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Translators' Professionalism and the Status of Translation as a Profession in Mid- and Late-nineteenth Century Iran

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Abstract

The nineteenth century was the era of reform and gradual move to modernization in Iran. In such a milieu, translation provided an efficient means to access the knowledge and science of Europe, which was the epitome of success and prosperity for the Iranian intellectuals. In the mid-nineteenth century, when Naser al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896) ascended the Qajar throne, his deep absorption in the West and his strong passion for learning about Europe and for modernization of the country brought about a dramatic increase in translation activity. In the fifty-year ruling period of Naser al-Din Shah, i.e., the mid- and late-nineteenth century Iran, translation offices were established and translators were widely employed in different institutions by the government. Using primary sources and documents, this archival research first examines the role of Naser al-Din Shah in production and publication of translations, then it explores whether translation was a profession in Iran in the mid- and late-nineteenth century or not and finally, it tries to find out if translators of the Naseri era can be considered professionals or not. Adopting two definitions as a yardstick, the study concludes that translation activity in the mid- and late-nineteenth century Iran had some characteristics that allow us to call it a profession. The study also argues that given the historical context of Iran in that era, the translators held the basic qualifications to be considered semi-professionals, while among them some were highly professional.

Keywords: Naser al-Din Shah, translator, Qajar, profession, Iran

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Translators' Professionalism and the Status of Translation as a Profession in the Mid- and Late-nineteenth Century Iran

The Qajar Iran (1785–1925) witnessed the third translation movement in the history of this country. The first movement happened in the Sassanid era, the last pre-Islamic Persian empire, and the second in the time of Abbasids (750–1258 AD), the third Arab caliphate governing Iran after the Muslim conquest of the country. What distinguishes these translation movements from other translational activities is the sudden massive surge in the number of government-backed translations stimulated by an enthusiastic support of a monarch being passionately interested in becoming aware of the knowledge and scientific advances of other nations or in transferring that knowledge to his people. In the first movement, with the patronage of Khosrow I (501–579 AD), the twenty-second king of the Sassanid empire, various scientific, literary, and religious works were translated from Greek, Latin and Indian into Middle Persian. In the second movement, i. e., the Abbasid translation movement, it was Ma‘mūn (786–833 AD) during whose reign, in addition to numerous works translated from Latin and Greek into Arabic, the seminal works of ancient Iran were translated from Middle Persian into Arabic. Finally, in the Qajar translation movement, which reached its peak in the time of Naser al-Din Shāh (1848–1896), a dramatic rise happened in translation from European languages into Persian.

The inauguration of the Qajar court translation was during the time of ‘Abbās Mīrzā (1799–1833), the crown prince and son of Fath‘Alī Shāh (r. 1797–1834), who, following the Iranian defeats in two Russo-Persian wars (1804–1813 and 1826–1828), took the first steps toward modernization of Iran. The defeats, which resulted in the loss of some northern territories of Iran, made ‘Abbās Mīrzā and his companions think about the reasons behind their military weakness as well as the general backwardness of their country compared to Europe. Pondering over the superiority of the West, they became convinced that the scientific and technological advances of European countries were the main reasons. In their view, gaining access to those developments was the key to prosperity, advancement, and progress of their country. Hence, to acquire the science and knowledge of the West and to transfer them to their people, the early Qajars took some measures, one of the most effective ones was translation of European scientific texts into Persian. These translations, together with dispatching students to European universities and inviting Europeans to Iran to teach and share their knowledge, played a decisive role in introducing modern sciences, technologies, and knowledge to the Iranian people.

The Qajar king who played a pivotal role in the nineteenth-century translation movement in Iran was Naser al-Din Shāh, the fourth Qajar monarch, who was in power for almost half a century, from 1848 to 1896. Naser al-Din Shāh was the first Qajar king who travelled to Europe, not once but three times (in 1873, 1879 and 1889). He, who was intrigued by the modern aspects of European life, became a strong advocate of reform and modernization. During his reign, modern institutions, such as the first European-style school (Dār al-Funūn) and the court of justice, were established and some

modern technologies like railway, telegraph, photography, postal service, and newspapers were introduced in Iran. The avid interest of Naser al-Din Shāh in European sciences also provided an added impetus for translation, which caused the Qajar translation movement to reach its zenith. In the Naseri era, numerous works in different scientific areas, including medicine and anatomy, mathematics, astronomy, military sciences, chemistry, education, psychology, and music were translated from European languages into Persian. Moreover, Naser al-Din Shāh's life-long passion for world history generated a dramatic surge in translation of travelogues as well as historical books, novels, and newspaper articles, among which "histories of Western Europe, Russia and America primarily served Naser al-Din Shāh and were confined to the royal library" (AMANAT 2012: 334).

The translation movement of the Qajar era and the significant role of Naser al-Din Shāh in that movement have been previously addressed by a number of translation scholars (see for example, DELZENDEHROOY, KHAZAEI FARID & KHOSHSALIGHEH 2019; FARAHZAD & ADILI 2019; ALIPOUR 2021). What distinguishes the present research from previous studies is its full reliance on primary sources. The first serious methodological discussion of the use of archival documents in translation studies is attributed to Munday, who foregrounded "archival work in research reports" (PALOPOSKI, 2016a: 3). As Munday (2014: 64) maintains, although still "under-utilised", archives and primary sources "are an indispensable resource" for historical studies of translation. In recent years, merits of archives and primary sources in historical translation/translator research have been widely acknowledged by translation studies scholars (see for example, PALOPOSKI 2016a; GOMEZ 2017; ATEFMEHR & FARAHZAD 2021a). Primary sources are highly varied, ranging from personal letters, correspondence and telegrams to decrees of kings, contracts and documents of salaries. Paratextual elements produced and published together with translations are also categorized as primary sources (see ATEFMEHR & FARAHZAD 2021b, 2021c). The value of these sources basically lies in the first-hand, raw information they offer. They provide us with the opportunity to establish direct and unmediated contact with the past. However, to avoid writing a biased or inaccurate history, the content of documents must be read critically and factors such as the motives of the authors and reasons for archival must be taken into consideration. The primary sources used in the present study include letters, correspondence, telegrams, pre/postfaces to translations, notes and marginalia inside translations plus memoirs of a high-ranking official of the Naseri era. These documents and sources were found in two major libraries of Iran: (1) The National Library and Archives of Iran, and (2) the Library, Museum and Document Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Using the discovered primary sources, many of them previously neglected by historians and translation scholars, this article first investigates the role of Naser al-Din Shāh in production and publication of translations. It then explores the occupational status of translation in the Qajar society and finally, the professional competence of the Naseri era translators will be examined.

The Qajar King and Translation Activity

The discovered primary sources uncovered important facts about some aspects of translation activity in the Naseri era, namely the role of Naser al-Din Shāh as commissioner of translations and the range of topics translated under the patronage of the Shāh. The pre/postfaces of 'Isā Khān Garrūsī to his translations are among these sources. 'Isā Khān Garrūsī was one of the most prolific translators of the Naseri era, and nineteenth-century Iran, who translated more than thirty works, mostly travelogues published originally in the French travel journal *Le Tour du monde*. In his

pre/postfaces, ʿIsā Khān explains that the travelogues were translated by the direct order of Naser al-Din Shāh. He also translated some foreign newspapers, which, as his notes reveal, were commissioned by the Shāh himself. As previously mentioned, Naser al-Din Shāh was deeply interested in Europe. To keep abreast of events in European countries, he regularly commissioned translators to translate foreign newspapers. For instance, in an undated letter we read that Naser al-Din Shāh ordered his Minister of Education, Mukhber al-Dowleh, to translate an English newspaper called *Public News*.¹ In another document, which is a handwritten self-reminder, Naser al-Din Shāh reminds himself to order translation of a newspaper brought by a European couple.² However, the notes ʿIsā Khān wrote on his translated newspapers uncover another aspect of translation activity in that era. As ʿIsā Khān explains, he was commissioned by Naser al-Din Shāh to translate the important and useful news stories of the newspapers published in European countries.³ This implies that, in addition to translation, the translators were also given the task of selecting information from various newspapers. The selected and translated news events were presented to the Shāh in the form of news booklets; thus, it was also the translator’s responsibility to decide how to arrange the events.

The translations Naser al-Din Shāh commissioned were mostly in line with his personal interests such as world history. In a letter sent to him in 1880, Eʿtemād al-Şaltaneh, the head of royal translation house, reported that, as commissioned, the two-volume book on the life of Bismarck had been translated by Baron Norman and was now ready to be presented to him.⁴ In another case, as indicated in the translator’s laudatory note⁵, Naser al-Din Shāh ordered the translation of a four-volume book on the history of Ottoman Sultans⁶. Naser al-Din Shāh’s interest in world history is also evident in a letter in which he asked for the collection and translation of information about the American civil war (1861–1865). This letter, sent by one of the close courtiers of the Shāh, was discovered in the collection of letters received by Naser al-Din Shāh in June 1865. As indicated in the letter, following the order of Naser al-Din Shāh, the courtier commissioned the American priests residing in Urmia⁷ to ask their fellow countrymen for some pictures of the four-year American war. The courtier further wrote that the American priests promised to prepare the pictures and translate the description of each in the span of one year.⁸ In the diaries of Eʿtemād al-Şaltaneh, we also read that on December 12, 1894, Naser al-Din Shāh commissioned the translation of a comprehensive history of France.⁹

¹ Document Number 4415646.

² Document Number 4399145.

³ *Tarjome-ye Rūznāme-hā-ye Farang* [Translation of European Newspapers], published on November 18, 1883.

⁴ Document Number 1408665.

⁵ MĀZANDARĀNĪ, MĪRZĀ ZAKĪ (1886).

⁶ It was *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, written by Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall. As the translator, Mīrzā Zakī Māzandarānī, explains in his preface, the book was translated from German into French, and it was the French version he translated into Persian.

⁷ A city in the province of West Azerbaijan in the northwest of Iran. In the early 19th century, Urmia was the location chosen by the American missionaries sent to Iran. As reported by Becker (2015: 137), “by 1843”, more than “thirty members” of “the Mission to the Nestorians” resided in Urmia.

⁸ Document Number 3847204.

⁹ *Rūznāme-ye khāterāt-e Eʿtemād al-Şaltaneh* [Journal of the memories of Eʿtemad al-Saltaneh], p. 986.

In addition to travelogues, books on world history and newspapers, which were of particular interest to Naser al-Din Shāh, some scientific books were also translated at his order. There is an autobiographical preface among the prefaces, in which the translator, Mīrzā Taqī Kāshānī, mentions that he was commissioned by Naser al-Din Shāh to translate books on various subjects, especially the European sciences.¹⁰ We also know that in 1877, a book on astrology, titled *Āsemān (The Sky)*, was translated from French into Persian by the order of Naser al-Din Shāh. As the translator, Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Eṣfahānī, recounts in his preface, Naser al-Din Shāh brought this book back from his second journey to Europe. Upon his arrival in Tehran, he ordered Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Ghaffār to meet him every day at his palace to translate the book piece by piece.¹¹

The discovered handwritten notes and comments of Naser al-Din Shāh at the beginning of some translations also throw light on another aspect of translation in that era. In most cases, he just wrote ‘Tamāman Khāndeh Shod’ (‘Completely observed’) followed by the date and place of reading. Among the translations that contain such notes are *‘Aqīdeh-ye Voltaire dar bāb-e Iran (Voltaire Opinion of Iran)* and *Madkhalīyat-e Iran dar Mas‘aleh-ye Sharqī (Iran’s Impact on Issues of the East)*, translated by Hovhannes Khān Masehyan in 1884 and 1889 respectively, *Pas az Bīst Sāl (After Twenty Years)*, translated by Muḥammad Ṭāher Mīrzā in 1888, *Sharḥ-e Hāl-e Malakeh Victoria (Biography of Queen Victoria)*, translated by Baron Norman in 1881 and many of the travelogues translated by ‘Isā Khān Garrūsī.

However, in a few cases, he wrote these notes to express his opinion about the book. For instance, in a disparaging comment written on the first page of the second volume of Baron Norman’s translation on the life of Bismarck¹², Naser al-Din Shāh wrote: “Completely observed; But it was indeed nonsense and banal. It is not a history or a tale or newspaper. I wonder if the buster who wrote this had been on drugs or something”.¹³ These notes reveal that Naser al-Din Shāh was not only a commissioner, but he was also a meticulous reader of translations. As documents show, sometimes, when he found a translation unsatisfactory, he ordered the retranslation of that book by another translator. For instance, on the last page of a translation, which is about the war between France and Prussia, ‘Isā Khān Garrūsī explains that on Naser al-Din Shāh’s order, he corrected the previous translator’s mistakes and rearranged sections of the book.¹⁴

Another major commissioner of translation in the Naseri era was E‘temād al-Şaltāneh, a prolific translator and one of the influential figures of that era, who held some official posts, including that of the head of royal translation house and the Minister of Publication. As documents reveal, many of the foreign books that were later translated for the Shāh were purchased by E‘temād al-Şaltāneh. He had different ways of obtaining the books; one was ordering them from European booksellers. Among the letters sent to Europe in August 1881, one is from E‘temād al-Şaltāneh to a bookseller in which he ordered some books.¹⁵ A few months later, on December 15, 1881, he sent another letter, enclosed inside some money, to a bookseller in Paris and asks him to send some

¹⁰ KĀSHĀNĪ, MĪRZĀ TAQĪ (1882).

¹¹ *Āsemān [The Sky]*, first published in 1877.

¹² Based on the information provided by the translator in the preface and the date in which the translation was published, that is 1881, the original text was traced. It was *Bismarck und seine Leute, während des Krieges mit Frankreich* written by Julius Hermann Moritz Busch in 1878.

¹³ NORMAN, BARON (1881).

¹⁴ GARRŪSĪ, ‘ISĀ KHĀN (1878).

¹⁵ E‘TEMĀD AL-ŞALTĀNEH (1971): 108.

books.¹⁶ Another way of obtaining foreign books was asking the foreigners who resided in Iran to purchase them from their home countries. As recorded in the diaries of E‘temād al-Şaltaneh, on February 23, 1884, he visited Baron Norman, who had just returned from his journey to his country, to get the book he ordered for Naser al-Din Şāh.¹⁷ After purchasing the books, E‘temād al-Şaltaneh commissioned the translators who worked for him at the royal translation house to translate them. Then the translations were presented to or read for the Şāh. In addition to his official posts, E‘temād al-Şaltaneh had the daily task of reading translated books and foreign newspapers for Naser al-Din Şāh. Even when the Şāh was on a journey or when he went camping and hunting around the country, the reading time, which normally took hours, was not cancelled. E‘temād al-Şaltaneh took this opportunity to read the books that could provide Naser al-Din Şāh with a model of a great ruler, indirectly warn him about his wrongdoings as a king and make him aware of the mistakes that could cause his monarchy to end. In fact, while Naser al-Din Şāh usually commissioned translations out of curiosity about certain subjects, it was a purposeful activity for E‘temād al-Şaltaneh. For instance, as we read in his diaries, in June 1885, Naser al-Din Şāh, who was then on vacation in one of his palaces outside the capital, summoned E‘temād al-Şaltaneh to read something for him. E‘temād al-Şaltaneh decided to read a book on the life of Frederick the Great, translated into Persian by ‘Isā Khān Garrūsī in 1879. Frederick II, by-name Frederick the Great, was the King of Prussia from 1740 until 1786 and is known as one of the greatest kings of the 18th century. Undoubtedly, he could serve as a role model for Naser al-Din Şāh. However, after sitting in front of the Şāh for four hours and reading the history of the great king of Prussia, E‘temād al-Şaltaneh realized that his effort was fruitless. He complains that each year he spent a lot of money to purchase and translate books full of admonition and warning, yet Naser al-Din Şāh never appreciated it.¹⁸ On another occasion, E‘temād al-Şaltaneh made the same complaint, this time about Naser al-Din Şāh’s negligence to the faith of Louis XV. On April 19, 1890, E‘temād al-Şaltaneh chose the translation of *Madame du Barry*, the well-known historical novel by Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870), for the daily reading time of Naser al-Din Şāh. The novel depicts and reveals secrets, conspiracies, and corruptions of the court of Louis XV as well as the debauchery and hedonism of the King. Again, Naser al-Din Şāh failed to take the lessons of the novel, which made E‘temād al-Şaltaneh annoyed and angry. In his diary, E‘temād al-Şaltaneh wrote that he translated *Madame du Barry* to teach a lesson to Naser al-Din Şāh and to make him aware of the mistakes that cause a monarchy to be overthrown; but it had the reverse effect.¹⁹

Translation as a Profession

The objective of bringing modernity to Iran, backed by Naser al-Din Şāh himself, led to the establishment of some modern institutions and offices in the Naseri era, in some of which individuals were hired as translators. Based on the studied documents, the major offices and organizations wherein translators were officially employed during the reign of Naser al-Din Şāh were the European-style school of Dār al-Funūn, the royal printing house and office of governmental newspapers, the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Iranian embassies located in cities such as Istanbul, London, Saint Petersburg and Paris.²⁰ More importantly, Naser al-Din Şāh had a

¹⁶ Ibid: 136.

¹⁷ Ibid: 276.

¹⁸ Ibid: 364.

¹⁹ Ibid: 695.

²⁰ E‘TEMĀD AL-ŞALTANEH (1878).

translation office called the Special Royal Translation House, which was a section of the Royal Private House, i. e., the royal court. As documents show, in 1878, five translators—three Muslim Iranian, Mīrzā Moḥammad Rezā, Mīrzā ‘Alī Khān and Mīrzā ‘Isā Khān, one Armenian Iranian, Mīrzā Maderus Khān, and one European, Jules Richard—worked for this translation office; they translated from English, Russian and French into Persian.²¹

In addition to the abovementioned organizations, there was another translation office, called the Special Governmental Translation House, that triggered a sharp increase in the number of translations in the Naseri era. Seemingly, the main incentive for the establishment of this translation office was the dissatisfaction of Naser al-Din Shāh over the slow progress of modernization in his country. Throughout the Qajar era, Iranian students were dispatched to European universities to acquire knowledge of the West, thus, to bring modernization to their country. However, it seems that they had not been very successful in the Naseri era or at least they could not meet the expectations of the Shāh. In the decree on the establishment of the Special Governmental Translation House, issued in June 1871, Naser al-Din Shāh explicitly expresses his disappointment over the students’ failure to spread modern sciences in Iran. Therefore, as written in the decree, he decided to establish a governmental translation office to accelerate the dissemination of science and knowledge and to organize translation activity in the way it was practiced in Europe. Then, after designating E‘temād al-Şaltāneh as the head of translation office and assigning him the task of employing translators, Naser al-Din Shāh ordains that all citizens of Iran, who are either translator or know a foreign language, must consider themselves employees of the translation house.²²

Under the administration of E‘temād al-Şaltāneh, the Special Governmental Translation House turned into a well-organized office of translation unprecedented in the Qajar era. Diaries of E‘temād al-Şaltāneh show that, except for Fridays and Mondays, the employed translators were obliged to be present in the translation office every day. Moreover, by the order of E‘temād al-Şaltāneh, all the translators were required to wear blue broadcloth uniforms.²³ Every morning, E‘temād al-Şaltāneh first visited the translation house to supervise the translators’ work and to collect the prepared translations. The collected translations were then brought to Naser al-Din Shāh. For instance, in the diary entry of May 1, 1884, we read that E‘temād al-Şaltāneh first went to the translation house and after collecting twenty-five translations, he went to the court to deliver the translations to the Shāh.²⁴ Or, on August 29, 1884, while Naser al-Din Shāh was on a journey to the north of Iran, E‘temād al-Şaltāneh sent him thirty-six translations, all produced in the Translation House.²⁵ In addition to E‘temād al-Şaltāneh, who superintended the production of translations, the Shāh himself also regularly monitored the translators’ work. From time to time, the translators of the Special Governmental Translation House were taken to the court of Naser al-Din Shāh by E‘temād al-Şaltāneh²⁶ or, in some cases, they were summoned by the Shāh himself.²⁷ In such visits, after presenting their translations to Naser al-Din Shāh, the translators were normally granted gratuities and rewards for their work.²⁸

²¹ Ibid: 27.

²² Copy of Naser al-Din Shāh’s decree in the third volume of *Mer’āt al-boldān* (1878): 1659.

²³ E‘TEMĀD AL-ŞALTĀNEH (1971).

²⁴ Ibid: 296.

²⁵ Ibid: 316.

²⁶ Ibid: 330.

²⁷ Ibid: 546.

²⁸ Ibid: 284 & 580-581.

The establishment of translation offices, the official recruitment of translators, the regular working hours and strict supervision of translators and their work indicate that translation was, or became, a profession in the Naseri era. Here, profession refers to what Pym (2014: 164) defines as a “full-time long-term employment”. In addition to the changes in working conditions, ‘attribution of translatorship’ also points to the status of translation as a profession in that era. Paloposki (2016b: 15) defines “attribution of translatorship” as “when and in what situations and contexts a person called him-/herself a translator, or when other people called them translators”. In the documents of the Naseri era, including official and personal letters, telegrams, and diaries of E‘temād al-Şaṭaneh, a translator’s name is mostly accompanied by his occupation. In other words, in most cases, there is a direct reference to the occupation of a person as ‘Mutarjim’ (translator). For instance, in his diary entry of December 4, 1883, E‘temād al-Şaṭaneh wrote, “After lunch, Şāh started his Russian lessons. His teacher is Maderus Khān, the translator”.²⁹ Another instance is the diary entry of February 21, 1884, in which E‘temād al-Şaṭaneh recounts that on Naser al-Din Şāh’s trip to the east of Tehran, they met “Mīrzā Aḥmad, the Russian translator, who was riding a red-tail horse”.³⁰ Such attributions imply that translators assumed an identity linked to their occupation. Besides, referring to a person by just one occupation, that is ‘translator’, indicates that the translators were either “monoprofessional” (Pym 2014) or, if they were not, translation was recognized as their main job.

However, not all translational activities acquired the status of being a profession. Documents show that the mentioned institutional framework was only provided for translation of certain works and genres, including mainly histories and historical novels, geographies, biographies, memoirs and travelogues, which were favored by Naser al-Din Şāh and E‘temād al-Şaṭaneh. Sciences such as geology, engineering and medicine also received the attention of the Şāh. But the same condition did not apply to many other subjects, including for instance Western philosophy and politics, that were either not appealing for the Şāh or were assumed to pose a threat to the monarchy by making the public familiar with modern ideas, thus contributing to their awakening.

Translators as Professionals

Undoubtedly, the contemporary definitions do not provide a yardstick against which professionalism of the nineteenth-century translators can be assessed. As Paloposki (2016b: 15) points out, “Translators of the past may have been a very different breed from the professional translators of today”. However, among various definitions of professionalism, the one proposed by Shreve was found to be most appropriate for the present discussion. Shreve (2020: 153) defines professionals as “individuals who have accumulated knowledge in a specific area of activity and are compensated, monetarily and with other benefits, for practicing that activity”. Based on this definition, professionalism has one requirement, which is accumulated knowledge in a specific area of activity, and one condition, which is monetary compensation or other benefits. That being the case, translators can be called professionals when they possess translation knowledge and when they receive something in return for their production.

In a basic sense, translation knowledge encompasses two fundamental components: mastery of two languages and familiarity with translation techniques and strategies. Regarding the first component, the Naseri era translators developed, or possessed, knowledge of a foreign language in different ways. In most cases, translators “had either acquired foreign languages abroad or had been properly schooled in foreign

²⁹ Ibid: 268.

³⁰ Ibid: 281.

languages at the Dār al-Funūn” (AFSHAR 2003: 286). Some others learned foreign languages at the military school of Tehran through communication with their European teachers. Mīrzā Taqī Kāshānī, one of the prolific translators of non-literary books in the Naseri era, was one of the students at this school who learned French while studying modern sciences with his French teachers.³¹ Another way of acquiring knowledge of a foreign language was private education. Some translators, like Muḥammad Ṭāher Mīrzā, learned European languages from their private tutors. Finally, in few cases, translators were proficient in a language other than Persian because it was their mother tongue. These translators were “foreigners who were resident in Iran” (AFSHAR 2003: 286). Jules Richard and Baron Louis de Norman, two well-known translators of the Naseri era, belonged to this group.

While since the seventeenth century, translator/interpreter training had been carried out in some translation schools across Europe (see PYM 2002; CACERES-WÜRSIG 2012), the Iranian translators lacked any form of formal education in translation at least until the twentieth century. However, acquiring, and accumulating knowledge about translation was not far-fetched for the Iranian translators of the nineteenth century as they had other ways of building knowledge about translation techniques and strategies, a major one was learning from their predecessors. The long history of translation in Iran produced a substantial body of treaties, notes, pre/postfaces about different aspects of translation, which transferred knowledge of translators of the past to the next generations of translators (see for example BIGDELOO 2022; LEESE 2021). Among the translators of the Naseri era, some demonstrated their familiarity of translation techniques and strategies more clearly than others. For instance, in his preface to the translation of *Āsemān*, the aforementioned Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Ghaffār emphasized the need for translators of specialized texts to have mastery of the subject matter. Then he explained that being educated and wise was not enough for a translator since transferring content of a foreign text requires familiarity with its technical terms.³² In his preface to another translation, he mentioned three qualifications for a translator: proficiency in two languages (i.e., source language and target language), knowledge of the subject matter and familiarity with technical terms.³³ Another translator with profound translation knowledge was Muḥammad Ṭāher Mīrzā, one of the famous translators of the Naseri era who is renowned for his translations of Alexandre Dumas’ works. His notes on the margin of one of his translations on astrology indicate that he was aware of the distinction between meaning-based and literal translation. After translating almost half of the book, he decides to change his translation method from meaning-based to literal translation to, as he explained, prove that he had completely understood every word of the original text and his meaning-based translation was not due to lack of comprehension.³⁴ Many of the Naseri era translators also showed familiarity with what we today call translation *skopos*. These translators tried to justify their use of certain translation strategies, such as addition or omission, by referring to the needs of their audience. For example, in his preface to the translation of a book on algebra, published for the students of Dār al-Funūn, the translator explained that he translated the book in a clear way to be understandable for the youth.³⁵ In another instance, in a preface to a translation on anatomy, we read that the translator’s attempt was to translate the book in a way that both experts and laymen could understand it easily. The translator then

³¹ KĀSHĀNĪ, MĪRZĀ TAQĪ (1882).

³² EŞFAHĀNĪ, MĪRZĀ ‘ABD AL-GHAFFĀR (1883).

³³ EŞFAHĀNĪ, MĪRZĀ ‘ABD AL-GHAFFĀR (1875).

³⁴ MUḤAMMAD ṬĀHER MĪRZĀ (1888).

³⁵ MUHANDES, ĀQĀ KHĀN (1888).

provides an explanation for one of the translation strategies he adopted to achieve this purpose. As he said, for the original French words with no equivalence in Persian, his decision was to keep the original word followed by a descriptive sentence in Persian. This way, he believed, the text would be understandable for those who are familiar with French terms as well as those who are not.³⁶ In the postface of another translation on geology, the translator wrote that his purpose of translation was to encourage both experts and non-experts to acquaint themselves with this new science; thus he translated in a way that could be easily understood by both groups.³⁷

Adopting Shreve's definition (2020), the second aspect of professionalism is remuneration or compensation for the activity of translation. Documents of the Naseri era show that the translators received remuneration for their translations. Among the letters sent to Naser al-Din Shāh, there is one from 'Isā Khān Garrūsī showing that translation was his only source of income. Following a heavy rain in Tehran, which destroyed 'Isā Khān's house, he wrote a letter to Naser al-Din Shāh in which he explained that his income was limited to the monthly payment he received from Naser al-Din Shāh and since this income barely sufficed to cover his living expenses, he was now in dire need of money to build a new house for his family.³⁸ Also, document of a renewal contract, signed on March 1, 1886, between Baron Louis de Norman and Naser al-Din Shāh's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was discovered, according to which Norman was given the annual salary of eight hundred Tomans for fulfilling his duties, including translation.³⁹ In addition to their salaries, translators were occasionally granted gratuities by Naser al-Din Shāh. For instance, on March 13, 1884, Naser al-Din Shāh gave a gratuity of two hundred and fifty Tomans to each of the translators who worked for the Special Governmental Translation House.⁴⁰ Or, on July 22, 1888, E'temād al-Şaltāneh brought a translation done by Hovhannes Khān to Naser al-Din Shāh and gave one hundred Tomans gratuity for the translation, which he paid to Hovhannes Khān the next day when they met.⁴¹

Concluding Summary

The recruitment of translators in the Qajar era was not unprecedented. In the early nineteenth century, a group of translators were employed by 'Abbās Mīrzā, the crown prince of the second Qajar king, to work in the "translation office" he established in Tabriz for translation of "military and engineering manuals" (ABRAHAMIAN 1983: 52). However, the official employment of translators increased exponentially in the time of Naser al-Din Shāh when the government started recruiting individuals with translation skills in different organizations and institutions. As the major commissioner of translation, Naser al-Din Shāh was the first, and the only, Qajar monarch who issued a decree on the establishment of a translation house. Moreover, by the direct order of Naser al-Din Shāh, several books on different genres, including especially world histories, historical novels, geographies, memoirs, biographies, and travelogues, were translated from European languages into Persian.

This article examined the status of translation as a profession in the mid- and late-nineteenth century Iran. Through investigation of primary sources, the study showed that translator's activities in the Naseri era exhibit characteristics that allow us to consider

³⁶ 'ALĪ BAKHSH MĪRZĀ (1873).

³⁷ TABRĪZĪ, YŪSEF (1880).

³⁸ Document Number 4563128.

³⁹ The document was found by BAKHTIYĀRĪ, AMĪR HŪSHANG (2003).

⁴⁰ E' TEMĀD AL-ŞALTĀNEH (1971): 284.

⁴¹ Ibid. 580-581.

translation as a profession. The great enthusiasm of Naser al-Din Shāh to translation of European works resulted in translation activity being regulated by the government, which made translation a full-time employment for many translators. The professionalism of the Naseri era translators was also explored. Using Shreve's definition, it was deduced that translators can be considered professionals when they are paid for their activity and have knowledge of translation. Documents showed that the employed translators as well as those who translated every now and then for Naser al-Din Shāh were all paid for their translations. They either received regular payments or received gratuities and awards for the translations they produced. Also, as the pre/postfaces, notes and marginalia written by the Naseri era translators showed, despite the lack of translator training courses, these translators possessed varying levels of translation knowledge, which was in some cases profound and specialized. Therefore, given the historical context in which the Naseri era translators lived, one can conclude that Iranian translators of the mid- and late-nineteenth century were at least semi-professional, while some were highly professional.

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