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THE STATUS OF TRANSLATED LITERATURE IN THE CREATION OF HEBREW LITERATURE IN PRE-STATE ISRAEL (THE *YISHUV* PERIOD)

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Résumé

Cet article traite de la fonction centrale remplie par la littérature traduite dans la cristallisation de la culture hébraïque originale, de la manière dont la littérature traduite a été utilisée pour prendre le relais d'une littérature originale absente et de la perception de l'activité traductionnelle comme une forme de création littéraire.

Il analyse le changement d'attitude qui est alors survenu et retrace le processus par lequel l'activité traduisante, d'abord favorisée parce que perçue comme une condition essentielle à l'émergence d'un centre littéraire, a ensuite été accueillie avec hostilité parce qu'elle rivaliserait avec une culture et une littérature hébraïque originales.

Lorsque le système littéraire est devenu à peu près complet, la littérature traduite cessa de jouer le rôle de «pis-aller» qu'elle avait assumé durant les premières années de l'établissement d'un centre littéraire en Eretz-Israël. La question du rapport souhaitable entre littérature originale et littérature traduite n'en demeura pas moins une question fondamentale pour les responsables chargés de déterminer la politique éditoriale. On constate alors une tolérance moindre à l'égard de la littérature traduite (allant de pair avec des demandes visant à réduire les crédits alloués à la traduction) et un appel à une «amélioration» du statut de la littérature originale.

Abstract

This article discusses the central function translated litterature had in the crystallization of original Hebrew culture. It looks at how translated literature was used to fill some of the missing functions of original literature and how the activity of translation was perceived as a form of literary creation.

It analyses the process according to which the attitude towards translational activity changed from a favorite one (regarding it as an essential condition for the creation of a literary center), to a hostile one which saw it as a rival to original literature and Hebrew culture.

When the literary system began to be self-sufficient, translated literature was no longer required to serve a "stop-gap" as it was the case in the early years of the establishment of a literary center in Eretz-Israel. The debate about the desired relationship between original and translated literature continued all the same to be one of the fundamental issues facing those responsible for determining editorial policy, showing decreasing tolerance for the status of translated literature and demanding an "improvement" in the status of original writing, together with calls to allocate fewer resources to translation.

1.

The role of Hebrew literature and literature in Hebrew, in the formation of an autonomous Jewish national society in Eretz-Israel (pre-State Palestine) was firmly on the agenda of Yishuv society (the Jewish society of the pre-State period) from its inception. It is in this

framework that the question of the appropriate or correct relationship between original and translated literature was first broached.

Translated literature was initially accorded a central status in the crystallization of original Hebrew culture, and was used to fill some of the missing functions of original literature. Moreover, the activity of translation was to some extent perceived as a form of literary creation. In one characteristic formulation of this view, Jacob Steinberg writes (1937 : 45): "There is nothing lacking in a place which possesses creative writing, even if this is the creative writing of translation".

During the period between 1908-1920, translation was not viewed as a rival to original literature and Hebrew culture, as would be the case later on. Rather it was felt to be an essential condition for the creation of a literary center, without which the growth of a readership would be impossible, publishers would not come into being, nor would a printing and publishing industry be developed. The desire to see the development of such institutions overcame the resistance of those who sought to establish the hegemony of original literature in Hebrew, in favor of the centrality of translated literature in the national literary system. The emphasis lay at this time not only, or not primarily, on Hebrew literature but on literature *in Hebrew*.

This viewpoint found expression in the activity of bodies which published translated literature during this period. Of the ten bodies active in publishing in Eretz-Israel at this time, no fewer than four concentrated on publishing translated literature: **La-Am**, **Japheth**, **The Palestine Office** (**Ha-Misrad Ha-Eretz-Israeli**: the executive arm of the Zionist Labor Union) and **Ba-Kefar**. The **La-Am** publishing house, affiliated to the **Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'ir** party, was active in Jaffa until the outbreak of World War 1, and published 89 translated volumes in Hebrew. Most of these were publications on various scientific topics, but a few were devoted exclusively to *belles lettres.*

Japhet was established in Jaffa in 1910. It sought to publish world masterpieces in Hebrew translation, and put out three literary anthologies that included translations of texts which the owners of this publishing house perceived as "classics." These anthologies were eventually discontinued, partly for financial reasons but also for reasons relating to the development of the Hebrew literary system. It was difficult for the publishers to find translators willing to work for them, as is evident from Joseph Chayyim Brenner's letter to Daniel Persky of 17.7.1910 (Brenner 1966-67). The publishing house also suffered financial difficulties stemming from the relatively small circulation of its published works.

The literary preferences of the publishers vacillated between the desire to translate a classic canon of world texts into Hebrew, on the one hand, and the desire to translate a literature displaying worthy public and educational values, on the other hand. In expounding his literary preferences, Brenner writes to Persky explaining that the relative scarcity of translators and the high cost of translation require that only select texts be translated: literature which has an "educational" rather than "phony" status. The length of the book was also a factor for consideration. Brenner said that he hoped to find translators for *Hamlet*, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Don Juan*, and *Manfred*, or for a volume of Shelley's poems. When he suggested publishing some of Johannes Jensen's texts, he motivated his suggestion in a letter to Yosef Aharonovitch dated 11.7.1912, stating that "in addition to their decent artistic worth, they have public and educational value, too: to teach the children of Judah the love of work and the building of life" (Brenner 1966-67).

It was, somewhat paradoxically, World War 1 that served as a catalyst for translation activity, when **The Palestine Office** was called upon to sustain literary life in pre-State Israel. As early as the beginning of the war, the Office established a committee, including such figures as Dr. Nisan Turov, Joseph Chayyim Brenner and Yitzhak Wilkansky, to institute a comprehensive program for the translation of world masterpieces. The committee

decided to set in motion a translation project, to which 500 francs were allocated monthly, in order to assist those writers resident in Eretz-Israel who were suffering from financial need as a result of the War (Central Zionist Archive, file L2/91). Its chief goal was to enable Eretz-Israeli writers to support themselves through literary activity, while simultaneously enriching the supply of literature on the shelves. Publishing policy was determined accordingly. The committee decided to translate only classic texts, and rejected various proposals to translate texts which appeared to deviate from this mold. Thus, for example, they wrote to Yehuda Kadish Silman on 16.7.1916 stating the following: "Since we now desire to produce only translations of classic authors, we cannot approve the suggestion to translate the writings of Pinski" (Central Zionist Archive, file L2/91). The committee wished to translate the best of world literature, hereby contributing to the enrichment of Hebrew literature, and ensuring that the would-be intellectual could find not only original texts in Hebrew, but world classics, too.

At its first meeting, it was decided to translate the following texts, among others:

> Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, Selma Lagerlof's *Jerusalem*, Alphonse Daudet's *Aventures prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon*, Auerbach's *Barfüßele*, Victor Hugo's *L'homme qui rit*, and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. Some other texts were added at a later stage: Le Sage's *Gil Blas*, Schiller's *Die Räuber*, George Sand's *La petite Fadette*, François-René de Chateaubriand's *René*, and Arthur Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardi*.

The program instituted by the office was far-reaching in both temporal and geographical terms. Some of these texts were subsequently published in the **Ha-Kefar** library series, and in the framework of **Sifriyya Chaklait** (the "Agricultural Library") edited by Yitzhak Wilkanski. Others were published years later by a variety of publishers. It is interesting to note that despite the impending British conquest, this list of texts included relatively few works in English. Instead texts in the European languages, especially Russian, German and French were emphasized.

Despite the fact that the leadership of the Yishuv was enlisted to promote the enterprise of translating texts into Hebrew, publishing policy concerning translated literature was far more selective than considerations regarding the publication of original literature in Hebrew. Two trends were especially prominent. The first may be termed an aesthetic editorial policy, and the second, quantitative or promotional.

The common denominator here was the realization that without culture and a cultural environment, it would be impossible for a national Jewish community to evolve in Eretz-Israel. It was thus necessary to publish books in all fields of life in Hebrew. The difference between the editorial orientations was the result of differing cultural ideologies. The first orientation, dominant among the labor parties, held that aesthetic criteria and criteria of worth should determine whether or not a particular book was suitable for translation into Hebrew. The leaders of the labor parties emphasized the need to publish books of perceived ideological value. Both original and translated literature was required to suit the needs of the Hebrew laborer, and to assist him in his professional advancement.

The second orientation, whose supporters includes Ze'ev Jabotinsky, stressed the quantitative flowering of national culture rather than qualitative factors or criteria of worth. Consequently, Jabotinsky suggested establishing a comprehensive project of translation and original writing. He also sought to establish a national press which would assist in widening the Hebrew readership, in disseminating the Hebrew language and in promoting original Hebrew literature and literature in Hebrew translation. In his view, the role of such a press was to publish useful texts, particularly texts which had a chance of becoming popular best-sellers. Jabotinsky rested his case on two assumptions: 1. The state of national culture then current required that Eretz-Israel be saturated with all kinds and genres of books — since

there could be no national culture without literature, and any void would be filled by foreign literature. 2. Given that Hebrew literature was unable to meet this task on the basis of its original resources alone, a translation program was imperative. Jabotinsky's opinion of original literature (especially prose) is reflected in the decisively marginal place he allocated to it in his publishing program (Jabotinsky 1919).

2.

When the time came for Hebrew writers to evaluate the development of Hebrew literature in Eretz-Israel over the War years, from the distance of hindsight approximately a decade later, it became apparent that their relationship to it had shifted. They were especially ambivalent towards the place and role of translated literature in the process of establishing a literary center in Eretz-Israel. Thus, in the early nineteen-thirties, Jacob Fichmann, one of the national poet Bialik's Pleiad of disciples, evaluated the effect of translation on the evolution of Hebrew literature in negative terms:

> At the present time, when books appear in their tens, hundreds and thousands, so that there is sometimes no escape from this dominion of paper which already strangles true culture under its weight, there are some who would linger for hours before the bookshelf seeking [...] a book. Today there is no longer any literary life, books are not even written any more but merely spewed out [...] Recent times, times of building literature, must arouse a process of soul-searching in each and every one of us when we contemplate this foreign property penetrating from the treasures of the universal spirit. We reluctantly survey our life's work, and cannot but be enfeebled by the prospect. (Fichmann ND)

Asher Barash, editor of the journal *Hedim*, the first periodical of Hebrew modernity, felt that translated literature had come to dominate Hebrew literature to such an extent that it threatened the existence of original literature. This despite the fact that he had argued in the early nineteen-tens that the intensive translation activity under way was of special importance in the creation of a Hebrew readership. Barash thought that a large portion of this readership preferred translated literature, since original literature was unable to meet many of its needs. So, in his view, translated literature actually prevented the flight of the potential readership from consuming texts written in Hebrew. But by the end of the nineteen-twenties, Barash saw translated literature as the prime reason for the slow development of original Hebrew prose. In 1929, he wrote in the *Ahmanac Mizpeh*: "The great translation enterprise established in Eretz-Israel and abroad seems to cast a shadow over original Hebrew prose, and to reduce it to a mere fraction".

It seems that even the most prominent supporters of translated literature had shifted their position by the end of the nineteen-twenties, now maintaining that translation stifled original writing. Some, like Barash, saw this as a "process, which was natural and necessary." In other words, it was natural that the system of translated literature should be so central to the polysystem of Hebrew literature, since it compensated for the absence of certain types of original literature (see Even-Zohar 1978). Other figures saw this dominance as a real threat to the very existence of original Hebrew literature.

In defense of translated literature, Barash argued that the fact that the Hebrew writer had become the translator of universal masterpieces (a "valet" to use Barash's metaphor) enabled him to improve his literary craftsmanship and simultaneously to improve the literary tastes of his readership. In opposition to Fichmann's pessimistic evaluation, Barash held that translated literature served as a preliminary stage preparing the way for original literature. In 1929, he reiterated his position that translation filled a gap in Hebrew literature and helped to set new criteria for original works: a readership who had been "pampered" with

the best of world literature would reject original literature of inferior quality. He believed that original Hebrew literature could withstand the threat of translation by starting to place greater emphasis on realistic description and on plot, the hallmarks of most of the prose translated during the nineteen-twenties. Translated literature, seen as filling a gap, was perceived by Barash, therefore, as setting standards for original Hebrew literature and as a model for imitation.

3.

Despite the feelings of the men of letters concerning the dominance of translated literature, factually speaking translations only outstripped original literature in quantitative terms in the year 1928 — and this only if the length of the books translated is taken into consideration (their number of pages) rather than the absolute number of titles.

The year 1928 saw the publication of 65 translated works as opposed to 87 original works, in comparison to 26 translated works and 61 original works in 1925 (Tschernowitz 1929 : 9). The proportion of translated to original works was chiefly determined by the activities of the **Stybel** press, which by the mid-nineteen-twenties incorporated other publishers in Europe and Eretz-Israel, such as **Omanut**, **Mizpeh**, **Turgemann**, **Ha-Shilo'ah**, and so on. The **Mizpeh** publishing house, for its part, issued 15 original works in the years 1928-1929, and 29 translated works, as opposed to 3 original works and 16 translated works in the years 1926-1927.

The problem of "discrimination" against original literature was raised again and again whenever the state of Hebrew literature was discussed, particularly in discussions concerning the state of the Hebrew writer. Various writers issued bitter recriminations against the Hebrew publishing houses, accusing them of a policy which discriminated against original literature in favor of translations. The **Omanut** Press was a case in point. In 1932 it issued one original work as opposed to 30 translations; while the **Stybel** press did not publish even a single original work during that year (see Norman 1932).

The intensive publication of translations created the impression that translated literature was competing with original literature, and taking over the publishing industry. This impression was reinforced by the activities of **Stybel** during the thirties, reflected in the massive importing of books into Eretz-Israel on the one hand, and the almost total neglect of original literature on the other hand. With the exception of the periodical *Ha-Tekufah*, it concentrated on translating "classic" works.

Unlike **Stybel**, the **Mizpeh** publishing house sought to provide the Hebrew reader with "readable" prose. According to the views of its editor, Asher Barash, since original prose could not meet the readership's needs, translated literature should be published. As editor of the **Mizpeh** library series, Barash sought to make translated literature a standard for original literature to emulate, using the former to change the norms of the latter. By means of the massive translation of realist prose, Barash hoped to alter the norms of original Hebrew writing which displayed a dominantly pyschological/symbolist orientation. The central factor motivating **Mizpeh**'s editorial policy was not the putative "literariness" of a given text, but its potential popularity with the readership, although **Mizpeh** refrained from publishing non-canonized literature. **Mizpeh** may be said to have published canonized literature, of a more popular nature. In accordance with its editorial policy, the year 1928 saw **Mizpeh**'s publication of Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Jack London's *The Son of the Wolf*, and Johan Bojer's *Den store hunger* [*The Great Hunger*] (pamphlet issued by the publishers).

It is, however, worth noting that when **Mizpeh** found original prose works that met its editor's criteria of "readability," the ratio between original and translated prose changed.

While, during the years 1926-27, **Mizpeh** published 3 original works and 16 translations, during the years 1928-29, as many as 15 original works were published as opposed to 29 translated works, and towards the year 1930, the prose publishing program and other projects culminated in the issue of 15 original works and 28 translations. Only one of these original texts was, however, a work of poetry.

4.

Analysis of translation policy, as presented in Toury's 1977 study, reveals that the prime determinants influencing translation had to do with the original language of the source text, the national origin of the author/translator and the position of the source text in the hierarchy of the source literature.

4.1. Source Language

1. Translation into Hebrew proceeded from three main source languages: English, Russian and German. Together, these three served as the principal sources of translations for all the leading publishers, with the exception of **Dvir** which specialized in Yiddish. Between 1918-1928, 26 German texts were translated, 24 Russian texts, 22 French texts, 20 English texts, 12 Yiddish texts and 6 Swedish works. A few books originally written in a variety of languages including Spanish, Italian, the Jewish Spanish dialect, Greek, Latin, Rumanian and Persian were also translated.

2. Internal divisions among the principle language groups shows a definite regularity, although English grows constantly as a source for translated works.

4.2. The Writer's Country of Origin and the Status of the Text in the Source Literature

1. The writer's Jewishness or his propensity for writing about Jewish themes was a factor encouraging the selection of certain texts, not only in Yiddish, but also in German (and to some extent in the other languages). This orientation is especially prominent during the Nazi period when Jewish writers were persecuted. The publishing ideology characteristic of this period saw translation as a means of "returning stray lambs to the fold."

2. Other texts were selected on the basis of their "belonging to the classics," which triggered another category, "approximate classics" deemed suitable potential candidates for translation. New texts were preferred if they were felt to resemble classic texts, and were rejected when they were felt to be more "modern." This orientation chiefly characterized translation from English and American sources, and was less active in translation from Russian and German, where a greater openness to texts perceived as modern was in evidence.

3. Novels were the preferred source of narrative translation. Novellas took second place, but were still ranked above collections of short stories. There were two clear preferences among the novel category: the *Bildungsroman* on the one hand, and the social novel, on the other.

4. These considerations become especially important when the selection procedures of the **Sifriyyat Ha-Po'alim** (The Workers' Library) are taken into account. Here there is a clear preference for literature with a social — even socialist — orientation, whether Soviet in origin or not. Such overt politicization of editorial policy did not, of course, characterize **Stybel** and **Mizpeh** which were privately owned. **Mizpeh** displayed an orientation which favored translations from English of "near-classic" works; whereas **Stybel** tended to use German classic or near classic sources.

5.

Translated literature also played a central role in the development of non-official Hebrew literature. This is apparent from investigation of the so-called "short novel." The most prominent phenomenon here is the increased weight of translated versus original texts. The 700 short novels published by the **Ha-Roman Ha-Zair** and **Kolmus** presses heralded the beginning of massive cultural and publishing activity, reflected in the longstanding availability on book-stands of soft-cover books and journals printed on cheap paper, as well as of properly bound works in more impressive formats.

The very extent of the non-canonized translated system was itself evidence of the potential existence of a vast readership for non-canonized works written in Hebrew. But the reviled status of non-canonized literature led to a decrease in production of original works in general literary output.

Another reason for the flowering of translation might be related to the expectations of the readership. It is possible to assume that the readership preferred literature with a foreign flavor, rather than literature with a familiar, local flavor. This assumption is reinforced by the prominence of a new model in the non-canonized system: original Hebrew texts which displaced the setting of their plots from Eretz-Israel under the British mandate to foreign, far-flung and exotic locations, introducing completely foreign heroes who constituted exact parallels of their counterparts in non-canonized European literature.

6.

In summary: Three publishing houses dominated translated literature for adults over the nineteen-twenties: **Mizpeh**, **Stybel**, and **Omanut**. Together, they were responsible for 80% of all translations into Hebrew (Toury 1977 : 123). When **Mizpeh** and **Stybel** virtually ceased their activities over the period 1937-38, their role in producing translated texts was taken over by **Sifriyyat Ha-Po'alim**, **Masada**, **Am Oved**, **Schocken** and **N[ahum] Twersky** which incorporated **Stybel**. The latter presses published two-thirds of all translated works in Hebrew over the period 1939-1945, and continued their massive translation programs during the first years after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Translated literature continued to be central to the literary system even once the latter began to be filled, and translated literature was no longer called upon to serve a "stop-gap" function as was the case in the early years of the establishment of a literary center in Eretz-Israel. The question of the desired relationship between original and translated works became one of the fundamental issues facing those responsible for determining editorial policy. Newspapers and journals published quite a considerable number of articles on this topic, showing decreasing tolerance for the status of translated literature and demanding an "improvement" in the status of original writing, together with calls to allocate fewer resources to translation.

The apparent fear that translated literature would marginalize original literature was the preoccupation of a literary center that had already established itself and become institutionalized. The *actual* centrality of translated literature, however, is characteristic of the literary center in Eretz-Israel during the early stages of its crystallization, when the literary center faced enormous material difficulties. During this early period, translated literature was not seen to compete with original literature and original Hebrew culture, but was perceived as a necessary condition for the creation of a literary center, without which there would be no readership, no presses, no publishing and printing industry. The desire to see the development of such institutions overcame the resistance of those who sought to establish the hegemony of original literature in Hebrew in favor of the centrality of translated literature in the national literary system.

Translated from the Hebrew by Louise Shabat Bethlehem

Note

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