

聖典コーランを訳す

クレイグ・アラン・フォルカー

On Translating the Holy Qu'rān

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Abstract

There is a widespread belief that the Holy Qu'rān cannot be translated, either because of actual linguistic difficulties or because it would be sacrilegious to do so. Nevertheless, significant portions of the Qu'rān have been translated into numerous languages. Translation, in fact, dates from the ministry of the Prophet Mohammed Himself, and the doctrine of “Qu'rānic inimitability” developed only several centuries after His ascension. There is an on-going debate, however, as to whether translations are scripture itself or merely a form of commentary. Translators must also decide whether to adopt a verse form in imitation of the original and to what extent potentially opaque Arabic loan words for Islamic concepts should be used. Because of the inherent ambiguity of the original text, decisions in the translation of certain key passages are often made on the basis of sectarian doctrinal teachings, rather than objective exegesis.

要 約

イスラム教のコーランは翻訳できないと広く信じられている。言語の複雑性や神聖さを汚すことになりうるという理由などがあげられるが、一方でコーランの重要な部分は実際、数多くの言語に翻訳されてきた。翻訳の歴史は、教祖マホメットが生存した時代に遡る。コーランが独特であるという教義はマホメット死後の数世紀も後になってから発展した。現在、翻訳は経典そのものであるか、それとも解説にすぎないのかについて議論があり、翻訳家はコーランの原文そのままにはならなくても詩的な書式を重んじて翻訳するか、どこまでアラビア語に頼って不透明になりえても外来語を用いるか、翻訳家が選択をしなければならない。原文がもともとあいまいであるために、重要な文章の翻訳をどうするかは、客観的な解釈よりも宗教の教義に基づいている。

1 . Introduction

In the West, the massive effort of Christian missionaries since the days of Saints Jerome and Augustine in translating the Bible into hundreds of languages is often contrasted with the seemingly uniform use of the original Arabic Qu'rān throughout the Islamic world. The lack of Qu'rānic translations is often explained by a belief that in Islam, Arabic is a “holy language” and that it is an act of faith that the Qu'rān is not translatable. In actual fact, the question of whether the Qu'rān should be translated and what the status of these translations should be have been matters of debate among Muslim scholars and missionaries since the time of Muhammad Himself. It is true that some Muslims have believed that the Qu'rān may not be translated; as re-

cently as 1926, a leading Egyptian religious leader wrote that translations would destroy the unity of Islam and weaken the authority of the Word of God (Shakir 1926). But the fact that the Qu'rān is indeed translated is shown by the list of 59 languages in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* into which at least substantial portions of the Qu'rān have been translated (Pearson 1986: 430 ff). That translations are made by and for Muslims is shown by the list made by Sharafuddin (1984) of 32 translations of the Qu'rān made by believers into Urdu alone since 1800.

Part of the emphasis on translation in Christianity would seem to come from the Christian Scriptures themselves. The original texts were written in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; Hebrew was no longer a living language by the time of Christ, while Aramaic and Greek soon became minority languages as the Christian community spread throughout the Roman Empire. In addition, the biblical record of the story of Pentecost, in which the Word of God was given by the Holy Spirit simultaneously to people in several languages, cannot fail to be an inspiration to a Christian translator of the Bible. The Qu'rān does not provide such a polyglot impetus to translation. God revealed the Qu'rān in one language only, which was not only the language of the first Muslims, but became a major language of learning, remaining a world language to this day. Such a situation, together with no experience comparable to the Christian Pentecost, would seem to do little to encourage a pious Muslim to attempt to translate Scripture.

2 . Translations during the ministry of Muhammad

There is evidence that linguistic and translation concerns were raised at least three times during Muhammad's ministry. The first time dealt with the correct readings of a sūrah He had revealed. Except in the early days of His ministry, it was His practice to chant the Revelation, which was recorded in writing by one or more followers and then checked later by the Prophet for accuracy. At one stage, a controversy arose when two followers argued about a difference in what they had recorded. According to a well-established Hadīth (oral tradition) Muhammad heard one version and said that that was what He had revealed. He then listened to the other version and said that the differences in it were due to dialect differences, that the Qu'rān was revealed in seven dialects, and that believers could recite it in whichever dialect was easiest for them (Tibawi 1962: 5).

A second incident occurred when news of Islam reached Persians, who asked Salman the Persian, a close companion of Muhammad, to explain what the Qu'rān was. Salman translated the opening sūrah of the Qu'rān, the Fātihah, into Persian. According to an admittedly somewhat untrustworthy Hadīth, Salman reported this action to Muhammad, who is said not to have disapproved (Tibawi 1962: 5).

The last recorded incident occurred when Muhammad sent a letter to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, containing the third sūrah, which encourages friendship between Christians and Muslims. While the original letter was written in Arabic, Tibawi (1962: 6) quotes companions of the Prophet as having explained that He expected that the letter would be translated into Greek, which, of course, it was.

3 . Translations in the early Muslim era

These incidents during the life of the Prophet formed the basis of the teachings of Abu Hanifah, a Per-

sian scholar born in the first century of the Muslim era. He stated that these incidents, and the practice of translating the Torah and Gospels into Arabic, permitted the translation of the Holy Qu'rān and the use of translations in prayer. In the eyes of his most active disciples, this latter view was rather strong; they permitted the use of translations in prayer only for those who did not understand Arabic. This early interest in translation among Persian believers resulted in numerous translations into Persian of the Qu'rān (Pearson 1986: 430) which were followed by one into Sindhi and a total of 70 into Turkish(Birge 1938: 395) This brought to a head a controversy about the nature of the Holy Qu'rān, whether the “true” Qu'rān is the meaning of the revealed Arabic Qu'rān, or whether the Arabic Qu'rān is in fact the literal Word of God Himself. If the latter, more literal, view was adopted, then translation of the Qu'rān could be no more than a commentary on its contents, differing from other commentaries only in that it is in a language other than Arabic.

Much of the ensuing theological argument revolved around Sūrah XIV: 4, “And We never sent a Messenger save with the language of His folk, that He might make the message clear for them”. Conservative scholars argued that since the Revelation was a universal message, this verse meant that Arabic was a universal language. Liberal scholars, such as the Hanafi school, argued that this verse has a completely opposite meaning, making it incumbent to translate Scripture, so that the words of Muhammad would, in fact, be clear to His people, who are all humanity. In the end, the conservative view became established as standard by the fifth century of the Muslim era. Since this meant that the Qu'rān in translation would cease to be the Word of God, and since a doctrine of *i'jaz* “inimitability” had developed, a number of scholars stated that this infers that the Arabic language itself has a unique position above all other languages. Interestingly, a number of medieval non-Arab Muslims were prominent in promoting this view (Tibawai 1962: 12-13)

Having won this theological dispute, the non-Hanafi Muslim religious establishment still had the problem of non-Arabic-speaking believers, especially the uneducated. While virtually all religious leaders required actual prayer to be in Arabic, most scholars ended up allowing translations of Scripture as a “commentary”, which could capture the “absolute meaning” of the Arabic original, but not all the “auxiliary meanings”. To emphasize this “non-official” nature of the translation, the practice grew of having the Arabic original on the same page as, or even interlinear with, the translation. Early examples of these post-Hanafi translations exist in the British Museum from the eighth century of the Muslim era (Tibawai 1962: 15)

4 . Modern translations

It is interesting to note that the first modern translations were not made for missionary purposes, but to defend the faith in non-Arabic-speaking Muslim countries experiencing cultural and religious pressure from Christian societies. The modern tradition of translation of the Qu'rān can be dated from the eleventh century of the Muslim era when Shah Waliyullah of Delhi translated the Qu'rān into Persian and published it without the Arabic original. This was followed by separate Urdu translations, some interlinear and very literal, even word for word, translations, while others were written in a more natural prose style. It is noteworthy that a number of the great Urdu writers of the last two centuries, such as Dipti Nizir Ahmad, who established Urdu as a modern literary language, were also translators of the Qu'rān. In the last century, literal and interlinear translations have for the most part been abandoned in Urdu, and six translations have been made into Urdu

verse, requiring an even freer interpretation (or distortion, in the eyes of fundamentalists) of content matter (Sharafuddin 1984).

These Urdu translations were a stimulus to creating a religious literature in Bengali, where Muslim clergy were much more opposed to translation of the Qu'rān or even of religious commentary into the vernacular (Khan 1982: 130 ff). The first translation of the opening sūrah seems to have been in 1868, with the first complete translation being made by a Hindu scholar in 1881. This was very popular among Muslims, as was a competing translation by an anti-Islamic native Christian published in 1891. This was followed by several translations by foreign Christian missionaries, apparently with the view that if Bengalis could read the Qu'rān for themselves, they would reject it and embrace Christianity. Several translations by Muslims appeared beginning in 1908, and even more appeared with the stimulus given to vernacular literature after the independence of the South Asian subcontinent. By 1962 the Islamic Academy in Dacca had completely reversed the position of the Islamic clergy of a century earlier, calling for a standard Bengali translation, which was published in the late 1960 's. Khan (1982: 136) claims that because of the introduction of unnecessary Arabic loans and the lack of clarity, this still needs substantial revision.

Christian missionaries were active in the first translations of the Qu'rān into Swahili as well, with the first translation being made by a Christian missionary in 1823. While the actual translation was generally acceptable to Muslim leaders, the appenda of explanatory notes were quite offensive (Holway 1971: 102). This translation was followed by one made by the Ahmadiyya movement in 1953 and an orthodox Sunni version in 1969. In an interesting note on the target audiences of the translation, Holway reports that the commentary of the Christian translation attacked the Qu'rān itself, the commentary in the Ahmadiyya version attacked the comments of anti-Islamic Christian missionaries, and the comments in the orthodox Sunni translation attacked the commentary of the Ahmadiyyas.

As mentioned above, translations of the Qu'rān into Turkish existed from the beginning of the Muslim era. The modern tradition of Turkish translations dates from the Young Turk movement before World War I, however, and was therefore a result of contact with the West. In the period before and during World War I, several attempts were made by reformists to publish Turkish translations, an endeavour that was forbidden by the Ottoman government. These were written in a simple, de-arabised form of Turkish and were therefore part of the process of establishing the modern Turkish literary language. As part of the process of cultural modernisation under Atatürk, mosques were required to use Turkish translations of the Qu'rān in Friday services beginning in 1932. In the following year the government decreed that the call to prayer from Turkish minarets would have to be made in Turkish. In 1935 the government printed a standard version in the new alphabet for distribution throughout the country, making Turkey the first nation to have such a standard translation (Birge 1938: 395).

By the beginning of the last century, translations of the Qu'rān had appeared in most major East Asian languages spoken by Muslims (Zwemer 1915). An early Chinese translation is interesting in that it consists of the Arabic original followed by a transliteration of the Arabic letters into Chinese characters, and then a "translation" consisting of a commentary on both the form and the content of the Arabic original. In Indonesia, both the orthodox Muslim establishment and the government have supported a National Centre for the Development of Qu'rān Studies. In an interesting contrast to such orthodox institutions in many other Mus

lim countries, this centre supports both translation into Indonesian vernacular languages and Qu'rānic recitation through Arabic chanting.

The first translations of the Qu'rān into European languages were made by Christians, beginning with a Latin translation in 1143(Zwemer 1915: 247-248). European vernacular translations were often based on Latin translations, although as early as the fifteenth century, an Arragonian translation was made directly from the Arabic. The first translation into English was by Ross in the seventeenth century, based on an earlier French translation. George Sale's 1734 translation has tended to be regarded by non-Muslims as a standard version. This is surprising, since it was based on a Latin translation by a strongly anti-Islamic Christian cleric. Its standing among Muslims is perhaps most tellingly shown by the rumour supposedly current in parts of India at the turn of the last century that on his deathbed, Sale had converted to Islam and requested that all copies of his "incorrect" translation be burned (Zwemer 1915: 247).

The first English translations by believers were not made until about one hundred years ago, mainly by Indians, although one was by Pickthall, a British convert. The Indian translations have tended to follow in the tradition of regarding translation as a form of commentary, often including as much or more sectarian commentary as actual translation. Indeed, Pickthall's translation has been criticised by other Muslim scholars such as Ali (1934: xv) for example, for including virtually no commentary other than a short introduction to each sūrah and an occasional footnote.

5 . Problems in translating the Qu'rān

Some grammatical characteristics of the poetic style of the Qu'rān are unusual word order and the omission of both certain grammatical particles and the head of a genitive phrase, resulting in ambiguity in many verses. Rahbar (1963: 64) claims that with this ambiguity, linguistic decisions of translation tend to be decided on sectarian grounds. Phrasing is often vague, so that in the story of Noah, for example, one could argue for translations saying that either "the whole earth" or "the whole region" was flooded (Rahbar 1963: 63). These differences are compounded by the fact that the standard version of the Qu'rān compiled after Muhammad's death was only consonantal. Since case is often determined by vowel change in Arabic, determining the subject and object of sentences in the Qu'rān can depend on the theological position of the translator. This has caused discontent when a minority sect has published a translation favouring its teachings, such as when the Ahmadiyyas, an active missionary sect, published a translation for Swahili speakers, most of whom are Sunni (Holway 1971: 103).

Jeffrey (1940: 66) has commented that the heavy reliance on traditional commentary fails to make use of the type of literary criticism made available through Western scholarship used in biblical translation to determine the meaning of words and paragraphs at the time they first appeared. He and others in the West have argued that some of the ambiguity in the Qu'rān stems from rearrangements made in the ordering of the sūrahs and verses when the first standard form of the Qu'rān was established after the ascension of Muhammad. But he recognises that the results of this type of criticism, such as the rearrangement of the Qu'rānic verses proposed by the Christian translator Bell, must appear sacrilegious to orthodox believers, for whom the results

of commentary based on a study of the Hadīth are a necessary complement to the Qu'rān itself.

Another source of ambiguity is the rarity of some of the words in the Qu'rān, a number of which are recorded only once. Some of these have acquired meanings since having been used in the Qu'rān that they may not have had when used by the Muhammad. For example, the word *samad* in Sūrah CX II : 2 is a nominal derivative of a verb meaning "to help people in peril". But because of its use in a verse where God's nature is being described as not human(e. g. , "He begetteth not nor was begotten" in the next verse)the word has come to mean "eternal", so that Pickthall is typical in translating it as "the eternally Besought of all".

In all translations of the Qu'rān, there are a number of other decisions a translator must make. Holway's (1971 106-108) comparison of the Fātiha(opening sūrah) in three translations into Swahili illustrates some of these problems. One is the choice of prose or verse. Of the three Swahili translations, the two by Muslims are in verse, as is the original, while the translation by a Christian missionary is in prose. Lyric renditions are also favoured by English translations by Muslims, but, as Jeffrey (1940 56) points out, this can often lead to a broken and uneven style in the translation, something quite the opposite of the smooth and rhythmic original. That this is not only the view of unbelievers is shown by the comment of Maududi (1967 1 - 2) that the Qu'rān was originally an oral work and the informal style of address used in it can best be rendered by prose in some other languages, such as English.

In the languages of all Islamic societies, Arabic has been the source for many loan words for religious purposes. Even in languages with established literary traditions or where Muslims are a minority, such as in most English-speaking nations, translators tend to adopt an Arabic term for a previously unknown religious concept, such as *Qiblah*("Kiblah" in the *American Heritage Dictionary*) In some societies with previous experience with Christianity, the question arises as to what extent Christian vocabulary should be used. In Swahili, for example, the Christian translator generally choose the same phrase used in translations of the Bible, e. g. , *Bwana* in Swahili for "Lord", while the Muslim translators have chosen equivalents with Arabic roots wherever possible.

In this regard, an important decision is whether to retain *Allāh* in translation or to use a local equivalent. All three Swahili translations use a local word for God, with the Muslim translations adding a singular form of the Swahili equivalent of "almighty" to emphasize the fact that there is only one God. Translations into English vary. Yusuf Ali uses "God", while Maududi and Pickthall retain "Allah". Haddad and Lummi(1987: 161 and 174) report that in the United States, Muslims from immigrant backgrounds tend to prefer to stress the commonality of Islam and Christianity by avoiding Arabic words such as *Allāh* in English, while congregations of new converts, such as the Nation of Islam, tend to reject religious terms which might bind them to their Christian past. On the whole, English translations have adopted an archaic style reminiscent of the King James Bible. Even Maududi's translation, which begins with a preface criticising this in previous translations, uses archaic "thee" and "thou" (Maududi 1967: 2 - 3)

6 . Conclusion

As has been seen, translations of the Qu'rān by Muslims as well as non-Muslims have been made ever since Islam first spread beyond the Arabic-speaking world. From the time of the first translations, a tension has existed among Islamic scholars as to whether the Qu'rān should be translated and the extent to which

translations may be used for prayer or public worship. Except for the very liberal Hanafi school, most scholars in the past accepted translation of the Qu'rān as an impossibility in theory, while grudgingly allowing it in practice as a form of commentary to be used for pedagogical or private use only.

With greater contact with a critical and often irreligious West, improvements in public education, and a weakening of the power of Islamic clergy in many areas, there has been a steadily increasing demand for translations by Muslims of their Scripture. Thus, the influence of those who favour translation and even the substitution of translations for the Arabic Qu'rān original in public prayer and worship, as well as private meditation, has grown considerably. The extent to which the pendulum has swung is shown by the fact that not long ago, the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League could write an encouraging preface to a work on Urdu translations of the Qu'rān (Sharafuddin 1984:9). One can only hope that now that the theological argument about the acceptability of translation has been resolved for the majority of at least non-Arab Muslims, greater attempts will be made to examine the process of translation itself and the relative merits of different approaches to translations of the Holy Qu'rān.

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Note: Quotes from the Holy Qu'rān have been taken from the Pickthall translation.

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