

# **Translator's Behavior between Text and Context**

**Mohammed Alghbban**

**Department of Modern Languages and Translation-Hebrew Program**

**College of languages & Translation**

**King Saud University**

## **1. Abstract**

Drawing on the work of Vinay and Darbelnet, *A Methodology for Translation*,<sup>1</sup> this article discusses the translator's behavior in a particular situation during translation. While syntax and lexical structures are among the very important stylistic and internal verbal factors that affect the translator's attitude towards the source text materials; sociocultural, politics, and diplomatic interests are among the very important external non-verbal factors that influence the methodology of the translator's behavior. From a translation point of view, I will spotlight this in a study on *The Epistle to Yemen* – one of the most important works from Medieval Times written in Judeo-Arabic – and its three contemporary translations into Hebrew. Throughout the study, the focus is not mainly on verbal items, but will address in detail some non-verbal factors such as ideology, ethnicity, religious conflict, and the demographic environment of both the translator and his receptor audiences as it pertains to the translator's technique.

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<sup>1</sup> Vinay, Jean-Paul and Jean Darbelnet. 2004. "A Methodology for Translation." Translated by Juan C. Sager and M. J. Hamel. In *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. Edited by Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge. PP. 84-93.

**Key words:** Judeo-Arabic; *The Epistle to Yemen*; Translator's behavior; Maimonides; Translation techniques; Contextualization; Hebrew translation; Culture transformation.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology used in this paper is analytical and comparative. In the analytical section, the author will analyze the textual content of the source text (ST) and of each target text (TT). The analysis will also apply to each TT individually and examine the level of correspondence with and/or deviation from the ST.

In the comparative section, the author is going to compare and contrast the three different translations in the TT and discuss how and why each translator made his choice to clarify and/or obfuscate some elements from the ST in his translation. For that purpose, excerpts from the three translations will be selected for comparison with the ST. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the findings of the proposed study and my deductions based upon the progress of the investigation.

## **3. Introduction**

It is very important to introduce the studied work by reflecting on the nature of the original text and presenting the value of its translation. From a Jewish historical background, the messianic idea and the image of the Messiah are fundamental. The Tanakh describes the character of the Messiah and the circumstances of his appearance (Isaiah 11: 1-5), yet does not give any date or location of his arrival. Many false messianic movements throughout Jewish history resulted from the suffering and the persecution of the Jewish people around the globe. In each of those movements, a

religious figure proclaimed himself to be the Messiah and led his people to national revolution. Typically this resulted in the presiding government repressing and massacring the Jewish minority.

One of those false messianic movements occurred in Yemen in 1150 CE when the Shi'ite governor, 'Abd al-Nabi' Mahdi, persecuted the Jewish community there and gave them three options; conversion to Islam, exile from Yemen, or death. In response to the governor's order, the Yemeni Jews fell into one of two camps. One group chose conversion and other chose martyrdom. Those circumstances led one member of the Jewish community, Abdullah, to proclaim that he was the Messiah. He then became a missionary for Islam and all the Jews who converted believed in him. As a result of their trust, he created a conflict within the Jewish community.

The chief Rabbi in Yemen at that time, Jacob ben Nathanel al-Fayyumi, wrote a letter to Maimonides seeking his advice and guidance in regard to this dangerous matter. In the letter, al-Fayyumi asked very fundamental questions regarding the Messiah and Jewish belief. Some of those questions, according to Halkin<sup>2</sup>, were as follows: "What was the significance of the community's suffering? How should they respond to a convert who had become a missionary for Islam and claimed that the Torah itself confirmed the prophethood of Muhammad? What should they make of the claim of another individual to be the Messiah, come to rescue them from their persecutor? Could the date of the Messiah's coming be predicted by astrology?"

Maimonides (1135-1204 CE) at that time was living in Cairo and was the personal physician of Saladin. He is considered one of the most illustrious figures in Judaism, as

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<sup>2</sup> Halkin, Abraham, ed. and Boaz Cohen, trans. 1952. אגרת תימן לרבינו משה בן מימון. המקור הערבי ושלושת. [Moses Maimonides, Epistle to Yemen: The Arabic original and the three Hebrew versions.] New York: American Academy for Jewish Research. PP.19.

well as one of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time.<sup>3</sup> Maimonides wrote back to al-Fayyumi answering the questions in one of his famous works, *The Epistle to Yemen*, in 1172. The answer was not meant to be sent only to the Jews of Yemen, but to all Jews on earth. It carried a warning message for all false messiahs; it also carried a message of courage and hope for all Jews to strengthen their faith. The source text was written in Judeo-Arabic and then translated into Hebrew by three different reputed Jewish translators living in different places and cultures.

The first translator is Abraham ben Samuel Ha-Levi, commonly known as Abraham Hasdai lived in Barcelona and, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, "... some Arabic works are known only through his translation."<sup>4</sup> His Translation to *The Epistle to Yemen* was directed to the Andalusian Jewry who were lived as minority surrounded by both Muslim and Christian culture and practice in al-Andalus.<sup>5</sup>

The second translator is Samuel Ibn Tibbon (1150-1230 CE), a physician and philosopher from Lunel in southern France. He learned medicine from his father, as well as Arabic and Hebrew literature. The influence of Maimonides led Samuel to translate many of his works in science, philosophy, literature and religion. His Translation to *The Epistle to Yemen* was directed to the French Jewry who were surrounded by Christian culture and practice in Capetian France.<sup>6</sup>

The third translator is Nahom Ha-Ma'ravi who was born in modern-day Morocco. His main interest of translation was between Arabic and Hebrew. Among his various

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<sup>3</sup> Halkin, Abraham, trans. 1993. *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership*. 1st paperback edition, with discussions by David Hartman. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

<sup>4</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906. [www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com). s. vv. Abraham Ben Samuel Halevi Hasdai, Moses ben Maimon, Samuel Ben Judah Ibn Tibbon.

<sup>5</sup> אגרת תימן לרבינו משה בן מימון. המקור הערבי ושלושת התרגומים העבריים. iiixxx.

<sup>6</sup> ארת תימן לרבינו משה בן מימון. המקור הערבי ושלושת התרגומים העבריים. iixxx.

translated works are *Sefer Ha-ytseah* by Isaac the Israeli from Kairouan and *The Epistle to Yemen* which was directed to Moroccan Jewry living as a minority among the Muslims.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Analyzing the Textual Materials

Before starting the analysis of these TTs, it is important to consider the structural nature of the ST, and its relation to these TTs. The source text was written in Judeo-Arabic using the Hebrew alphabet, with Arabic syntax and, in most cases, semantics as its linguistic foundation. The cultural backgrounds of the source text and the target audiences are the same. Finally, there are some expressions from Arabic and Aramaic that appear in the source text.

The examples below will reflect a general point of view on the verbal similarity between the three translators regarding their translations:

##### Example 1

Source Text <sup>8</sup>	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> All translations from the source text are my own

<p>"אמנם מה שזכרת מן העומד<sup>1</sup> בארץ תימן, אשר גזר שמד על ישראל כל המקומות שיש-לו יכולת עליהם לצאת מן הדת, כמו שעשה הכנעני<sup>2</sup> בארצות המערב"</p>	<p>"אמנם מה שזכרתו מענין זה המושל<sup>1</sup> בארץ תימן, אשר גזר שמד על ישראל והכריח כל אנשי מקומות ממשלתו לצאת מן הדת, כאשר עשה הכנעני<sup>2</sup> בארץ המערב"</p>	<p>"אולם מה שזכרת מענין האיש הזה<sup>1</sup> אשר קם בארץ תימן, ואשר גזר שמד על ישראל והכריח כל המקומות אשר משל עליהם להוציאם מדתם ואמונתם, כאשר עשה הכנעני<sup>2</sup> בארץ המערב"</p>	<p>"אמא מא דכרתהו מן אמר הדא אלקאים<sup>1</sup> בארץ אלימן, אלדי גזר שמד על ישראל וגבר כל אלמואצע אלתי קדר עליהא עלי אלכרוג מן אלדין כאלדי פעל אלכנעני<sup>2</sup> פי בלאד אלמגרב"</p>
<p>"As for what you have mentioned about the matter of that vicegerent of Yemen, who decreed forced apostasy of the Israelites and compelled all the Jewish inhabitants in all the places he had subdued to desert their religion, just as the Berbers had obliged them to do in</p>	<p>"<u>But</u> what you have mentioned about <u>that man</u>, the leader of Yemen, who decreed forced apostasy of the Israelites and compelled <u>them</u> in the places he had subdued to desert their religion <u>and</u> <u>faith</u>, just as the Berbers had obliged them to do</p>	<p>"<u>Indeed</u>, what you have mentioned about <u>that governor</u> of Yemen, who decreed forced apostasy of the <u>Jews</u> and compelled all the <u>native</u> inhabitants in all the places he had subdued to desert their religion, just as the Berbers had obliged them to do</p>	<p>"<u>Indeed</u>, what you have mentioned about the vicegerent of Yemen, who decreed forced apostasy of the <u>Jews</u> and compelled all the Jewish inhabitants in all the places he had <u>restrained</u> to desert their religion, just as the Berbers had obliged them to do</p>

the Maghreb”	in the Maghreb”	in the Maghreb”	in the Maghreb”
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## Example 2

Source Text	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom
והדה מן אלתחייל אלעגיב אלדי יפעלה אלשכץ אלשדיד אלנכאיה, אנה ירום קתל עדווה ובקאה הו	<u>וזה מפליאות התחבולה</u> אשר יעשה אותם האדם רב הקנאה <u>אמיץ</u> <u>המריבה</u> , כי ישתדל להרוג אויבו והשאר עצמו	<u>וזאת תחבולה נפלאה</u> אשר יעשה האיש הרע שהוא ישתדל <u>להרוג שונאו עם</u> <u>התקיימו הוא</u>	<u>ויש לך לתמוה מרוב</u> <u>התנכלו</u> , שמחשבת האיש המזיד הזה היתה להרוג את אויבו <u>ולחיו את</u> <u>נפשו</u>
And this is a strange kind of deceit that the very envious person can do, that he will strive to kill his enemy to himself survive.	And this is <u>one of</u> <u>the exceptional</u> <u>deceptions</u> <u>performed by a very</u> <u>malicious and</u> envious person who will strive to kill his enemy and <u>yet</u>	And this is <u>an</u> <u>astonishing trick</u> made by the very <u>evil person</u> , who will strive to kill his enemy <u>while</u> <u>keeping his</u> <u>continuity.</u>	And <u>you'll be</u> <u>astonished from the</u> <u>great cunning of his</u> <u>conspiracy that the</u> <u>thought of such a</u> <u>wicked person was</u> <u>to murder his enemy</u> <u>and keep his life.</u>

	<u>himself remain.</u>		
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### Example 3

Source Text	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom
" תם קאם בעדה משגע יחדו חדוה אד פתח לה אלטריק, וזאד מע דלך גרץ אכרי, והו טלב אלמלך ואלטאעה לה"	" אחרי כן קם אחריו משוגע הלך בדרכיו, כי הוא פתח לו הדרך, והוסיף עליו ענין אחר והוא בקשת המלוכה והממשלה לעצמו"	" אחר כך עמד אחריו משוגע הלך בדרכו, שהוא פתח לו הדרך, והוסיף עליו כונה אחרת, והוא בקשת המלוכה ושיעבדוהו בני אדם"	" ועמד אחריו משוגע ונהג כנהגו, כלומר לשנות דתנו הואיל ופתח לו הפתח והוסיף עם כל זה כונה אחרת שרדף אחרי המלכות ששתעבדו לו"
"And then the Madman came after him, following his lead since he paved the way for him, and in addition to that he added another desire, that is, possessing kingship and authority for	" <u>After that</u> the Madman came <u>and</u> <u>followed</u> his lead, since he paved the way for him, <u>but</u> he added <u>further</u> <u>objectives</u> of <u>optioning</u> kingship and authority for himself"	" <u>Later a</u> Madman came after him <u>and</u> <u>followed</u> his lead, since he paved the way for him, <u>but</u> he added <u>another</u> <u>purpose, that is</u> <u>seeking</u> kingship <u>and enslavement of</u> <u>others</u> "	" <u>A</u> Madman came after him <u>and</u> <u>followed his way,</u> <u>that is, to change</u> <u>our religion and</u> <u>start anew, and</u> paved the way for him <u>and</u> he added <u>on top of that</u> another desire, that



himself”			is, kingship and <u>complete</u> <u>enslavement</u> of <u>others”</u>
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Generally speaking, all examples above show the process of rendering the verbal content, such as the lexical and syntactical units of the source text, into the target language. All three translators, though they use varying words and expressions, underlined in the examples for comparison, resemble one another and imitate the source text by conveying the proper meaning.

Vinay and Darbelnet<sup>9</sup> approach parallelism in translation by arguing that because of the metalinguistic parallelism between the ST and the TT it is possible for the translator to transfer the delivered message of the ST element by element into the language of the TT, since it is based on either parallel categories, or on parallel concepts. Taking such argument into account, both translations of Abraham and Samuel are shown to be based on a parallel category, or structural parallelism. By juxtaposing the source text and the target text, the result would be that the target language had completely accepted the stylistic structures of both the syntax and the semantic of the source text. In other words, they kept, as much as they could, the structural parallelism as well as the parallel concept in their translations. Therefore it was recognizable that almost each

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<sup>9</sup> Vinay, Jean-Paul and Jean Darbelnet . “A Methodology for Translation.” In *The Translation Studies Reader*, PP. 84-93.

element of the source text had its parallel element in the target language, except for some words choices that differ from one translator to another in order to provide varying levels of lexical clarification.

The translation of Nahom on the other hand, seems to be more descriptive than the others. The style in his translation occasionally altered the syntactic structural parallelism between the two languages, but the parallel concept between the two texts was almost identically transferred. As a result, his translation is more explicit and lengthier than the others.

The overall conclusion drawn from the analysis of these examples could be applied to the entire work of all three translators. Since they shared a similar culture and the linguistic gap had been already reduced by the nature of the source text, all three translations effectively conveyed the message of the ST into the target language. The religious nature of the source text had limited the freedom of the translators, forcing them to be faithful to the original meaning.

## **5. The Comparative Section**

Although the verbal elements of the source text helped shape the translators' attitudes in the target text, there were also irresistible non-verbal factors that influenced the translators' approaches to the source text, causing a shift in the parallel content of their translation. To show these micro-level, interlineal changes, a few sample statements from each of the three translations will be selected for comparison:

### **Example 4**

Source Text	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom
" ואמא כוננא לא נצדק נבווה עמר וזיד"	"ואולם היותנו בלי מאמינים בנבואת פלוני ופלוני"	"ואולם היותנו בלתי מאמינים בנבואת עמר וזיד"	"אבל שלא נאמין בנבואת זיד ועמר"
"And the fact that we do not believe in the prophecy of 'Amr and Zeid"	"And <u>regarding our</u> <u>disbelief</u> in the prophecy of <u>so and</u> <u>so</u> "	"And <u>regarding our</u> <u>disbelief</u> in the prophecy of 'Amr and Zeid"	"But <u>regarding our</u> <u>disbelief</u> in the prophecy of <u>Zeid</u> <u>and 'Amr</u> "

Even though borrowing is one of the common methods in translation to introduce the flavor of the source language's culture to the target audience, the three translators, in most cases, tended to be as much as possible attached to the ST text culture, which was Jewish, while ignoring the Arabic influences of the text. Though Maimonides introduced, in our example, a foreign (Arabic) expression, "'Amr and Zeid" into his letter, the translators, in this and other examples, occasionally dismissed this intrusion in favor of a local alternative. Except for some expressions, the ST appeared to be rendered differently in the TT. Considering the fact that the Jewish culture during the diaspora was to some extent effected by the general cultural boundaries and environments of the lands where the Jewish people lived, the translators had to decide whether to keep those foreign expressions or to use a domestic alternative. Vinay and Darbelnet<sup>10</sup> used the term

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 129

"*calque*" as a special kind of borrowing to describe the situation where a language borrows a word or expression from another language and translates each of its elements literally. The result of such loan translation, according to them, is either a lexical calque that maintains the syntax of the target language (TL) while introducing a new mode of expression, or a structural *calque* which innovates a new construction into the language.

The TL of all translators was Hebrew; and therefore their approach to idioms and expressions as they appeared in the source text was dictated by their regional dialect. To explain more there were two major Hebrew vernaculars: Sephardic, the vernacular spoken by the Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula and in the Middle East, and Ashkenazi, the vernacular spoken by the Jews who lived in Western and Central Europe. It is doubtless that the translators' behavior was subjected to the boundary of the dominant language in the community of his target audience. Thus, the translation of Abraham had been influenced by the boundary of the Spanish language, Samuel by the French language boundary, and Nahom by the boundary of Arabic.

"Amr and Zeid" is an Arabic expression used to indicate random names. Maimonides used this expression to avoid mentioning specific names in his letter. Even though Islamic culture was the dominant at that time and Sephardic Jews were familiar with Arabic expressions and idioms, Abraham chose not to confuse his target readers and substituted "Amr and Zeid" with its parallel expression from Aramaic that is also known in the Sephardic vernacular. Instead of retaining "Amr and Zeid" he replaced it with its biblical equivalent "so and so" – "Ploni and Ploni"<sup>11</sup>. As for Samuel, he preferred to introduce the flavor of the Arabic culture by adopting the Arabic expression "Zeid and Amr" to his French Jewry as a structural *calque*. Whereas Nahom retained the lexical

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<sup>11</sup> אגרת תימן לרבינו משה בן מימון. המקור הערבי ושלושת התרגומים העבריים , 50.

structure of the expression “‘Amr and Zeid” as it was already completely understood by his targeted audience, the Moroccan Jewry.

*Explicitation* is the technique in which the translator makes explicit in the TT what is meant to be implicit in the ST by introducing information driven from the context or the situation in the ST<sup>12</sup>. Elsewhere, Nida introduces the term *amplification* to explain the process of explicitation. Amplification, according to Nida<sup>13</sup>, is the technique used when some important semantic elements are implicitly mentioned in the source language, yet they require explicit identification in the target language.

In a number of passages in *The Epistle to Yemen*, Maimonides intended to obscure the meaning, specifically when addressing a matter related to Islam. The reason behind such obscurity is that the author himself lived among Muslims in Egypt and was very close to the Caliph Saladin since he was his personal physician. Therefore Maimonides feared that his attack on the prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and Islam would place him and his family in danger should the Egyptian authorities learn the content of his letter. In contrast, Maimonides had requested that this letter be spread among the Jewish community in Yemen and throughout the Jewish diaspora:

ותקרא אותה על הקהל ועל היהודים, כדי שתהיה ממצדיקי הרבים- אחר שתזהר ותשמר  
תכלית ההזהרה והשמירה משום רשע שלא יפרסם ולא יגלה הדבר לאמות הישמעאלים  
שמא יחדש דבר שיצילנו השם ברחמיו ממנו. ואף על פי שכתבתי אותו, הייתה מתירא מזה  
הרבה מאד אבל ראיתי שהצדקת הרבים - דבר שאין ראוי לפחד עליו מן הסכנה.

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<sup>12</sup> Klaudy, Kinga. 2006. “Explicitation.” In Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies, edited by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha. 2nd ed. London: Routledge. PP. 80-84.

<sup>13</sup> Nida, Eugene. 1964. *Toward a Science of Translating, With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*. Leiden: Brill. PP. 228.

Read it at public gatherings and in private, and you will thus become a public benefactor. Take adequate precautions lest its contents be divulged by an evil person and mishap overtake us. (God spare us therefrom.) When I began writing this letter I had some misgivings about it, but they were overruled by my conviction that the public welfare takes precedence over one's personal safety.<sup>14</sup>

The interesting fact in this case is how the translator approached this problem of intentional obscurity found in source text when the translator experienced circumstances of censure similar to those placed on the author of the original text. The examples below will examine the approach of each translator to this issue:

### Example 5

Source Text	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom
"וממא יגב אן תעלמה אן אלאסם אלדי תזעם אלישמעאלים אנה מכתוב פי אלתורה, אלת יתעלק בה אלפושעים מן במאד מאד, ליס הו מים חית מים דאלי, בל אנה	<u>וממה שיאות שתדעו כי "</u> <u>השם שיאמרו</u> <u>הישמאעלים</u> שהוא כתוב בתורה, <u>אשר יחזיקו בו</u> הפושעים <u>שהו</u> במאד מאד, <u>איננו מחמד הנכתב</u> <u>מ"ם חית מים דל"ת</u>	"וממה שראוי שתדעוהו" <u>שהשם שחושבים</u> <u>הישמאעלים</u> שהוא כתוב בתורה <u>אשר נתלים</u> הפושעים בו, <u>והוא אמרו</u> במאד מאד, <u>אינו מ"ם</u> <u>חית מים דל"ת</u> , אלא	"ומה שיש לך לדעת <u>שזה השם שעלה בדעת</u> <u>הישמאעלים</u> שהו כתוב בתורה <u>שאחזו בו</u> הפושעים, <u>כלומר במאד</u> מאד שהוא <u>מחמד, אינו</u> <u>מחמד אלא אחמד</u> ."

<sup>14</sup> אגרת תימן לרבינו משה בן מימון. המקור הערבי ושלושת התרגומים העבריים: 131.

אלף חית מים דאל."	אבל הוא אחמד הנכתב "אל"ף חית"ת מ"ם דל"ת	הוא אל"ף חית"ת מי"ם דל"ת."	
"And you (sing.) must learn that the name, which allegedly that the Ishmaelites claim was written in the Torah, bm'dm'd, to which the apostates cling, is not M-U-H-A-M M-A-D but A-H-M-A-D"	"And you (pl.) should know that the name of the prophet that the Ishmaelites think is written in the Torah, bm'dm'd, to which the apostates cling, is not MUHAMMAD that is written M-U-H-A-M-M-A-D but AHMAD which is written A-H-M-A-D"	"It is worthy that you (pl.) know that the name of the prophet that the Ishmaelites think is written in the Torah, bm'dm'd, to which the apostates cling, is not MUHAMMAD but AHMAD"	"And what is important for you (sing.) to know is that the name of the prophet that the Ishmaelites think is written in the Torah, bm'dm'd, to which the apostates cling, is not M-U-H-A-M M-A-D but A-H-M-A-D"

### Example 6

Source Text	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom
" ואמא מא דכרתה מן	" ואולם מה שזכרת	" ואשר זכרתו מענין	" ומה שזכרת מדבר

הפושע שהכניס בלבות	הפושע אשר הביא בני	מענין הפושע אשר שם	אמר אלפושע אלדי אוהם
העם שמלת במאד מאד	אדם לחשוב שבמאד מאד	בני אדם להאמין כי	אלנאס אן במד מאד הו
הוא על משוגע"	הוא משגע"	במאד מאד הוא	משוגע"
		בגימטריא מחמד"	
"And what you have mentioned regarding that criminal who misguided the hearts of the nation that the word bm'dm'd is meant to be the Madman"	"And that you have mentioned regarding that criminal who made the people to believe that bm'dm'd is the Madman"	"But what you have mentioned regarding that criminal who deluded the people to believe that bm'dm'd appearing in the numerology is Mohammad"	"As to what you have mentioned about that criminal who deluded the people to believe that bm'dm'd is the Madman"

### Example 7

Source Text	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom
" ואן דניאל אכד מא ואצף מלך ישמעאל וקים פל' ואעקבה במגי אלמשיח"	" ודניאל תכלית מה שספר היה מלכות ישמעאל וקום פלוני, ואמר כאחריו יבא המשיח"	" ודניאל באחרית ספורו למלכות ישמעאל ועמידת המשגע, סמך לו ביאת המשיח"	" ודניאל, סוף מה שספר- מלכות ישמעאל ועמידת מחמד ואחריו ביאת הגואל בסמוך"



"And Daniel confirmed his description of the Kingdom of Ishmael, and the rising of someone before the coming of the Messiah"	"And <u>the last words</u> of Daniel <u>described</u> the Kingdom of Ishmael and the <u>rise</u> of someone, <u>and he</u> <u>said that</u> the Messiah <u>will come</u> <u>after him</u> "	" <u>And Daniel at the</u> <u>end of his tale about</u> the Kingdom of Ishmael and the rising of <u>the</u> <u>Madman,</u> <u>he</u> <u>confirmed</u> the coming of the Messiah"	"And Daniel, <u>ends</u> <u>his tale with</u> the Kingdom of Ishmael and the rising of <u>Muhammad</u> <u>and</u> <u>after him the near</u> coming of <u>the</u> <u>Savior</u> "
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Obscurity in the source text is a common obstacle that the translator faces during the process of his work. It could be caused by an internal factor, such as a linguistic lacking between the two languages, or by an external factor, such as the sociocultural or political environments that govern the translator's behavior. One of the legitimate ways to approach the obscurity of the target text is by adding words and expressions when the situation requires clarification of an ambiguity in the original text.<sup>15</sup> However, there are some external factors for which the situation requires the translator to obfuscate the meaning, while the nature of the source text aims for specificity.

In the above examples 5, 6, and 7 the author was dealing with a crucial situation. From a critical point of view, he wanted to refute the Muslim claim regarding mentioning the name of the prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) in the Torah. Yet for safety reasons he did not want to mention the name of the Prophet openly in his letter. Thus,

<sup>15</sup> Nida. Toward a Science of Translating. PP. 156-167.

throughout his letter, Maimonides sometimes employed the Hebrew terms משוגע “the madman” or the Aramaic term "ploni" which means "that one" as referential nicknames for the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, when the name Muhammad was necessary to be mentioned, he wrote the letters of the word Muhammad in their proper order.

The translators’ approach to this problem was essentially based on their sociopolitical environment and on the geographical location of their target audience. For example, Samuel whose target audience was a Jewish minority living among a French Christian majority did not hesitate to make explicit what was implicit in the source text. On the other hand, Abraham and Nahom, whose target audiences were Jews in Barcelona and Morocco had submitted themselves to the obscurity of the ST and carefully mentioned the name of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) only when necessary to do so. They were in a comparative environment to that of Maimonides in which they lived among a Jewish minority surrounded by a Muslim majority. For that reason, whenever the source text had an attack on Islam, the translations of Abraham and Nahom, in most cases, tended to be literal to the ST and in other situations further obscure the matter.

The analysis of the examples 5, 6, and 7 does not always hold true. As has been mentioned earlier, the main factor in determining the disparity between clarity and obscurity of the translation was the sociopolitical environment of the three translators. Hence, it was obvious that by juxtaposing the three target translations, if the matter

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<sup>16</sup> The disbelievers among of Arabs in the first years of Muhammad’s prophecy used this term "madman", مجنون, as a nickname to the prophet Muhammad - peace be upon him. Cf. Quran 37:36, “And say: What! ‘Shall we give up our gods for the sake of a poet possessed [مجنون]?’” (Emphasis mine). Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

discussed in the source text was related to Christianity, the result would be explicitness for Nahom and obscurity for Samuel, whereas Abraham, at some extent, adhered to a literal translation of the source text.

The following example is the first appearance of Jesus in the source text:

### Example 8

Source Text	Abraham	Samuel	Nahom
" פאול מן עמד עלי הדא אלראי ישוע הנוצרי שחיק עצמות והו מן ישראל, ואנה ואן כאן אבוה גוי ואמה ישראלית פהו מן ישראל, לאן אלאצל ענדנא גוי ועבד הבא על בת ישראל הולד כשר, ואנמא נסמיה ממזר עלי גהת אלמבאלגה"	<u>"והראשון שנכשל בעצה הזאת ישו הנוצרי, שחוק עצמות, והוא מישראל, ואם היה אביו גוי והאם ישראלית השרש אצלני הגוי ועבד הבא על בת ישראל הולד כשר, ואולם נקראהו ממזר על דרך ההפלגה."</u>	<u>"ותחלת מי שמצא זה הדעת- היה ישוע הנוצרי... והוא מישראל. והוא אף-על-פי שהיה אביו גוי ואמו ישראלית- העיקר בדניו: גוי ועבד הבא על בת ישראל הולד כשר, ואולם נקראהו...להפליג בחרפתו."</u>	<u>"ותחלת הנכשלים בעצה זאת [ישוע הנצרי שחוק עצמות] והוא מישראל, ואע"פ שהיה אביו גוי והאם ישראלית מפי השמועה למדנו גוי ועבד הבא על בת ישראל הולד כשר, וזה נקרא אצלנו ממזר על דרך ההפלגה."</u>
"The first to institute this idea was Jesus the Nazarene, may his bones be ground to	<u>"The first who failed to institute this advice was Jesus the Nazarene, may his bones be</u>	<u>"The first who invented this thought was Jesus the Nazarene... and he was a Jew. Even</u>	<u>"Among the first losers from this advice was (Jesus the Nazarene, may his bones be ground</u>

dust; he was a Jew even though his father was a Gentile and his mother was a Jewess. This is because our principle is that a child born of a Jewess and a Gentile or a slave, is legitimate. Only figuratively do we call him an illegitimate child"	ground to dust. He was a Jew, <u>even if</u> his father was a Gentile and his mother was a Jewess, our principle is that a child born of a Jewess and a Gentile or a slave, is legitimate. Only figuratively do we call him an illegitimate child"	though his father was a Gentile and his mother was a Jewess, our principle is that a child born of a Jewess and a Gentile or a slave, is legitimate. Only figuratively do we call him..."	to dust). He was a Jew, even though his father was a Gentile and his mother was a Jewess, our principle is that a child born of a Gentile or a slave, is legitimate. <u>But</u> we do figuratively call him an illegitimate child"
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The author in example 8 explained explicitly, from the Jewish perspective, who Jesus is and why is he not the true Messiah. Similar to the illustration of the examples 5, 6 and 7 but from different angle, example 8 highlights the sociopolitical influence on translation. Samuel's translation attempted to reduce the asperity of the language of the source text to avoid ideological conflict and also to respect the French dominant culture in his geopolitical environment. Considering his neighboring audience, it is interesting to see the shift in his translation from being explicit to implicit when the source text was

attacking Christianity. For instance, the phrases directed to Jesus, “May his bones be ground to dust” and “illegitimate child”, were completely deleted from his translation. In contrast, Abraham’s and Nahom’s translations appeared literal to the source text although the latter parenthesized the expression, “May his bones be ground to dust”.

## **6. Conclusion**

In *The Epistle to Yemen*, we can specifically understand the translators’ behavior by comparing and contrasting the three differing translations into Hebrew. I found it certain that the nature of the source text was the dominant factor in determining the attitude of the translator and the adequacy of his translation. Therefore, I conclude this article with a series of observations.

First, regarding the verbal issues, I affirm that the kinship between Arabic and Hebrew closed the linguistic gap for the translators. The appearance of Aramaic in the source text was not an obstacle for the three translators, since Aramaic was considered the legislative language for the main resources of the Jewish tradition in the post-Talmudic era. Therefore, the target audiences of the source text as well as those of the target text were acquainted with it.

The second observation is on the macro-level of non-verbal issues, those related to the text itself. I confirm that since there was no culture-specific contradictory elements between the source text and its target language, the translators found themselves forced to literally transpose the source language’s message into the TL. In fact, their function had been mainly focused on transposing the effect of the original Judeo-Arabic text into Hebrew.

Finally, my third observation is on the appearance of non-verbal micro-level issues. These are factors related to the environment external to the source text such as the demographical environment, ideological intersect, and ethnic and religious conflict, that affected the translators' attitude and caused the interlineal differences between the three translators, differences that were specific to each translator's individual socio-political contexts.

### **Funding**

The author is grateful to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Saud University and the Research Center at the College of Languages and Translation for funding the current research.

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