




The Role of Translation Movements in Developing Modern Islamic Civilization: Civilizational-Cultural Perspective in Focus

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ABSTRACT

Throughout Islamic history, translation has served not merely as a linguistic bridge but as a civilizational instrument, shaping scientific, philosophical, and cultural trajectories. This study explores the role of three major translation movements, the Sassanid, Abbasid, and Qajar periods, in constructing and transmitting the knowledge foundational to the development of Islamic civilization. Grounded in the cultural turn framework of translation studies and informed by the theory of modern Islamic civilization as articulated by Imam Khamenei, the research identifies six core factors: the role of translators as cultural mediators, the strategic selection of texts, the establishment of translation institutions, resistance to overreliance on translation, and the influence of ideological and policy-driven support structures. A qualitative, descriptive-analytical method was employed, with data analyzed through thematic coding and comparative historical analysis. The findings suggest that revitalizing these key elements in the present context could enable the global dissemination of Islamic civilizational values, positioning translation as a strategic, future-oriented tool.

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1. Introduction

The development of civilizations is deeply intertwined with processes of knowledge transmission and cultural exchange, in which translation has historically played a central and dynamic role—particularly as a catalyst for scientific advancement (Mir Khalid & Anjum, 2025). Rather than being seen solely as a linguistic activity, translation has been recognized by scholars such as Gutt (2010) and Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, 1998) as a form of intercultural communication. As Williams (2013) observed, translation performs varied functions across historical and sociopolitical contexts, underscoring its evolving influence on civilizational development. It has facilitated the assimilation, reinterpretation, and transformation of scientific and philosophical knowledge across cultural and ideological boundaries (Gutas, 1998; Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990). This is particularly evident during pivotal historical moments—most notably the Abbasid Caliphate—when translation became institutionalized and was integrated into the broader fabric of society (Frye, 2008; Rosenthal, 1975).

Contemporary translation theory increasingly views translation as a political and cultural act, rather than merely a linguistic process. This shift, emphasized in the “cultural turn” of translation studies, underscores the role of translators as agents of ideology and cultural mediation (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, 1998; Venuti, 1995; Bedeker & Feinauer, 2006). Adopting this perspective, the present study examines how historical translation movements have functioned as instruments in the construction of Islamic civilization and explores their relevance to current efforts aimed at reviving what Imam Khamenei (2012) terms the “modern Islamic civilization”.

While extensive scholarship has addressed historical translation movements—particularly the Graeco-Arabic tradition (Gutas, 1998)—relatively little research has linked these historical episodes to contemporary civilizational agendas within the Islamic world. Moreover, the specific mechanisms by which translation can advance this vision, including the role of translators as cultural and ideological mediators, remain underexplored. This paper seeks to address this gap by analyzing how historical translation dynamics can be recontextualized to support the resurgence of civilizational thought in the 21st-century Muslim world, with a particular focus on Iran’s evolving civilizational discourse (see discourses by Imam Khamenei, 2012, 2016a, 2016b, 2019).

Accordingly, the research is structured around these five questions:

- What factors contributed to the success of Islamic translation movements?
- How can these factors be reapplied in modern contexts?
- What ideological and institutional frameworks are needed today?
- What challenges limit translation’s civilizational function?
- How can translation be a conduit between past heritage and future vision?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Descriptive studies on Islamic translation history

Pioneering works, such as Rosenthal (1975) and Gutas (1998, 2012) have extensively analyzed the institutionalization of translation during the Abbasid era. Gutas (1998) highlighted the Graeco-Arabic translation movement as a civilizational turning point, where scientific and philosophical knowledge was systematically adapted into the Islamic intellectual world. Similarly, Frye (2008) underscored the continuity between pre-Islamic Iranian knowledge systems and Islamic learning, pointing to the foundational role of the Sassanid Empire in shaping translation infrastructures. These studies, however, largely focus on the what and how of translation rather than its civilizational purpose.

2.2. The cultural role of translation and translators

A more analytical layer is introduced by scholars, such as Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), Lefevere (1992b), and Venuti (1995), who argued that translation operates within ideological and cultural systems. According to this view, translators function as “rewriters” who shape cultural narratives and mediate between systems of power (Lefevere, 1992a). This perspective is echoed by Asghari (2011), who studied Iranian translators’ strategic role in cultural transmission between the 2nd and 4th centuries AH, and Behzadi (2015), who investigated narrative shifts in the Qajar-era translations as ideological reflections of Iran’s modernization processes. These works situate translators as active agents rather than passive intermediaries.

2.3. Translation and civilization building

Although the political and cultural importance of translation is widely acknowledged, few scholars have explicitly explored its role as a strategic tool for civilizational renewal. Bsoul (2019) examines translation and acculturation in the medieval Islamic world, arguing that translation enabled epistemic integration and growth. Similarly, Bahri (2011) views translation as a mechanism for preserving cultural identity during periods of political instability. However, these studies do not fully connect translation to a deliberate civilizational strategy, particularly in the modern Islamic context as articulated by thinkers like Imam Khamenei (2012, 2016a, 2016b, 2019).

2.4. Contextual studies of specific periods

The Abbasid translation movement has been most widely studied (Fani, 1981; Gutas, 1998; Jan Ahmadi, 2000; Jamili, 2001; Bsoul, 2019), followed by works focusing on Sassanid precursors (Frye, 1984; Zarrinkoob, 2008) and the Qajar-era’s engagement with Western knowledge (Parsa-Kia, 2009; Bahri, 2011; Behzadi, 2015). Jamshidi Sarai (2016) explored the formation of translation movements in relation to socio-political demands, while Roosta-Azad (2016) provided a comparative view of Persian and Greek translation processes. These studies provide rich data but often lack a unified analytical framework.

Despite existing scholarship, several gaps remain. First, there is a lack of comparative analysis across historical translation movements to identify shared structural or ideological patterns. Second, the connection between historical translation strategies and contemporary Islamic civilizational thought is underexplored. Finally, few studies apply modern translation theories, particularly the cultural turn, to analyze historical movements within their ideological contexts. This study seeks to address these gaps by integrating historical, cultural, and theoretical perspectives. It uniquely applies the cultural turn theory (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, 1998) and incorporates Islamic civilizational discourse to compare three major translation movements—Sassanid, Abbasid, and Qajar. Additionally, it aims to derive

practical insights for a contemporary Islamic translation agenda aligned with the epistemological vision of modern Islamic civilization.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study utilized a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design to examine the civilizational role of translation movements in Islamic history. A qualitative approach was chosen for its suitability in interpreting the cultural, ideological, and institutional dimensions of the subject, which are not easily quantified. This design facilitates a critical exploration of translation as a socio-civilizational process within historical and ideological contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The descriptive-analytical model aligns with the research objective: to identify structural similarities and ideological patterns across the Sassanid, Abbasid, and Qajar translation movements and assess their relevance to the goals of modern Islamic civilization. The analysis integrated primary historical texts and secondary academic sources to uncover recurring themes, strategic practices, and institutional mechanisms.

3.2. Corpus

The corpus consisted of archival texts, historical records, and scholarly analyses related to three periods of translation movements:

- Sassanid Era: Focusing on Zoroastrian and Indian scientific texts translated into Middle Persian (Frye, 1984; Gutas, 2012; Zarrinkoob, 2008).
- Abbasid Caliphate: Emphasizing the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, with institutional support, such as Bayt al-Hikmah (Gutas, 1998; Rosenthal, 1975).
- Qajar Period: Engaged with European texts and modern sciences, often through French and Russian mediation (Behzadi, 2015; Parsa-Kia, 2009).

Sources were selected using purposive sampling to identify texts that illuminate the civilizational roles of translation, such as cultural identity formation, scientific dissemination, and ideological negotiation in Islamic translation movements. The inclusion criteria required texts to demonstrate relevance to these movements, evidence of institutional or state involvement, discussion of translator agency and ideology, and temporal coverage from the 3rd century CE to the early 20th century.

3.3. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed following the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), allowing for the systematic identification, classification, and interpretation of the key themes. The process involved four key stages:

- Initial coding: The texts were read and annotated for relevant concepts, such as “translator as mediator,” “institutional patronage,” or “strategic selection.”
- Axial coding: The codes were grouped into broader categories under the cultural turn framework, such as “ideological recontextualization” or “civilizational transmission.”

- Thematic clustering: The emerging patterns were consolidated into six thematic factors that defined successful translation movements across all the three historical periods.
- Comparative analysis: The three periods were compared using historical-comparative methodology (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003), assessing continuity and divergence in translation strategies and institutional support.

3.4. *Validity and reflexivity*

To ensure validity, triangulation was applied by cross-referencing multiple sources from both Islamic and Western historiographies. The study also acknowledged researcher subjectivity and applied reflexivity in interpreting ideological dimensions, particularly in relation to contemporary civilizational discourses, such as those of Imam Khamenei (2012, 2016a, 2016b, 2019). The analytical categories were not imposed a priori but emerged from the iterative reading of the data, enhancing conceptual robustness and grounding theory in historical evidence. Furthermore, frequent back-checking with existing theoretical literature ensured construct validity (Yin, 2018).

3.5. *Theoretical model*

This study applies the cultural turn in translation theory, as developed by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, 1998) to frame translation as an ideological and cultural act. Rather than treating translation as a neutral linguistic transfer, this approach considers the broader political, historical, and civilizational implications of translation practices. Translators are seen as active agents embedded in networks of cultural power, capable of shaping discourse and influencing civilizational trajectories (Lefevere, 1992a, 1992b; Venuti, 1995).

In parallel, the study drew on the civilizational discourse of Imam Khamenei, who has been framing Islamic civilization as a multi-dimensional system, encompassing science, ethics, governance, and identity (Imam Khamenei, 2019). In this discourse, translation is viewed as a mechanism for epistemic revival and the reclamation of Islamic intellectual sovereignty. Thus, translation becomes a future-oriented practice that enables the assimilation of external knowledge within indigenous Islamic frameworks. Combining these perspectives, the theoretical framework allowed for a nuanced understanding of translation as:

- A mechanism of cultural mediation and ideological negotiation (Bedeker & Feinauer, 2006, Lefevere, 1992b),
- A civilizational strategy for intellectual resistance and renewal (Venuti, 1995; Baker, 2009),
- A policy-dependent and institutionally driven endeavor (Hatim & Mason, 1990; Gutas, 1998, 2012; Baker & Saldanha, 2020).

This dual theoretical lens enabled a historical-comparative and forward-looking analysis of translation movements, linking their past successes to potential futures.

4. Results

4.1. The Sassanid era (224-651 AD)

The first significant translation movement in Iran emerged during the Sassanid era, notably with the founding of the Jundishapur Academy—a prominent center for medical and scientific studies (Roosta-Azad, 2016). During this time, scholarly efforts led to the systematic translation of texts from Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Syriac into Persian, contributing substantially to advancements in medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and mathematics (Behzadi, 2015). This intellectual legacy profoundly influenced later scholarly pursuits, particularly during the Abbasid period, when Persian scholars played a pivotal role in expanding translation activities and disseminating knowledge (Bahri, 2011). The Sassanid dedication to intellectual and cultural exchange underscores the transformative power of translation in shaping civilizations, marking this era as a foundational chapter in the history of translation in Iran and the broader region (Bahri, 2011).

4.2. The Abbasid caliphate (750-1258 AD)

The second major translation movement flourished between the 2nd and 6th centuries AH, during the Abbasid Caliphate, most notably with the establishment of Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad. This institution became a center for translating classical works from Greek, Indian, and Persian scholars into Arabic (Fani, 1981; Roosta-Azad, 2016). In the early Abbasid period, non-Muslim intellectuals—Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews—drew upon their rich cultural heritages to lead translation efforts that transferred scientific and philosophical knowledge from Greek, Persian, Indian, Syriac, and Nabataean sources into Arabic (Zarrinkoob, 2008). The movement reached its peak under Caliph al-Ma'mun, initially focusing on scientific and medical texts before expanding to encompass natural sciences, philosophy, and religious studies. These efforts were carried out by distinguished translators from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, including Iranian, Greek, Indian, Syriac, and Arab scholars. This intellectual renaissance marked the height of the Islamic Golden Age (Jamili, 2001; Behzadi, 2015). Among the most impactful translation movements in history, the Abbasid initiative centered in Baghdad played a vital role in the development and global dissemination of Islamic culture and civilization (Parsa-Kia, 2009).

4.3. The Qajar era (18th-19th centuries AD)

The third major translation movement in Iran emerged during the Qajar era and is often referred to as the Modernization Movement. This period was marked by significant transformations across Iran's literary, social, political, ideological, and cultural spheres (Behzadi, 2015). Translation served as a critical tool for introducing Western science, literature, and political thought into Iranian society. Each translation initiative during this era was shaped by its institutional context, the agency of translators, ideological frameworks, and its broader contribution to the evolution of Islamic civilization. The goal extended beyond mere descriptive comparison; rather, it aimed to derive actionable insights to revitalize translation as a strategic civilizational instrument in the contemporary Islamic world.

4.4. Factor analysis

4.4.1. Factor 1: Translators as cultural mediators

Translators across all three historical periods functioned not merely as linguistic intermediaries, but as intercultural negotiators who actively shaped the ideological framing of imported knowledge. In the Sassanid era, figures such as Borzuya (Burzoy) adapted Indian philosophical and medical texts—most notably the Panchatantra—into the Persian intellectual tradition, aligning them with Zoroastrian ethical cosmology (Frye, 1984; Gutas, 2012). These translations often entailed significant reinterpretation to fit the spiritual and epistemological paradigms of pre-Islamic Iran. During the Abbasid Golden Age, this mediatory role became even more pronounced. Scholars like Hunayn ibn Ishaq and his associates were not only multilingual—fluent in Syriac, Greek, and Arabic—but also well-versed in Islamic theology and contemporary rhetorical conventions. Their translations of Galen, Aristotle, and Plato were ideologically nuanced, tailored to harmonize with the Islamic worldview rather than serving as direct textual reproductions (Gutas, 1998; Rosenthal, 1975). By contrast, the Qajar period saw a disruption in this tradition of cultural mediation. Translators such as Mirza Malkom Khan and Mirza Fatali Akhundov endeavored to introduce Enlightenment thought and European political philosophy into Iran but lacked a coherent cultural or ideological framework to contextualize these ideas. This disconnect often resulted in cognitive dissonance between Islamic traditionalism and imported modernity, generating conflict rather than intellectual synthesis (Parsa-Kia, 2009; Behzadi, 2015).

4.4.2. Factor 2: Strategic selection of translated works

Translation during the Sassanid period was highly selective, focusing on texts of practical and religious significance—such as treatises on medicine, ethics, and astrology. These choices mirrored the strategic priorities of the Sassanid state: promoting health, moral conduct, and effective governance (Zarrinkoob, 2008). By contrast, the Abbasid era introduced a more systematic and ideologically driven approach to content selection. With the establishment of *Bayt al-Hikmah*, translation priorities became institutionalized. Philosophical, scientific, and mathematical works—particularly those compatible with rationalist thought—were translated to support and enrich Islamic theological and scientific discourse (Fani, 1981; Gutas, 1998). In this context, translation functioned not merely as a conduit of knowledge, but as a deliberate instrument of epistemic sovereignty. During the Qajar period, however, content selection became largely reactive, shaped by the immediate imperatives of military modernization and bureaucratic reform. Although important texts in technology and political science were translated, the absence of a cohesive civilizational vision resulted in a fragmented and ideologically incoherent translation agenda (Bahri, 2011; Behzadi, 2015).

4.4.3. Factor 3: Establishment of translation institutions

The institutionalization of translation was central to its role as a civilizational force. The Sassanid Academy at Jundishapur served as an early prototype for cross-cultural knowledge transfer, integrating Indian, Greek, and Persian intellectual traditions under royal patronage (Frye, 1984; Najafpour, Giti-Pasand, & Khosropanah, 2011). Though more limited in scale, it introduced an interdisciplinary ethos that would later flourish under Islamic rule. In contrast, the Abbasid era represented the full institutional maturation of translation efforts. *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom), established under Caliph al-Ma'mun, functioned as a

state-sponsored center for translation and scientific inquiry (Jamshidi-Sarai, 2016). It offered structured support through salaries, scholarly supervision, and ideological oversight, effectively embedding translation within the machinery of state policy and making it a cornerstone of the Islamic intellectual project (Rosenthal, 1975; Fani, 1981; Gutas, 1998).

During the Qajar translation movement, the first military translation institute was established in Tabriz (Hashemi & Heydarpour, 2013), and the Dar al-Fonun translation center flourished under the patronage of Nasir al-Din Shah. However, unlike the more cohesive and ideologically grounded institutions of the Sassanid and Abbasid periods, Qajar-era translation efforts lacked an overarching civilizational vision. They failed to integrate translation into a broader ideological or religious framework, resulting in a fragmented and utilitarian approach (Parsa-Kia, 2009). Consequently, these translation centers remained decentralized, limited in institutional capacity, and largely disconnected from the traditional Islamic intellectual tradition.

4.4.4. Factor 4: Resistance to overreliance on translation

A critical barrier to indigenous knowledge production in non-Western academic settings is the overreliance on translation or translation dependency—the unfiltered importation of foreign texts without contextual or ideological adaptation. This practice can lead to epistemic fragmentation, intellectual eclecticism, and even cultural self-destruction (Abdi Chari, Barazash, & Abdi Saghavaz, 2024). This concern is not new. Imam Khamenei (2006, 2008, 2013, as cited in Zeynaldini & Ghanaghi, 2022) has repeatedly emphasized that intellectual dependency, mere imitation, and a spirit of translationism hinder the development of genuine knowledge production in universities.

Historically, effective resistance to such dependency can be observed in the Sassanid and the Abbasid translation movements, which exercised critical selectivity—translating only those works that could be meaningfully integrated into their epistemic and cultural frameworks (Gutas, 1998; Zarrinkoob, 2008). This strategic approach helped preserve cultural coherence and avoid epistemological confusion. Conversely, during the Qajar period, translation practices lacked such discernment. Initiated by Abbas Mirza, with the noble aim of scientific progress, the movement gradually evolved into an uncontrolled influx of Western texts—ranging from romance novels to political treatises—many of which were ill-suited to the socio-cultural landscape of Iran (Behzadi, 2015; Abdi Chari et al., 2024). Without adequate ideological filtering, the Qajar translation movement contributed more to fragmentation than to civilizational advancement. This contrast underscores the importance of resisting passive translationism and cultivating indigenous knowledge systems that integrate external ideas critically and constructively, rather than wholesale.

4.4.5. Factor 5: Institutional patronage and policy-making

State patronage played a decisive role in the success of translation movements during both the Sassanid and Abbasid periods. In the Sassanid era, translation was closely tied to statecraft and religious education, with rulers actively endorsing the translation of scientific and religious texts—particularly from Sanskrit and Greek—as a means of consolidating imperial knowledge and reinforcing Zoroastrian doctrine (Gutas, 2012; Rosenthal, 1975). Similarly, during the Abbasid period, Caliph al-Ma'mun institutionalized translation as a cornerstone of intellectual and civilizational advancement, most notably through the establishment of Bayt al-Hikmah. Under his leadership, the state provided generous financial incentives and formal recognition for scholars, cultivating a vibrant environment

for scholarly production and intercultural exchange (Frye, 2008; Baker & Saldanha, 2020). In both cases, the strategic alignment of translation with state interests was key to its institutional sustainability and cultural impact.

During the Qajar period, state support for translation was inconsistent. Although rulers like Nasir al-Din Shah initiated reforms and supported institutions such as Dar al-Fonun, translation efforts often lacked ideological grounding and long-term planning. More frequently, translation was treated as a symbol of modernization rather than a tool for structural reform (Khodaparast, 2019). In contrast, effective policy-making played a significant role in shaping the translation movement during the Abbasid and Sassanid periods. The Abbasid rulers, in particular, implemented structured policies to promote the translation and study of foreign texts, ensuring that these efforts aligned with the broader intellectual and scientific goals of the empire (Munday, 2016).

Translation policies extended beyond the mere selection of texts; they also encompassed control over their dissemination. Political and ideological motivations shaped which works were prioritized, reflecting the Abbasid rulers' efforts to integrate diverse bodies of knowledge into a cohesive intellectual framework (Parsa-Kia, 2009). Similarly, the Sassanid Empire adopted a state-centric approach to translation, with texts rendered into Middle Persian under royal patronage for purposes of religious consolidation—particularly the promotion of Zoroastrian doctrine—and bureaucratic administration. In this context, translation served both ideological unification and administrative rationalization (Daryaei, 2009). In contrast, translation policies during the Qajar period were sporadic and lacked ideological or institutional continuity. While initiatives such as the establishment of Dar al-Fonun signaled attempts at modernization, they were largely reactive and not part of a coherent intellectual agenda. Translation efforts often relied on individual patronage and were driven by political mimicry of Europe rather than a strategic cultural vision (Amanat, 1997; Khodaparast, 2019).

4.4.6. Factor 6: Ideological integration and reframing

Perhaps the most significant distinction among the three translation movements lies in their approach to ideological reframing. A defining feature of Abbasid translation efforts was the selective adaptation of Greek rationalism, which was not adopted wholesale but reinterpreted to align with Islamic theology, particularly in the realms of kalam and philosophy (Gutas, 1998; Bsoul, 2019). Similarly, the Sassanids filtered Indian and Hellenistic ideas through the lens of Zoroastrian metaphysics, preserving cultural continuity and reinforcing religious orthodoxy (Frye, 1984). In contrast, the Qajar period lacked such ideological mediation. Western concepts were introduced with minimal filtering, resulting in an intellectual dissonance between traditional religious structures and the influx of foreign knowledge (Parsa-Kia, 2009; Bahri, 2011).

4.5. *Synthesis and interpretation*

When these six factors are viewed comparatively, a pattern emerges.

Table 1. Comparative assessment of translation movement foundations across historical periods.

Factor	Sassanid	Abbasid	Qajar
cultural mediation	strong	strong	moderate
strategic selection	moderate–high	very high	low
institutionalization	moderate	very high	low–moderate
controlled translation	high	high	low
patronage & policy	moderate–strong	strong	inconsistent
ideological reframing	high	very high	weak

Table 1 offers a comparative evaluation of six foundational factors that shaped the translation movements across three pivotal historical periods: the Sassanid, Abbasid, and Qajar eras. The selected factors—Cultural Mediation, Strategic Selection, Institutionalization, Controlled Translation, Patronage and Policy, and Ideological Reframing—are assessed in terms of their relative strength and presence within each period. The ratings (e.g., High, Moderate, Low) represent qualitative judgments based on historical records and scholarly interpretations. This comparison highlights both patterns of continuity and points of divergence. The Abbasid model emerges as the most comprehensive, demonstrating how translation, when embedded within a coherent ideological, institutional, and civilizational framework, can serve as a transformative force. The Sassanid period laid important epistemic groundwork, whereas the Qajar era exemplifies the limitations of translation efforts in the absence of ideological integration and strategic direction. These results support and pave the ground for the proposition that translation can once again serve as a civilizational engine—provided that modern efforts mirror the integration, selectivity, and ideological clarity of the previous movements.

5. Discussion and implications

Based on a comparative thematic analysis, this study identifies six interrelated factors that significantly contributed to the effectiveness of historical Islamic translation movements (Bedeker & Feinauer, 2006). Translators across the Sassanid, Abbasid, and Qajar periods did not function merely as linguistic intermediaries; rather, they engaged in active ideological and cultural reframing, adapting texts to align with prevailing epistemologies. The most successful movements—most notably during the Abbasid era—exhibited a deliberate approach to content selection, prioritizing works that advanced broader civilizational objectives over indiscriminate adoption of foreign materials. Centralized institutions, such as the House of Wisdom in the Abbasid period and Jundishapur in the Sassanid era, played a crucial role in facilitating coordination, ensuring quality control, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration.

Effective translation movements also imposed epistemic filters, maintaining cultural coherence and avoiding content saturation by selectively integrating compatible knowledge systems. State-led initiatives and policy-driven patronage provided translators with institutional stability, intellectual legitimacy, and ideological guidance. Crucially, the most impactful translations were not literal conversions but interpretative acts—embedding foreign ideas within the metaphysical and ontological frameworks of the host civilization. These findings underscore that translation is not a neutral conduit of information, but a civilizational mechanism capable of either reinforcing or destabilizing cultural identity, depending on its ideological orientation.

5.1. Implications for modern Islamic civilization

The findings of this study hold important implications for contemporary Islamic societies, particularly within the framework of modern Islamic civilization as articulated by Imam Khamenei (2012, 2016a, 2016b, 2019). According to this vision, civilizational revival necessitates the integration of science, ethics, culture, and governance within a coherent and identity-preserving system.

Historical insights suggest that revitalizing translation today requires far more than technical proficiency; it demands a comprehensive strategy rooted in ideological awareness and civilizational purpose. This includes the establishment of centralized translation institutions grounded in Islamic epistemology—such as modern equivalents of Bayt al-Hikmah or ideologically informed think tanks—to coordinate and oversee translation efforts. Furthermore, the formulation of clear translation policies is essential, ensuring that translated content aligns with strategic scientific and ideological objectives.

Translators must be trained not merely as neutral transmitters of information, but as ideologically conscious mediators capable of adapting foreign knowledge within an Islamic framework. Strategic content curation is also critical, as indiscriminate adoption of Western paradigms risks cognitive overload and epistemic disorientation. Just as Greek philosophy was reframed through *kalaam* and *falsafah* during the Abbasid period, contemporary translation efforts must similarly embed foreign knowledge within Islamic ontological and metaphysical structures. Without adherence to these principles, translation may inadvertently deepen cultural dependency rather than serve as a vehicle for intellectual autonomy and civilizational renewal.

5.2. Strategic recommendations

To align translation efforts with the broader project of Modern Islamic Civilization, this study proposes a set of strategic recommendations aimed at restoring translation as a civilizational force. First, translation governance must be situated at the policy level and embedded within national civilizational strategies to ensure coherence, direction, and sustainability. This should be supported by the development of ideological training programs for translators, combining linguistic expertise with foundational knowledge in theology and civilizational studies. Additionally, the creation of digital repositories housing high-quality, culturally aligned translated works would enhance access and continuity. Clear criteria for content inclusion should also be established, prioritizing materials that align with Islamic worldviews and address the intellectual and societal needs of the Ummah. Finally, translation initiatives must expand beyond purely technical domains to encompass interdisciplinary fields such as science, philosophy, ethics, and jurisprudence. These measures collectively can revitalize translation as a transformative mechanism—bridging the rich legacy of Islamic thought with the challenges and opportunities of contemporary global engagement.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to investigate the civilizational role of translation in Islamic history by analyzing three major translation movements: the Sassanid, the Abbasid, and the Qajar periods. Drawing upon the cultural turn (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, 1998) in translation

studies and guided by the vision of modern Islamic civilization as articulated by Imam Khamenei (2012, 2016a, 2016b, 2019), the research applied a qualitative thematic analysis to identify the underlying factors that have shaped the effectiveness and ideological impact of these movements. The findings clearly demonstrate that translation, when strategically managed and ideologically grounded, has historically acted as a transformative engine of civilizational growth. Six key factors—cultural mediation, strategic content selection, institutionalization, filtering against overload, ideological integration, and state patronage and policy-making—were identified as fundamental contributors to successful translation efforts in the past.

Among the three periods analyzed, the Abbasid model emerged as the most complete and impactful, integrating foreign knowledge within Islamic theological, philosophical, and political frameworks. The Sassanid translation legacy provided the pre-Islamic foundation, while the Qajar movement, despite its ambitiousness, lacked coherence and civilizational vision. In light of these insights, the paper argues that any contemporary effort to revive translation as a civilizational strategy must go beyond functional language transfer and reestablish translation as a deliberate, policy-oriented, and culturally aligned activity. This includes building institutional structures, training ideologically aware translators, and aligning content with the epistemological needs of the Islamic world.

Ultimately, by learning from the past and grounding translation efforts in a cohesive ideological vision, Islamic societies can re-enable translation to serve, not as an imitation tool, but as a tool for epistemic sovereignty and civilizational revival. Building on the study's historical findings regarding the role of institutional support and ideological frameworks in shaping translation movements, future research should delve into the specific mechanisms by which translation has served as a vehicle for cultural preservation and religious transmission during the Abbasid period. In particular, the influence of key Islamic figures, such as Imam Kazem, Imam Reza, and Imam Javad, Divine peace upon them, warrants focused examination—especially in terms of how their intellectual engagement within the Abbasid court environment has implicitly or explicitly guided translation priorities and epistemological integration.

Additionally, a promising area for future research lies in assessing the religious and philosophical literacy of contemporary Iranian translators, particularly their familiarity with Islamic principles and how such knowledge—or its absence—affects translation choices in fields like Islamic ethics, law, and civilizational discourse. This can be approached through empirical studies (e.g., translator interviews, textual analysis of religious translations) to determine how Islamic frameworks are preserved, adapted, or neglected in modern contexts. Finally, future inquiry could benefit from comparative analyses between historical translation movements and current institutional translation policies in Iran, identifying continuities and ruptures in state approaches, ideological orientations, and educational structures related to translation. Such research would offer not only a historical bridge but also practical insights into shaping more coherent and purposeful translation strategies today.

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