twice, first in 1903 for his collection of poetry “Falling Leaves” (1901) and his translation of American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha”, and then in 1909 for his collection
of poetry “Poems 1903-1906” and his two translations of Longfellow’s “The Golden Legend” and of English poet Byron’s “Cain”. Bunin also translated some works by English Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson and by French poets François Musset and François Coppée.

1922-30 > Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff was a Scottish writer who earned his living as a translator of French literary works. His main translation was the translation of French writer Marcel Proust’s 7-volume novel “Remembrance of Things Past” (“À la recherche du temps perdu”) from 1922 to 1930. The translation of the seventh volume was left unfinished because of his death. He chose the second verse of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 30 as a non-literal translation of the novel’s title, that was later replaced by “In Search of Lost Time” in other translations. Scott Moncrieff’s translation contributed to the fame of Proust in the English literary sphere. However Proust wrote that he was not happy with some translation choices, offending his translator who replied with irony. On the contrary, Polish-English novelist Joseph Conrad thought that Scott Moncrieff’s translation was of higher quality than the original novel. Scott Moncrieff translated French medieval classics before translating Proust, and later translated French novels by Stendhal and Italian plays by Luigi Pirandello.

1923-39 > Polish translator Aniela Zagórska translated into Polish from 1923 to 1939 most works written by her uncle Joseph Conrad, a Polish-British novelist who wrote in English. In Conrad’s view, translation, like other arts, inescapably involved choice, and choice implied interpretation. Conrad would later advise his niece: “Don’t trouble to be too scrupulous. I may tell you that in my opinion it is better to interpret than to translate. It is, then, a question of finding the equivalent expressions. And there, my dear, I beg you to let yourself be guided more by your temperament than by a strict conscience” (cited in Zdzisław Najder, “Joseph Conrad: A Life”, 2007).

1939-45 > Russian poet Mikhail Lozinsky translated Italian poet Dante’s “Divine Comedy” into Russian. Completed in seven years (1939-45) despite his poor health, his translation earned him the Stalin Prize in 1946. Russian modernist poet Anna Akhmatova wrote in her book “My Half-Century” that, “In the difficult and noble art of translation, Lozinsky was for the twentieth century what Zhukovsky was for the nineteenth”. Russian lyrical poet Alexander Blok credited Lozinsky’s translations as superior to Zhukovsky’s translations. Lozinsky also translated Shakespeare’s plays, but his translations were less popular than contemporary translations by Pasternak and Marshak. Some critics found Lozinsky’s translations “obscure, heavy and unintelligible” because they did not try to modernize Shakespeare’s style by stripping it of some details and puns. However Anna Akhmatova thought that Lozinsky brilliantly achieved his aim of “conveying the age of Shakespeare’s language and the complexity about which even the English complain.”

1942-51 > Russian writer Samuil Marshak’s main translation was the translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets into Russian in 1948. The translated sonnets inspired several Russian classical, pop and rock musicians over the years. Marshak translated many other poets (William Blake, William Wordsworth, Robert Burns, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, William Butler Yeats, Edward Lear and others). His poetic translations are now so entrenched in Russian culture that their translator is regarded more as a co-author than a translator. Over his career, Marshak won four Stalin Prizes (1942, 1946, 1949 and 1951). His third Stalin Prize was awarded for his translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets.
1943 > Cesare Pavese, an Italian poet, novelist and literary critic, translated English and American writers who were then new to the Italian literary sphere, including American poet Edgar Lee Masters’ "Spoon River Anthology", a collection of free verse poems. His translation was published by Einaudi in 1943. During his years in Turin, Italy, Pavese was the mentor of Fernanda Pivano, who later became a writer and translator herself. He gave Fernanda Pivano both editions (English and Italian) of “Spoon River Anthology” for her to better understand the difference between an original work and a translated work.

1949 > Fernanda Pivano, an Italian writer, journalist and literary critic, translated Ernest Hemingway’s novel “A Farewell to Arms” into Italian in 1949. She had met Ernest Hemingway the previous year, resulting in an intense collaboration and friendship. Fernanda Pivano’s many translations introduced American writers to an Italian audience, from the great icons of the Roaring Twenties (F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker and William Faulkner) through the writers of the 1960s (Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Gregory Corso and Lawrence Ferlinghetti) to a new generation of young writers (Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis, David Foster Wallace, Chuck Palahniuk and Jonathan Safran Foer).

1956-60 > Russian poet and novelist Boris Pasternak — the acclaimed author of “Doctor Zhivago” (1957) — had to turn to translation from 1956 to 1960 in order to provide for his family. He produced translations of works by German poets Goethe, Rilke and Schiller, French poet Verlaine, Spanish dramatist Calderón de la Barca and English playwright Shakespeare. His translations of Shakespeare’s plays were popular with Russian audiences because of their colloquial and modernized dialogues. Pasternak wrote in an essay dated 1956 that “Translating Shakespeare is a task which takes time and effort. Once it is undertaken, it is best to divide it into sections long enough for the work not to get stale and to complete one section each day. In thus daily progressing through the text, the translator finds himself reliving the circumstances of the author. Day by day, he reproduces his actions and he is drawn into some of his secrets, not in theory, but practically, by experience.” Pasternak also translated works by Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi, Polish poet Juliusz Słowacki, Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko and Georgian poet Nikoloz Baratashvili. Much earlier, in 1942, he wrote in a letter to Russian poet Olga Ivinskaya, who was his friend and lover: “I am completely opposed to contemporary ideas about translation. The work of Lozinski, Radlova, Marshak, and Chukovsky is alien to me, and seems artificial, soulless, and lacking in depth. I share the nineteenth century view of translation as a literary exercise demanding insight of a higher kind than that provided by a merely philological approach.”

1956-72 > James S. Holmes, an American-Dutch poet, also translated poetry from Dutch into English. He received in 1956 the Martinus Nijhoff Award, named after Dutch poet and essayist Nijhoff. When the literary magazine “Delta” was founded in 1958 to report on Dutch culture in the Netherlands and Belgium, Holmes became its poetry editor, and translated contemporary Dutch poetry for the magazine. Holmes was the first to coin the term “Translation Studies” in his paper “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (1972), that became the founding statement of the new discipline. He taught translation studies at the University of Amsterdam and wrote a number of influential articles about translation.
1960-80? > Jorge Luis Borges, an Argentine short-story writer, essayist and poet, translated a number of literary works from English, French, German, Old English or Old Norse into Spanish. Borges also wrote and lectured extensively on the art of translation, “holding that a translation may improve upon the original, may even be unfaithful to it, and that alternative and potentially contradictory renderings of the same work can be equally valid” (Wikipedia).

1961 > Albanian scholar and politician Fan Noli produced a translation of the New Testament from Albanian into English, published in 1961 under the title “The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the approved Greek text of the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Greece”. Two days after Noli’s death in 1965, Albanian leader Enver Hoxha wrote in his diary: “Noli was one of the prominent political and literary figures of the beginning of this century. He today enjoys a great popularity in our country, deserved as a literary translator and music critic. He was a prominent promoter of the Albanian language. He was also respected as a realistic politician, and as a revolutionary democrat in ideology and politics.”


1964-67 > Russian-American novelist Vladimir Nabokov wrote his first nine novels in Russian, and translated them into English later on. His novel “Lolita” (1955), written in English, brought him international fame. On translating “Lolita” into Russian, Nabokov wrote: “I imagined that in some distant future somebody might produce a Russian version of ‘Lolita’. I trained my inner telescope upon that particular point in the distant future and I saw that every paragraph, pock-marked as it is with pitfalls, could lend itself to hideous mistranslation. In the hands of a harmful drudge, the Russian version of ‘Lolita’ would be entirely degraded and botched by vulgar paraphrases or blunders. So I decided to translate it myself.” The Russian edition was published by Phaedra Publishers in New York City in 1967. Nabokov also translated Russian poet Alexander Pushkin’s “Eugene Onegin” from Russian into English, and the 4-volume English edition was published in 1964.


Please see also:
* A short history of translation and translators
* History of translation and translators — timeline
* Some famous women translators of the past
* Dictionary of famous translators through the ages

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