

A Critique on the Translation of an Entry in Encyclopedia Iranica

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly Omar Khayyam is the most famous Persian poet in the West. His fame, on the one hand, rests upon his aphoristic and epigrammatic poems involving universal and enduring themes and subjects which are written in concise and rhythmic forms. On the other hand, Edward FitzGerald's (1809- 1883), the Victorian English poet-translator, masterly and poetic rendering made them on every tongue. No doubt Omar Khayyam had the greatest impact on literature and society in English speaking countries. Omar's poems, through FitzGerald's adaptation, borrowing John Dryden term, gradually traversed the western literatures and societies. Perhaps Omar Khayyam, as an "other", provided a mirror through which the West saw itself. According to Charles Eliot Norton (1869) the poem "reads like the latest and freshest expression of the perplexity and of the doubt of the generation to which we ourselves belong (567)."

2. Discussion

The present paper tries to analyze the Persian translation of one of *Encyclopedia Iranica* entries. To do so, the present author has tried to discuss it through the prism of fluency, fidelity, and exactness. This entry, which is written by Jos Biegstraaten, is entitled "Omar Khayyam: The Impact on Literature and Society in the West". This entry has been translated by Mostafa Sedaghat- Rustami and has been published by a monthly magazine named *Golestane* (June, 2014, 131, 67-69). Jos Biegstraaten (2015) wrote this essay, on the request of Professor Ehsan Yarshater, editor in chief, for *Encyclopedia Iranica*. This papers deals with the impact of Rubiyat of Omar Khayyam on literature and society in the West, that is to say, in England, America, France, Germany, and Netherlands. According to Biegstraaten, his influence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was vast and tremendous. Although, these days, its fame has declined slightly, it is still one of the most popular poems in the English language. Omar's poem has inspired freethinkers, pictorial artists, composers, and poets all over the world.

Jos Biegstraaten, one of the brilliant Omar-scholar in Netherlands and the head of The Dutch Omar Khayyám Society, has authored some scholarly and path breaking

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books and papers on Omar and FitzGerald poem. Some of his seminal papers are as follows: a) "Omar with a smile", (Biegstraaten, 2005); b) "Omar Khayyam: Impact on Literature and Society in the West", (Encyclopedia Iranica, 2008); c) "How Umar Khayyám Inspired Dutch Visual Artists", (Seyyed-Ghorab, 2012). Entry-writing is a difficult and laborious task. It requires special training and can't be done by everyone. Interesting to say, in some languages there is a separate word, encyclopedist, for someone who is an expert in it. In the same way, the translation of an encyclopedic entry entails some qualifications and is a hard nut to crack. First, one must have a good command of the source and target languages. Second, one must have a flair for writing. Third, one must be familiar with the area which is translating. Therefore, translating Iranological texts is not an exception, and cannot be done by someone who does not know the basics of this area.

Unfortunately, this translation is full of errors and mistakes. I'll mention some of the seminal ones. For example, many proper nouns are mispronounced and misspelled, some of the titles have been left untranslated, and some of the sentences are misunderstood and then mistranslated. The present author has tried to find and categorize them under seven separate titles: **1)** mispronunciation and misspelling of French nouns (six items), **2)** mispronunciation and misspelling of German nouns (nine items), **3)** mispronunciation and misspelling of English nouns (seven items), **4)** mispronunciation and misspelling of Dutch nouns (two items), **5)** Untranslated titles (three items), **6)** mistranslated titles (seven items), and **7)** incorrect translation of some sentences (five items). Also, after each section some suggestions and explanations are added. It is worth noting that the last part (that is to say, part 7) does not encompass all the cases. To name only a few, just some of them are included. Also, in this part at first the English text then the Persian translation and finally the suggested translation are added. It must be born in mind that the suggested translation is not at all the final translation of the sentences.

3. Conclusion

In short, translation is an important task, and mastering it needs time and effort. The practitioners of this laborious job must be patient and assiduous. Needless to say, cursory translations are misleading, mostly for the young readers, and can lead them astray.

Key words: Iranica, translation, Omar Khayyam, Jos Biegstraaten, Mostafa Sedaghat- Rustami.

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