

# LITERATURE ACROSS FRONTIERS

**MEDIA RELEASE: 11th October 2011**

## **BRITISH & IRISH READERS MISSING OUT ON SOME OF THE BEST ARABIC, HEBREW & TURKISH LITERATURE**

Research released this week reveals a lack of books translated from Arabic, Turkish and Hebrew in Britain and Ireland, confirming the general trend which has won the British book market the 3% label for being the least receptive to translated literature in Europe.

Literature Across Frontiers has published a report on the state of literary translation into English from the three major languages of the South-East Mediterranean over the past twenty years. The report is part of a wider project of mapping translation flows in the Euro-Mediterranean region, carried out in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Translation Programme, a co-operation between the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, Literature Across Frontiers and Transeuropéennes.

Although translations of Arabic, Hebrew and Turkish literature into English have grown in recent years, and there has been a sharp increase in the Arab world in the last decade, the number of literary titles published in translation is still very small. Just over 300 works of literature from the entire Arabic-speaking world are listed in the bibliography compiled for the study, which includes only 49 books actually published in the UK. During the same period, 165 Hebrew and only 49 Turkish titles have been translated and published for distribution in the UK and Ireland, often by small independent publishers.

The report, based on analysis of publishing data, articles, reviews, and interviews with translators and publishers, provides an overview of the current state of translation from the languages of the South Mediterranean and the Middle East into English in the British Isles, examining a range of topics from training opportunities for translators and practising translators' conditions of work, policies and support for translation, to media reception of translated books and programming of public literary events.

The report concludes that linguistic conservatism, cultural insularity and limited direct contact between UK publishers and the Arabic, Hebrew and Turkish literary scenes, but above all the market-led publishing sector are some of the main barriers that prevent literature from these regions reaching the English-language reading public.

“The commercial imperative is one of the greatest obstacles to achieving a closer contact with literatures of the South Mediterranean and the Middle East,” says Alexandra Büchler, co-author of the report and director of Literature Across Frontiers. “Public support and private sponsorship therefore remains essential to bringing international content to British and Irish readers, despite the fact that commercially successful publishers and festivals are well positioned to take the perceived risks associated with the publishing and promotion of translated literature.”

The report also calls for greater synergies between the private and publicly funded sector and for new and innovative approaches to argue the case for the key role of culture, including literary translation, in contributing to intercultural understanding and peaceful coexistence in the region- particularly at a time of great economic challenge and social and political change. “Marking LAF’s ten-year anniversary with a conference on literary exchange in the Euro-Mediterranean region, held this year in Istanbul, was one of our

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contributions to the creation of a forum where barriers to translation in the region can be discussed and solutions proposed”, Alexandra Büchler said. “But solutions require resources and the rapid changes in the region have created opportunities and a momentum which should not be lost because of a lack of timely investment into cultural exchange.”

Read the full report at <http://lafpublications.org/>

## NOTES

1. The *Literary Translation from Arabic, Hebrew and Turkish into English in the UK and Ireland 1990 - 2010* study was made as part of the Euro-Mediterranean Translation Programme, a cooperation between the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, Literature Across Frontiers and Transeuropéennes. For more information visit [www.lit-across-frontiers.org/projects.php](http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/projects.php)

2. Literature Across Frontiers is a platform for literary exchange, a network of partners and a programme of initiatives based at the **Mercator Institute for Media, Languages and Culture, Aberystwyth University in the UK**. LAF cooperates with a network of partners on activities such as policy research and analysis, publications, translator training and skills development, joint participation in international book fairs, literature festivals and other forums, organisation of larger-scale projects, as well as conferences, seminars and workshops.

3. The conference **Literary Exchange and Translation in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: challenges of the next decade** held in co-operation the Republic of Turkey’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Libraries and Publications, was held in Istanbul from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of May. A summary of the proceedings is available at [www.lit-across-frontiers.org/publications.php](http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/publications.php)

4. Literature Across Frontiers has been supported by the **Culture Programme of the European Union** since 2001.

5. For more information about the work of LAF visit [www.literature-across-frontiers.org](http://www.literature-across-frontiers.org).

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