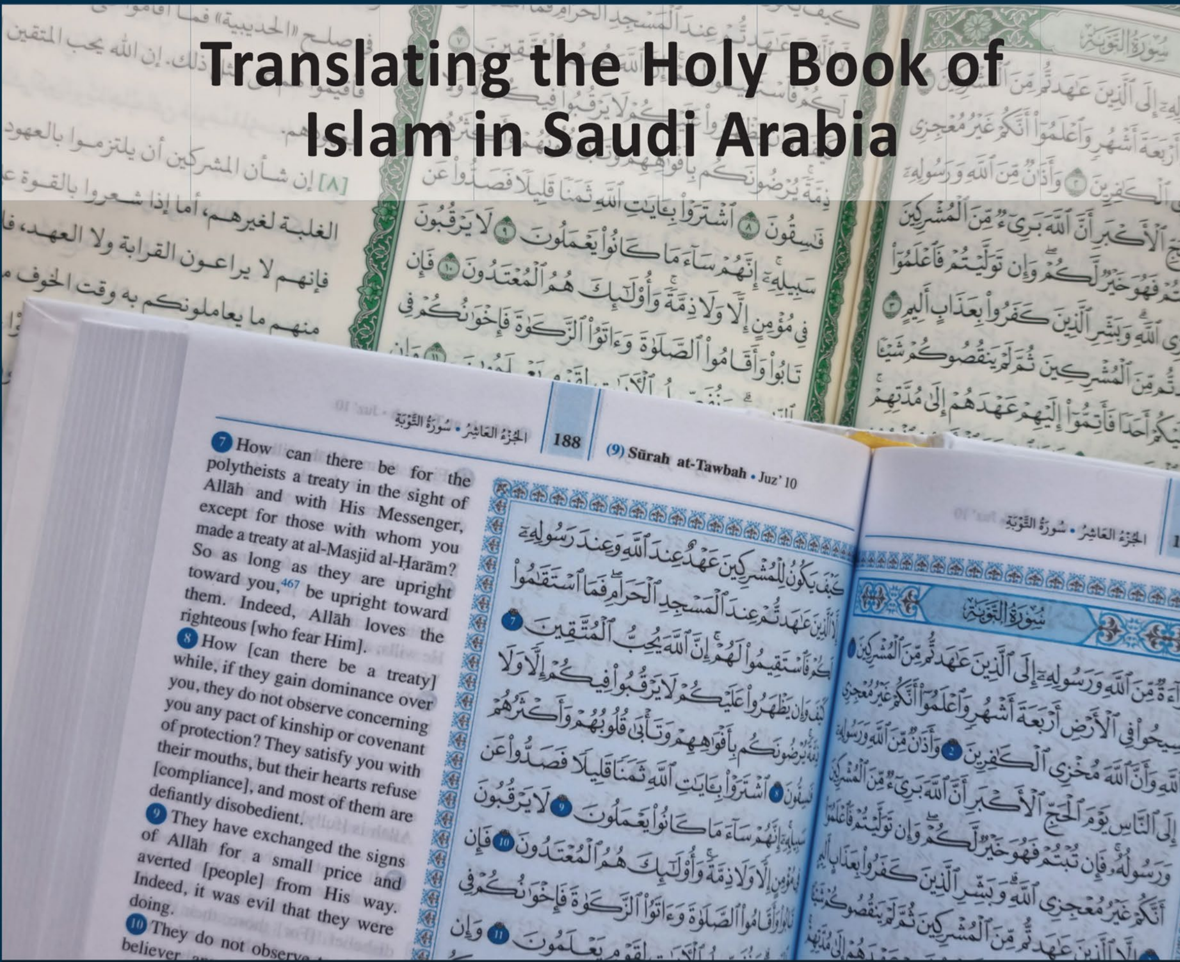
GLOBAL QUR'AN

The Kingdom and the Qur'an



Translating the Holy Book of Islam in Saudi Arabia

MYKHAYLO YAKUBOVYCH

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1. Twentieth-Century Debates on the Translatability of the Qur’an in the Middle East

On even the most cursory comparison of the history of Qur’an translation to that of other sacred books, one particular feature stands out: despite the fact that hundreds, if not thousands, of translations into more than 150 languages have already been printed, many Muslims still maintain that it is impossible to actually translate the Qur’an. Most translations published in the Islamic world begin their introductions by emphasising the notion of Qur’anic inimitability [*iᶜjāz al-Qurᵓān*], a theological concept used to argue against the validity of any ‘translation’ as such. This doctrinal stance dates back to the Early Medieval era, when interlinear translations of the Qur’an (at this time, usually treated as ‘commentary’) into Persian and Turkic languages became established practice, and is held into the present day.

In the context of the Islamic world, it was only relatively recently that a new kind of translation emerged, one that was presented independently from the Arabic original, as a standalone text. Such standalone, or independent, ‘Muslim’ translations (which usually still described themselves as ‘translation(s) of the meanings’ of the Qur’an to accord with the idea of Qur’anic *iᶜjāz*) did not begin to appear until long after non-Muslims had begun publishing translations of the Qur’an in European languages. These were mainly produced by Western scholars in Islamic Studies or by Christian missionaries who used their translations as tools in their polemical disputes with Muslims. Some non-Arabic-speaking Muslim-majority countries (such as India or Persia), came round to the idea of standalone translations quite quickly, while in

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other areas (for example, the late Ottoman Empire and early Republican Turkey and, later, Egypt) this innovation was discussed and debated for much longer periods of time, as it will be shown below. Given the significance of these debates over the legality and legitimacy of Qur'an translation to the Saudi translation movement, this chapter delves into the Middle-Eastern scholarly network of the first half of the twentieth century, examining those who supported or discouraged translations of the Qur'an.

Early Debates on Translatability at al-Azhar University

Who was the first person in the Islamic world to translate the Qur'an? There are a number of topics that have been discussed by scholars since the ninth century that can help us to understand the difficulty involved in arriving at a definitive answer to this question. On the one hand, there is a well-established tradition of interlinear translations/interpretations into Persian and other 'Muslim' languages, which was developed mainly in the context of Sunni-Hanafi scholarship. On the other hand, treating translation as a text that is produced and read mostly independently from the original Arabic scripture is a phenomenon of modern book culture. It is no easy task to reconstruct the history of Qur'an translation into world languages, especially in terms of translations produced by Muslims; in general, however, it can be divided into two periods: before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

As mentioned above, debates over the translatability of the Qur'an emerged first in the Indian subcontinent, Egypt, and the late Ottoman Empire/Republic of Turkey. In the geographical area covered by present-day India, Pakistan, and Iran, the tradition of interlinear translations reached its peak in the eighteenth century with the publication by the reformist Indian scholar Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī (1703–1762) of his *Fatḥ al-Raḥmān bi-tarjamat al-Qurʾān* [Inspiration from the Merciful in the translation of the Qur'an] (1738). Both this and its Persian translation were the inspiration for further likeminded endeavours in the field. The bilingual edition of Dihlawī's work, which appeared in 1743, played a particularly significant role in shaping future translations of the Qur'an and was especially influential among mainstream Sunnis.[1] Over a century later, it would also be an important work for the Ahmadi school, who printed their edition of Muhammad Ali's translation of the Qur'an into English in India in 1917.

What was the situation at that time in the Arabic-speaking parts of the Muslim world, where obviously there was no need for Qur'an translations? It would be unreasonable to expect the eighteenth-century Wahhabi movement to have taken a position on the issue of translation, given that its influence was then limited to the Arabian Peninsula. Yet, the legacy of Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī (who translated the Qur'an into Persian) is often compared to that of Muḥammad b. ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb (1703–1791), the eponym of the Salafi/Wahabbi school, since they

> shouldered the same mission, namely, to purify Islam and realise its basic teachings as they understood them. Yet, the different backgrounds and social settings that they experienced, as well as the dissimilar challenges that they faced, triggered different visions, approaches, and responses.[2]

Although some attempts have been made to find a connection between Dihlawī and Muḥammad b. ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb (mostly via their common teacher, Muḥammad Ḥayyāt al-Sindī), there is no evidence that they knew each other or that either had any influence on the other.[3] It seems that the beginnings of Salafi theology (including perspectives on Qur'anic hermeneutics) were primarily rooted in the domestic context of local scholarly networks, rather than being influenced by external sources.

The situation, however, changed much during the twentieth century and the development of Saudi religious scholarship during this period has been widely connected to other centres of learning, especially Egypt. Recent, in-depth studies on the translation of the Qur'an in Turkey by

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[1] See Muhammad Qasim Zaman, 'Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, His Successors, and the Qurʾān', in *Ways of Knowing Muslim Cultures and Societies*, ed. by Bettina Gräf, Birgit Krawietz, and Schirin Amir-Moazami (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 280–97, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004386891

[2] Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, 'Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb and Shāh Walī Allāh: A Preliminary Comparison, Some Aspects of their Lives and Careers', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 34.1 (2006), 103–19 (p. 117).

[3] Basheer M. Nafi, 'A Teacher of Ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī and the Revival of *Ashāb al-Hadīth*'s Methodology', *Islamic Law and Society*, 13.2 (2006), 103–18, http://doi.org/10.1163/156851906776917552.

M. Brett Wilson[4] and discussions on the translatability of the Qur'an in Egypt by Travis Zadeh[5] provide an overview of the ongoing debates that ultimately resulted in the appearance of the concept of *tarjamat al-maᶜānī*, or 'translation of the meanings'. Supporters of the idea of Qur'an translation, such as the Shaykh [principal scholar] of al-Azhar, Muḥammad b. Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (1881–1945), contributed to the development of this concept. By summarising their positions, we can identify a few key milestones in the development of Qur'anic translation.

We know that preliminary discussions of the issue of translation had already begun in 1908, as the well-known Egyptian proponent of Islamic reform Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935) published in his newspaper, *al-Manār*, a fatwa under the title '*Ḥukm tarjamat al-Qurʾān*' ['A statement on the translation of the Qur'an'].[6] An Islamic scholar from Imperial Russia, Aḥsan Shāh Aḥmad, had asked him about some 'Russian Turks' who were challenging the 'prohibition' on Qur'an translation and had started to publish it part by part [*tadrījan*] in the city of Kazan. Riḍā condemned this endeavour,[7] as did many other scholars of his time, from Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī (1869–1954), the last Shaykh al-Islām of the Ottoman Empire, to the influential Azhari scholars Muḥammad Ḥabīb Shākir (1866–1939) and Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī al-Ẓawāhirī (1887–1944).[8] These scholars were critical of any attempts to publish a translation of the Qur'an itself or even a translation of its meanings. Their position was motivated not only by the fight against the modernist movement that was taking place among religious scholars in a quickly changing scholastic environment but also by the association of the Qur'an translation movement with anti-Arab nationalism and secularism (that is, the 'Kemalism' of the Turkish

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[4] M. Brett Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[5] Travis Zadeh, 'The *Fātiḥa* of Salmān al-Fārisī and the Modern Controversy over Translating the Qurʾān', in *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Qur'anic Exegesis*, ed. by Stephen Burge (Oxford: Institute of Ismaili Studies/Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 375–420.

[6] Rashīd Riḍā, '*Ḥukm tarjamat al-Qurʾān', al-Manār, 4:11 (1908), 269.*

[7] Later in the 1930s, Riḍā took more favourable position on the Qur'an translation. See Johanna Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd', in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/*-EQCOM_050503#d110807225e792

[8] Mykhaylo Yakubovych, 'Qur'an Translations into Central Asian Languages: Exegetical Standards and Translation Processes', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 24.1 (2022), 89–115, https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2022.0491

Republican leader Mustafa Kemal Pasha) and, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the rising influence of Ahmadi translations of the Qur'an.[9]

Without going into the details of the debates of the 1920s and 1930s, the general point can be made that the 'pro-translation' camp finally won out. Al-Marāghī's influential position as the shaykh of al-Azhar (he was initially appointed in 1928 but dismissed the following year; he returned to the office in 1936) played a big part in this. Already in an ongoing dispute with one of his biggest opponents, Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī al-Ẓawāhirī (an active critic of the idea of Qur'anic translatability), al-Marāghī recognised the necessity of translating the Qur'an into other languages as early as the 1920s and wrote his first treatise on this issue in 1932 (although it was not published until four years later). This work, entitled *Baḥth fī tarjamat al-Qurʾān al-karīm wa-aḥkāmuhā* [A study of the translation of the Qur'an and its rules], served as a response to the ongoing debate. In it, he concluded that the Qur'an has to be not only interpreted but also translated in a literal fashion [*tarjama ḥarfiyya*] and that, for the vast majority of verses, this would be eminently possible.[10] He argued that translation should be separated from interpretation as much as possible and referred to as *maᶜānī al-Qurʾān* [the meanings of the Qur'an] rather than as the Qur'an itself—a concept which has been consistently reiterated in every Muslim translation of the Qur'an up to the present day.

Al-Marāghī maintained that some verses—those not subject to debate by *tafsīr* scholars—can be translated 'literally', while others require varying degrees of explanation and discussion [*tarjama maᶜnawiyya*]. He thus upheld the concept that Qur'an translations cannot lay claim to Qur'anic *iᶜjāz*, nor replicate its rhetorical features, but took the stance that its meanings must be opened up for all mankind, insisting that 'the Qur'an was not revealed for the Arabs only, but for all the people in the world'.[11] Ultimately, al-Marāghī concluded that, 'there is no other way to convey the Message [...] than using translation'. In addition to addressing the issue of Qur'anic *iᶜjāz* and translation, al-Marāghī also discussed the role of the Arabic language and its 'sanctity' [*qudsiyya*]: taking a kind of Pan-Arabist view, he asked 'How can we make all the nations Arabised [...] if they cannot comprehend the meanings of the Qur'an in their own language[s]?'. It seems that, for al-Marāghī, translating the Qur'an was one of the starting points for Islamic reform, as he believed it would help make both Islamic and Arabic identity 'simultaneously global'.[12] His efforts to promote Qur'an translation appear to have eventually gained institutional support, as a special committee on Qur'an translation was established at al-Azhar in 1936. However, when Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1875–1936), a British convert to Islam and one of the first Muslim European translators of the Qur'an, visited Egypt in 1929 and met with al-Marāghī and other scholars, he was unable to gain their approval for his draft translation. 'The approval or the condemnation of Al-Azhar, or indeed of all the Ulama of Egypt, could not help or injure my translation much [...] Al-Azhar is a great historic institution which one would wish to see reformed and not demolished', writes Pickthall.[13] He goes on to reveal some of the reasons why a particular Egyptian scholar criticised his *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* after it was first published in 1930:

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[9] Moch Nur Ichwan, 'Differing Responses to an Ahmadi Translation and Exegesis: The Holy Qurʾân in Egypt and Indonesia', *Archipel*, 62 (2001), 143–61.

[10] al-Marāghī, *Baḥth fī tarjamat al-Qurʾān al-karīm wa-aḥkāmuhā* (Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat al-Raghāʾib, 1936), p. 31.

[11] Ibid., p. 35.

> I have translated Surah XVII, v.29, thus: 'And let not thy hand be chained to thy neck nor open it with a complete opening lest thou sit down rebuked, denuded'. He considers that, by thus translating the Arabic words literally, I have turned a commandment relating to miserliness and generosity into a commandment concerning the position of a man's hands! How should he know that we speak of 'open-handedness' and 'tight-fistedness' in English and that every English reader will understand my literal translation in precisely the same sense in which the Arabic reader understands the Arabic text. The ban is therefore based upon an altogether false assumption.[14]

Perhaps the most significant development of the time was the appearance of the idea of translation as a collective or, rather, institutional act—one overseen and produced by an institution with perceived religious authority, such as al-Azhar. The committee on translation formed by al-Marāghī just after he came to office as Shaykh of al-Azhar for the second time in 1936 established a list of eleven rules for the translation of the Qur'an, which were published in the official university journal *al-Azhar* (the following year these same 'rules' also appeared in the Egyptian literary journal *al-Risāla*).[15] These rules seem to constitute the first official set of guidelines for translating the Qur'an, still described as 'the explanation of the meanings of the Qur'an into a foreign language'. From this list, it is apparent that the committee proposed to first draft a work in Arabic that explained the meaning of the Qur'an, and then to translate this into various foreign languages (*'tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm* [...] *tamhīdan li-l-tarjamat maᶜānīhī'* [the interpretation/explanation of the Qur'an [...] is the source that leads to the translation of its meanings]). This official recognition of the term 'translation of the meanings' seems to denote some kind of compromise between the two camps, and the rules set out in *al-Azhar* do not relate to exegetical reasoning but, rather, address problems of text representation and accessibility. Some of the rules direct translators to avoid using specialised scientific terms or referring to any 'scientific theories' in their interpretation of the text, in what seems to be a reaction to the growing trend of scientism in the Muslim world. The committee also recommended excluding any reference to the *madhāhib fiqhī* [legal schools] or *madhāhib kalāmī* [theological schools]. Other rules propose the use of only the Ḥafṣ *ᶜan* ᶜAṣim variant of Qur'an reading (that is, translations should make reference to other texts only 'when necessary') as well as the use of the clearest and simplest wording when reproducing the meaning of the verses. The guidelines also advise that all translations should include an introduction that highlighted the main Qur'anic themes, such as 'the call to God, legislation, stories, and polemics'. Last but not least, they advocate the use of a *ḥadīth*-based exegesis, which entails the use of interpretations that are transmitted as approved traditions [*al-maʾthūr*], 'that which is already accepted'.[16] Thus, we see with these rules a kind of universalisation of Qur'anic textuality being brought into play. It seeks, first of all, to situate the scripture in time, specifically through the avoidance of 'modern' readings and, secondly, to transcend the interpretive confines of any specific legal school. This process of universalisation also fits in with the broad concept of Islamic unity, by promoting only 'well-established' meanings that are (presumably) consistent with the idea of a common, but unspecified, Islamic creed: it could be 'pan-Islamic' in some way, or specifically 'Sunni' or 'Shii', for example.

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Qtd. in Anne Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1938), p. 419.

[14] Ibid.

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[15] 'Aḥkām al-tarjama', *Risāla*, 184 (1937), 3–4 (p. 4).

[16] See Muhammad al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān fī ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān*, 4 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ᶜArabī, 1995), ii, p. 171.

In some ways, al-Azhar's rules also echo the ideas of another scholar from al-Azhar, the main editor of its official press, Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī (1878–1954). A prominent intellectual and polymath who authored books on many subjects, from history to *tafsīr*, he was educated in the French school system in Egypt and so was more or less familiar with ideas in circulation in Western education systems. Siding with al-Marāghī and his supporters, Wajdī published a treatise in 1936 called 'Scientific Proofs on the Permissibility of Translating the Meanings of the Qur'an into Foreign Languages', which was issued as an appendix to *al-Azhar*.[17] For Wajdī, 'the aims of the Qur'an' [*maqāṣid al-Qurʾān*] that should be represented in a translation are: 'the establishment of the authority of reason, the propagation of freedom of thought [*ḥurriyat al-niẓār*], and the destruction of the idol of imitation [*taqlīd*]'. Moreover, his treatise is a plea for 'general equality [*al-musāwā al-ᶜāmma*] between all people [... and] the destruction of national and linguistic borders in the service of human unity'.[18] This and other such statements calling for the establishment of a 'state of truth' [*dawlat al-ḥaqq*] and 'permanent progress in knowledge and action' evince a socialist leaning that was quite popular among Egyptian intellectuals of those times.[19] All of these ideas were synthesised in Wajdī's promotion of the ideas of a 'return to the original roots of Islam' and the concept that translation of the Qur'an is the only way to present the true message of Islam to humanity. Wajdī argues that translation undertaken according to the technique proposed by his colleagues at al-Azhar would the most effective way to perform *daᶜwa*, that is, missionary activity. Furthermore, when addressing the question of why books on Islam and the Qur'an cannot substitute for translations of the scripture, Wajdī shows quite a strong understanding of a Western readership as he explains why 'missionary treatises' are insufficient: firstly, Christian readers already have the same level of prejudice against this type of publication as Muslims do against Christian missionary pamphlets; secondly, the use of such treatises means that Christians can accuse Muslims of imitating their own evangelical methods among Islamic peoples; and, thirdly, 'contemporary people cannot be persuaded by things which are no more than a kind of means [...] they want something to come from the primary sources directly'.[20] So, in Wajdī's ideas about Qur'an translation, we can see support for not only the activity of translation itself but also its primary orientation towards *daᶜwa* at a time that coincides with an era of reform within Egypt.

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[17] Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, *al-Adilla al-ᶜilmiyya ᶜalā jawāz tarjamat maᶜānī al-Qurʾān ilā al-lughāt al-ajnabiyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat al-Maᶜāhid al-Dīniyya, 1936).

[18] Ibid., p. 3.

[19] A good example of such ideas can be found in Mayy Ziyādah, 'al-Musāwwāh' [The Equality], which first appeared in the journal *al-Muqtaṭaf* in 1922. For a modern edition, see Ziyādah, *al-Musāwwāt* (Cairo: Hindāwī, 2013).

In the light of this, members of the 'modernist' movement who were affiliated with al-Azhar seem to have used the idea of translating the Qur'an as a way to make the University and its scholarly network globally relevant, so that it represented the Islamic tradition in a way that was meaningful to both East and West. Unsurprisingly, the responses and theories developed in Egypt during this time of modernisation strengthened nationalist feelings and the hope for real self-government and independence from foreign rule, especially after 1936 with the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.[21]

When did support for the idea of the Qur'an's translatability finally become the predominant opinion in the Middle East? Following the discussions that took place the 1920s and 1930s, Qur'an translations had to be integrated into the traditional learning discourse, specifically into the voluminous books on the *ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān* [the sciences of the Qur'an] which were used as text books in intermediate and higher Islamic education. One of the best-known of these is the *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān fī ᶜulūm al-Qurʾān* [Sources of Knowledge in the Qur'anic Sciences], first published in 1943. Written by Muḥammad al-Zurqānī, a graduate of al-Azhar, several years earlier, this four-volume book is one of the most important twentieth-century contributions to the field of Qur'anic translation studies. Reprinted dozens of times since its first edition, *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān* remains an influential work and is especially interesting for our purposes because its second volume contains a fairly long chapter entitled *'Fī tarjamat al-Qurʾān wa-ḥukmihā tafṣīlan'* [On the translation of the Qur'an and details of the rules for this].[22] There, the author summarises earlier debates on the subject but also proposes his own strategic vision for Qur'anic translation, which includes many innovative points.

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[20] Wajdī, *al-Adilla al-ᶜilmiyya*, p. 7.

[21] See Anthony Eden and Moustapha el-Nahas, 'Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance, 1936', *Current History*, 22.128 (1952), 231–39.

Al-Zurqānī demonstrates a vast knowledge as he discusses the various languages into which the Qur'an has already been translated, both European and Asian. Seeming to take a personal interest in the topic, he mentions thirty-five translations that he considers to have been produced by 'the enemies of Islam' or 'false friends'.[23] He also reveals that the basis of the historical data about the first Latin translations and some missionary works were manuscript copies of the lectures of Viscount Philippe de Tarrazi (1865–1956), a polymath and philanthropist, founder of the National Library of Lebanon, and founding member of the Arab Academy of Damascus.[24] This reference shows Al-Zurqānī's acquaintance with Christian scholarship in Arabic, but he was also influenced by the writings and thought of Abū ᶜAbd Allāh al-Zanjānī (1892–1941), a jurist, exegete, and prolific Iranian writer.[25] In 1935, al-Zanjānī had published a short work in Arabic called *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān* [The History of the Qur'an], which closed with a discussion of existing translations of the Qur'an into European languages. Although he did not directly address the question of the permissibility of translating the Holy Book of Islam, he did describe the first Latin translation of the Qur'an and its various editions, as well as the contributions made to the study of the Qur'an by European Orientalists such as the German scholar Theodor Nöldeke (al-Zanjānī actually used the term *afranj* to describe Nöldeke, which literally means 'Frenchmen', but it seems he used this term to refer to all 'Westerners').[26] Notably, al-Zanjānī was himself Shii, but he travelled widely throughout the Sunni world and lectured at al-Azhar in the mid-1930s, and it is fair to say that his thought provided a new paradigm of Islamic unity and revival. *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān*, which enjoyed wide circulation among both Sunni and Shii scholars, described the legacy of Qur'an in a historical, rather than a theological, way for the first time. It is possible that al-Zanjānī's innovative approach was inspired by Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorâns* [History of the Qur'an], which was first published in 1860.[27]

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[22] al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān*, ii, pp. 88–135.

[23] Ibid., ii, pp. 92–95.

[24] Ibid., ii, p. 89. For more on Tarrazi, see 'Viscount Philippe de Tarrazi', http://dbpedia.org:8891/page/Philippe_de_Tarrazi

[25] See Seyyed Jaᶜfar Sajjadi, 'Abū ᶜAbd Allāh al-Zanjānī', trans. by Nacim Pak, in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, ed. by Farhad Daftary and Wilferd Madelung, https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_COM_0034

[26] Abū ᶜAbd Allāh al-Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Tāʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1935), pp. 70–72.

Starting his own discussion on the permissibility of the translation of the Qur'an with a long quote from al-Zanjānī on Latin Qur'an translations, al-Zurqānī argues that the time has come to respond to all the doubts and misconceptions that surround the issue of translation. He seems to have perceived the need for further clarity and ruling [*ḥukm*] on this well-known problem. For, after examining the meaning of the word *tarjama* [translation], he divides translation into two kinds: 'literal' and 'explanatory' [*ḥarfiyya wa-māᶜnawiyya*]. Al-Zurqānī defines the first as the kind of interpretation where the word order is observed and the words in the new, target language are selected because they are synonyms for those in the original, source language; he defines the second as the expression of the 'aims' of a text on the level of 'the beauty of its imagination' [*ḥusn al-taṣwīr*].[28] To illustrate his latter point, he takes the example of Q. 17:29, exactly the same verse that was previously employed against Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall: 'And let not thy hand be chained to thy neck'. Al-Zurqānī explains that a 'literal' translation would not convey the correct image and meaning to the reader, whereas an 'explanatory' interpretation—one that clarified that this Arabic expression refers to avarice—would work better.[29] With this, he corroborated the view of Azhari scholars who had already identified this verse as an example that perfectly illustrated the impossibility of translating the Qur'an literally.

Al-Zurqānī then sets out the pros and cons of translating the Qur'an and draws up his own list of four rules for interpreting the Qur'an in other languages. Translations 'literal or explanatory', he states, should be based on:

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[27] Al-Zurqānī used a later edition: Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1909).

[28] al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān*, ii, p. 99.

[29] The meaning of the verse relies on the idea that the hands of ungenerous people, because they are not extended to others, seem to be 'chained' to their neck.

1. Translators' knowledge of the lexicography of both the source and target languages;
2. Translators' familiarity with the stylistic and other features of both languages;
3. Aims to achieve full correspondence between the meanings of the source text and the translation; and
4. Aims to produce a target text that is 'independent' from the original, so a reader is able to read and understand the translation as a text in its own right.

The last rule is the most innovative: it proposes, for the first time, that a translation of the Qur'an should be able to be read as a standalone and self-sufficient text rather than as accompaniment comparable to *tafsīr* sources. This provides clear evidence of an established concept of treating translations as independent works, as opposed to interlinear explanations or some other kind of auxiliary text. Al-Zurqānī insists that 'independent form' [*istiqlāliyya*] is one of the main differences between a translation [*tarjama*] and an interpretation [*tafsīr*], and he makes the point that translation 'generally conveys basic meanings fully as well as their aims' while interpretation can work only as more or less profound 'clarification' [*iḍāḥ*] of parts of the source text, depending on the aims and skill of the interpreter.

In this context, al-Zurqānī builds a kind of hermeneutical theory that distinguishes between two kinds of meanings in the Qur'an: 'primary' meanings do not vary from one language to another, but 'secondary' ones do.[30] He clarifies this distinction with examples taken from *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, the first part of the Qur'an. Al-Zurqānī suggests that the original text's statements about the oneness of God [*tawḥīd*] and about God's promise of mercy to believers and disgrace to unbelievers can be effectively conveyed through either translation or *tafsīr* [*interpretation*]. These, therefore, are 'primary meanings' engendered by the 'aims' of the Qur'an. Likening this type to the skyline or horizon to emphasise their constancy, he describes 'secondary meanings' as 'deep sea covered by waves, within which knowledge of God and the greatness of His divinity manifests itself'.[31]

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[30] al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān*, ii, pp. 110–12.

Al-Zurqānī's *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān* develops the opinions of Azhari scholars in a new way. It proposes that the Qur'an could be translated, that its content could be accessed in another language, and that this interpretation is understood to take the form of a self-sufficient text. Perhaps most importantly, al-Zurqānī's work paved the way for translation to become a powerful tool for *daᶜwa* [missionary activity], as we shall soon see. His writings represent the peak of the translation movement in Egypt of the late 1930s and early 1940s, and *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān* influenced nearly all subsequent work on Qur'anic translation.[32] These discussions on Qur'anic translatability made their way from Egypt to Saudi Arabia during the same period and began to bear fruit in the following decades. However, despite theoretical innovations in the field, Egypt's al-Azhar focused in the early 1960s not on the translation of the Qur'an itself but, rather, that of *tafsīr* [accompanying interpretation]. This project was later realised in *al-Muntakhab fi tafsīr al-Qurᵓān al-karīm* [Selected Commentaries on the Noble Qur'an] (1961) and its subsequent translations into English, German, Indonesian, Spanish, and Russian.[33]

The Domestic Salafi Context: Wahhabi Hermeneutical Theory and Translation Activities Prior to the Age of Modernisation

The reference materials used in debates surrounding the translatability of the Qur'an in the Egyptian context were primarily Hanafi legal sources, although some other texts were brought in later. For example, al-Zurqānī also quoted writers in the Shafii and Maliki traditions (respectively, al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī). These scholars were not generally opposed to the reproduction of Qur'anic meanings in other languages, but they did establish some limits, such as the impermissibility of interpreting the divine names. Further development of the translation movement, especially in Saudi Arabia, however, was shaped by the Hanbali school.

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[31] al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ᶜirfān*, ii, p. 97.

[32] Demonstrating its ongoing influence, al-Zurqānī's book was published in a second edition by Dār Iḥyāᵓ al-Kutub al-ᶜArabiyya in 1952, and numerous copies were reprinted in 1953, 1954, and later years.

[33] See 'Mashrūᶜ tarjamat al-Qurᵓān', *al-Hilāl* (1960), pp. 12–13. The *tafsīr* itself was first published by al-Azhar in 1381/1961. On its later translation, see *al-Muntakhab fī tafsīr al-Qurᵓān al-karīm* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aᶜlā li-l-Shuᵓūn al-Islāmiyya, 1381/1961).

Historically, the Hanbali school has predominated in Arabic-speaking areas of the Muslim world and, as such, was largely unconcerned with discussions on the translation or explanation of the Qur'an in other languages. One of its thirteenth-century proponents, Ibn Qudāma, exemplifies this thinking. In *Kitāb al-Mughnī* (c. 1223), he prohibits recitation of the Qur'an in languages other than Arabic and urges people to learn Arabic if they are unable to read it, stating that, otherwise, 'prayer is not valid'.[34] Hanbalite teachings became implicated in the translation movement in the nineteenth century, however, because they constituted the primary legal foundation of the modern Salafi tradition, which emerged at that time. The first scholar to address the issue of the translation of the Qur'an was an authority working within the older Salafi tradition, Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328). Recent researchers understand his theoretical views on language to describe a 'radical hermeneutics' and a kind of 'linguistic philosophy'.[35] Seeking to determine the origin of meaning, Ibn Taymiyya presented 'a fairly well developed defence of the thesis that the meaning of words arose out of their use and that the veridical/metaphorical dichotomy was fundamentally flawed'.[36] This and several other of his ideas merit attention here because they influenced the later development of the translation movement in Salafi scholarship.

In *al-Radd ᶜalā-l-manṭiqiyyin* [Refutation of the Logicians] (1263), Ibn Taymiyya critiques Aristotelian formal logic and, in doing so, offers insightful commentary on the translation of meaning. He delves into the question of how an imaginative concept [*taṣawwūr*] originates from the basic utterance of a word [*lafẓ*] 'if uttered in another language'.[37] Comprehending the process of translation [*tarjama*] as a transfer of meanings between two languages, Ibn Taymiyya suggests that the translator [*mutarjim*] should know both languages well. Like al-Zurqānī', he distinguishes between two levels of meaning that require different methods of transference. Ibn Taymiyya identifies some 'basic concepts'—such as 'bread', 'water', 'meals', 'drinks', 'heaven', 'earth', 'night', 'day', 'sun', 'moon', etc.—that have conceptual consonancy in different languages. Many other words, however, 'can be translated only according to their approximate meaning'.[38]

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[34] Ibn Qudāma, *Kitāb al-Mughnī*, 15 vols (Riyadh: Dār ᶜAlām al-Kutub, 1997), i, p. 526. Despite taking this stance, Ibn Qudāma was not against the use of non-Arabic *tafsīr*s to explain the Qur'an's meaning.

[35] Walid Saleh, 'Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of an Introduction to the Foundations of Qur'anic Exegesis', in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. by S. Ahmed and Y. Rapoport (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123–62; Abdul Rahman Mustafa, 'Ibn Taymiyya & Wittgenstein on Language', *The Muslim World*, 108.3 (2018), 465–91, https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12251

[36] Rahman Mustafa, p. 488.

Ibn Taymiyya turns to religious vocabulary to demonstrate his theory. Some basic religious concepts, he argues, can be adequately explained through others. He offers as example the phrase *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* ['the right way'] (Q. 1:6), advising that this can be interpreted as 'Islam', 'adherence to the Qur'an', 'obedience to Allah and His messenger', and 'useful knowledge and good actions'. Ibn Taymiyya also advances the idea that all terms used 'in the Qur'an and Sunna' can be divided into three categories: (1) words such as 'sun' and 'moon' that can be known easily; (2) legal terms such as *ṣalāt* and *ḥajj*; and (3) words such as 'marriage' [*nikāḥ*], 'bargain' [*biʾya*], and 'debt' [*qabḍ*], which fall into the category of social practice or 'tradition' [*ʿurf*].[39] When explaining those concepts in another language, the meaning of the original can be conveyed through the use of 'particularisation' or 'description' [*waṣf*], in other words, by the use of equivalent examples or synonyms. Ibn Taymiyya, then, generally believed that translation is plausible, that terms in different languages are able to convey the same meaning. Even as *al-Radd ʿalā-l-manṭiqiyyīn* lays out this hermeneutical theory, it remains silent as to whether Ibn Taymiyya himself believed in its applicability to the Qur'an. Did he understand the scripture as a text like any other that, according to his views, can be translated?

For insight into this question, we must look to another of Ibn Taymiyya's works, a treatise named *Naqḍ al-manṭiq* [A Criticism of Logic], which was not published until 1951.[40] The subject of Qur'an translation is mentioned in its introduction, and one of its chapters is entitled '*Jawāz tarjamat al-Qurᵓān ilā ghayr al-lugha al-ᶜarabiyya wa-kāyfiyyat dhālika*' [The permissibility of translating the Qur'an into non-Arabic language, and how to do it].[41] However, both of these parts were penned not by Ibn Taymiyya but by the book's editors, who openly position themselves as supporters of 'the Salafi creed' and want to claim that Ibn Taymiyya had nothing against the translation of the Qur'an. They explain that the publication is based on a manuscript copy of the text dating from 1783 and preserved in the Maḥmūdiyya Library in Medina. A more recent editor has suggested that this copy was at the disposal of earlier scholars.[42] The manuscript also contains references to other copies, which may mean that it was, at some time, viewed as an integral part of a collection of legal treatises. Thus, we can assume that Ibn Taymiyya's text was known to many Salafi-Wahhabi scholars prior to 1951; its appearance in print only made his ideas more accessible. The publication of *Naqḍ al-manṭiq* reflects the growing interest in Ibn Taymiyya and his legacy in the mid-twentieth century.

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[37] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Radd ʿalā-l-manṭiqiyyīn* (Beirut: al-Rayān, 2005), p. 90.

[38] Ibid., p. 95.

[39] Ibid., p. 94.

[40] Those who brought *Naqḍ al-manṭiq* to light were the Egyptian editor Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Fiqī and two Saudi scholars, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq Hamza and Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Al-Fiqī was an active proponent of the Salafi

But, what exactly does this text say about the issue of Qur'an translation? After comparing the rationalism of philosophers to the truth of the Qur'an, Ibn Taymiyya says that the permissibility of translation depends on translators' knowledge of the holy text, 'its meanings, explanation, and translation'. For him, both explanation [*tafsīr*] and translation [*tarjama*] can be of three kinds:

1. 'Translation of the word alone, such as the rendition of one word [in the target language] by [using] a synonym';
2. 'Translation and clarification [*bayān*] of the meaning, in order for the listener to imagine the meaning'; and
3. 'Clarification of the trustworthy meanings and verification of them'.[43]

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movement in Egypt; he led the Salafi-inspired group Jamāᶜat Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya [Society of the Followers of Muhammad's Sunna] and published many works by Ibn Taymiyya. On this society, see Aḥmad Ṭāhir, *Jamāᶜat anṣār al-sunna al-Muḥammadiyya: nashātuhā, ahdāfuhā, minhajuhā wa-juhūduhā* (Algiers: Dār al-Faḍīla, 2004).

[41] Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqḍ al-manṭiq*, ed. by Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Fiqī (Cairo: Dār al-Maᶜrifa, 1951), pp. 11, 214.

[42] Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqḍ al-manṭiq*, ed. by ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Qāᶜīd (Riyadh: Dār ᶜAlām al-Fawāᵓīd, 2013), p. 12.

[43] Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqḍ*, ed. by al-Fiqī, p. 96.

The three techniques he outlines here are comparable to the distinctions he makes in *al-Radd ᶜalā al-manṭiqiyyin* between 'grammatical/literal', 'rhetorical/metaphorical', and, finally, 'explanatory' translation. Fully aware of the complexity of translation, then, Ibn Taymiyya at last addresses the question of Qur'anic translation directly:

> It is well-known, that the *umma* [community] is obliged to convey the Qur'an, its word and its meaning, just as the Messenger was obliged to do so, and conveyance of the Message from God cannot be done without such translation. So, if [this] conveyance to foreigners requires translation, it should be translated for them as well as possible.[44]

He seems to understand translation as a necessary process to allow the community to fulfil its obligation to convey the message of the Qur'an widely.

Ibn Taymiyya's views on the subject quickly caught the attention of Salafi scholars after the publication of *Naqḍ al-manṭiq*. For instance, Muḥammad Bahja al-Bayṭār, an eminent Salafi scholar from Syria, published a review of *Naqḍ al-manṭiq* in the influential *Mujammaᶜ al-ᶜilmī al-ᶜarabī* [Journal of the Arabic Academy of Sciences] in 1952.[45] The Academy had been founded in 1918, and its board comprised not only local scholars, but also European Orientalists, and it served as a bridge connecting Islamic religious networks with modern Western approaches to Oriental Studies.[46] Al-Bayṭār represents his institution's expansive view; his review contained not only a general description but also his opinions on its treatment of 'the Qur'an translation issue'.[47] He brings Ibn Taymiyya's theory to bear on contemporary debates over the 'literal' [*ḥarfiyya*] and 'explanatory' [*tafsīriyya*] translation of the Qur'an, comparing it favourably to a popular opinon of the time that some Arabic words cannot be rendered into other languages at all.

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[44] Ibid., p. 98.

[45] Al-Bayṭār had studied under the famous exegete Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and later became a lecturer at a number of Saudi mosques and schools. He was also the first director of the Saudi Teaching Insitute (Maᶜhad al-ᶜIlmī al-Saᶜūdī), established in Mecca in 1926. See William Ochsenwald, 'The Transformation of Education in the Hijaz, 1925–1945', *Arabian Humanities Journal*, 12 (2019), 1–25, https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.4917

[46] Agatangel Kryms'kyi and Ol. Bogolybskyi, *Do istorii wyschoi osvity u arabiv* (Kyiv: Vseukrainska Akademiya Nauk, 1928), p. 23.

[47] Muḥammad Bahja al-Bayṭār, 'Naqḍ al-manṭiq', *Majallat mujammaᶜ al-ᶜilmī al-ᶜArabī*, 27 (1952), 300–02.

Al-Bayṭār concludes his review with the assessment that 'if the heads of other nations do hear the call to Islam [...] this will urge them to learn Arabic for their worship'.[48] With this, he echoes the sentiments of the pro-modernist scholars of al-Azhar but also demonstrates a general unwillingness to challenge the pre-eminence of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an. However, al-Bayṭār does support the use of translation for *daᶜwa* [missionary] purposes. His review is significant because it is one of the first examples in mid-twentieth-century Salafi literature of a scholar taking a global perspective on the role of translation.

Ibn Taymiyya's writings were not universally understood to support the idea of Qur'anic translation. Opponents of translation, including the traditional Hanafi scholar and Iraqi activist Kamāl al-Dīn al-Ṭāᶜī, read Ibn Taymiyya's texts differently. Al-Ṭāᶜī positions the early thinker as a Hanbali scholar who prohibited the translation of the Qur'an, based on the following quotation from Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Sabᶜiyya* [Refutation of Ibn Sabᶜīn, written around 1300]:

> It is impossible to find any word [in one language] that explains [or replicates] the meaning [of a given word in another language] in exactly the same way, and this is why religious scholars have said it is not permissible to recite the Qur'an in any language other than Arabic.[49]

These words have been used to support the widely disseminated assumption that scholars are unanimously agreed about the Qur'an's inability to be translated. Yet, another of Ibn Taymiyya's works, his *al-Tisᶜīyniyya* [The Ninety Arguments]), also includes the above quotation, but there it is followed by a significant final codicil. The addition specifies 'however, its translation is allowed in the same way as *tafsīr* is allowed' [*lākin yajūzu tarjamatuhu kamā yajūzu tafsīruhu*].[50] Al-Ṭāᶜī's characterization of Ibn Taymiyya's anti-translation position appears to be based on a misquotation. For, the codicil clearly indicates that Ibn Taymiyya's final position is that translation itself is acceptable, just not for use in recitation.

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[48] Ibid., p. 302.

[49] Kamāl al-Dīn al-Ṭāᶜī, *Muᶜjiz al-bayān fī al-mabāḥith takhtaṣṣu bi-l-Qurᵓān* (Baghdad: Maṭbaᶜat al-Tafayyiḍ al-Ahliyya, 1940), pp. 169–70.

[50] Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tisᶜīyniyya* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maᶜārif, 1999), p. 819.

Returning to the influence of Ibn Taymiyya on the field of Qur'anic translation, his views on language and its theological dimension in particular were widely accepted by the earliest generations of Wahhabi scholars. They, too, considered translation to be a valid hermeneutical tool to aid understanding at a theoretical level. That at least some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars were interested in deeper investigation of the problem of meaning can be seen in instances of polemical literature that were written by early Wahhabi authorities, which aimed to persuade their opponents of the universality of their understanding of the Qur'anic message of divine oneness [*tawḥīd*].

One such authority was a man called ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh (1779–1869).[51] He received several *ijāza*s [certificates] in various branches of the religious sciences, primarily in grammar, rhetoric, and comprehension, but also in *tafsīr* and became a prominent teacher. ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan was one of the first scholars to use the now-common term *al-salafiyyūn* to describe 'those who follow verified traditions' [*al-muḥaqqīqūn al-muttabiᶜūn*], and he was influential in establishing the Wahabbi *tafsīr* canon.[52] Writing that 'the only correct *tafsīr* is that which corresponds to the *tafsīr* of *al-salaf*' [the traditionally approved *tafsīr*], he advises that 'the best commentaries available to people are those by Abū Jaᶜfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥusayn b. Masᶜūd al-Baghawī, and also al-ᶜImād Ismāᶜīl Ibn Kathīr', following Ibn Taymiyya's footsteps on that issue.[53] This reference is one of the earliest to Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* (c. 740), which was almost unknown until it became popular in the late twentieth century.[54]

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[51] He was the nephew of Muḥammad b. ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb who, unusually for a Wahhabi, studied at al-Azhar University after being taken to Egypt as a prisoner of war during the Ottoman/Egyptian-Wahhabi war of 1811–18. See Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, *Mashāhir ᶜulamāᵓ al-Najd* (Riyadh: Dār al-Yamama, 1974), p. 80.

[52] ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, *al-Muḥajja* (Riyadh: Maktabat Dār al-Hidāya, [n. d.]), p. 38.

[53] Ibid., p. 42.

[54] An Indian scholar, Muḥammad Siddīq Ḥasan Khān, who died in 1890, may have used it as one of the sources for his own *tafsīr*. See Younus Y. Mirza, 'Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr: A Window onto Medieval Islam and a Guide to the Development of Modern Islamic Orthodoxy', in *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. by George Archer, Maria Dakake, and Daniel Madigan (London: Routledge, 2022) pp. 245–52 (p. 248), http://doi.org/10.4324/9781315885360-26

While advocating for the use of a specific set of *tafsīr*s, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan was careful not to speak against others that were popular. Rather, he restrained himself to warning against their overindulgence in theology [*kalām*]. Such '*tafsīr*s are "good" only in those parts where they rely on early traditions', he advised, 'with the most problematic question relating to [their treatment of] the attributes of God and *irjāᶜ* [postponement of judgment]'.[55] In ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan's writing, then, one may see a formalisation of the Salafi *tafsīr* tradition. For, all of the exegetical works he explicitly approves, particularly Ibn Kathīr's commentary, went on to constitute the core of the Salafi tradition. He also delineates the problems that would require further explanation and investigation by future scholars. His approach did much to shape the Salafi discourse on Qur'an interpretation in foreign languages over the next century.

One of ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan's most important works is his *al-Radd ᶜalā-l-Kashmīrī* [Response to al-Kashmīrī] (1926).[56] This book is important in the current context because it contains a discussion of hermeneutical theory and the question of whether language is given by God directly or established by divine inspiration. ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan wonders if some fixed meanings are identical in different languages and, in answer, confirms that 'all languages were inspired by God, and after they were first established no changes took place [...] the name of every thing is set'.[57] Later, while talking about the notion of divine oneness, and using this pretext to prove the Qur'an's universal accessibility, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan follows Ibn Taymiyya in understanding certain Qur'anic meanings as intelligible in all languages. This raises a broader question: if some meanings are universal, can they be 'safely' translated from one language to another without any distortion at all? This query would not be answered until much later, during the 1940s.

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[55] Āl al-Shaykh, *al-Muḥajja*, p. 42.

[56] This book is a criticism levelled at someone called ᶜAbd al-Maḥmūd al-Kashmīrī, whose identity remains unknown (he may have been a member of a Sufi brotherhood or some other Sunni anti-Wahhabi circle). See ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, *Bayān kalimat al-tawḥīd wa-l-radd ᶜalā al-Kashmīrī ᶜAbd al-Maḥmūd*, in *Majmūᶜ al-rasāʾil wa-l-masāʾil al-Najdiyya*, 4 vols (Cairo: al-Manār, 1926), iv, pp. 325–26.

[57] Ibid., p. 327.

One reason for growing interest in Qur'an translatability in Saudi Arabia was the introduction of the printing press. With it came discussions about the accessibility of the Qur'an and the wider religious tradition accelerated. The first printing house to be established in the Middle East was established by the Ottomans in Mecca in 1882.[58] This was followed by the establishment of the first 'official' Saudi publishing press in 1926, again in the holy city. These institutions, at least during the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Hijaz [a region in the western part of the Arabian peninsula] (1916–25), printed literature that mostly conformed to the mainstream Sunni tradition, including books by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, and other scholars.[59] The establishment of a printing industry (which, though quickly accepted by the public, was not entirely above suspicion) prompted initiatives to print and distribute the Qur'an. There is, however, no indication of any interest in publishing Qur'an translations during this initial period.

The first printed edition of the (Arabic) Qur'an to be published in Saudi Arabia was produced in 1949 by a private institution known as the Sharikat Muṣḥaf al-Makka al-Mukarrama [The Holy City of Mecca Qur'an Company]. The project began as a commercial initiative to distribute copies of the Qur'an among the pilgrims who came to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj and Umrah.[60] Later, it was supported by the founder of the Saudi Kingdom, ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz al-Saᶜūd (who reigned from 1932–53). This Qur'an, known as *Muṣḥaf al-Makka al-mukarrama* remained in print until 1979. According to an anecdote from a calligrapher who worked on the project, Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Makkī, he personally copied the text from the Cairo edition then sent it to relevant authorities in Saudi Arabia for approval, while also requesting approval from al-Azhar in Egypt. He relates his memories in a book entitled *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān wa-gharāʾib rasmihi wa-ḥukmuhu* [The

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[58] Ibrāhīm al-ᶜUtaybī, 'Bidāyat tārīkh al-maṭābiᶜ wa-l-nashr fī al-mamlaka', *Majallat al-fayṣal*, 247 (1997), 60–64 (p. 63).

[59] Aḥmad al-Ḍubayb, *Bawākīr al-ṭibāᶜa wa-l-maṭbūᶜāt fī bilād al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn* (Riyadh: KFNL, 1408/1987), p. 9.

[60] One of the co-founders of this press was a well-known Saudi writer Muḥammad Sarūr al-Ṣabān (1898–1972). He supported Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English Qur'an translation, which was reprinted in Mecca in 1965 (and will be discussed in Chapter Two). For more on al-Ṣabān, see Saudi Archive [in Arabic], https://www.darah.org.sa/index.php/media-library/st-and-rep/dignitaries/155-2019-01-30-09-57-47

History of the Qur'an, the Wonders of its Orthography and Opinions on it] (1946) that was first published in Jeddah, and then, a few years later, in Cairo. Al-Kurdī's work offers great insight into the prevailing views of printing and translation at that time.[61] The author, who was born in Mecca in 1900, studied at al-Azhar in Egypt then returned to his homeland where he worked as one of the foremost calligraphers in the holy city. Some of his works, such as *Tabarruk al-saḥāba* [Seeking Blessing through the Prophet's Companions] (1987), reveal that he was not a Salafi.[62] Indeed, some of the *fiqh* [Islamic law] books he published were mainly devoted to the teachings of the Shafii legal school.[63]

In al-Kurdī's 'History', which gives a general overview of the history of the Qur'an in print, he mentions that the first versions appeared in Europe and the Ottoman Empire, and then, later, Egypt.[64] While Al-Kurdī acknowledges 'the absence of permission to recite the Qur'an in a non-Arabic language', he insists that this prohibition does not extend to Qur'anic commentary:

> When it comes to explanatory translation [*al-tarjama al-tafsīriyya*], there are no problems with it, since it clarifies [the Qur'an's] meanings and reveals their depth; since there are many books on that topic, it is enough here to just say that.[65]

Al-Kurdī further explains his position with the claim that any 'literal' translation of the Qur'an is simply an impossible undertaking, and any 'explanatory' translation is not the Qur'an itself. His casual references to the issue of Qur'an translation suggest that debate on the subject was a well-accepted phenomena in the Muslim world by the mid-twentieth century, and he makes clear on which side his opinions fall: al-Kurdī's promotion of explanatory translations situates him firmly in the modernist camp alongside Azhari scholars such as al-Wajdī and al-Marāghī, whose views were discussed earlier in this chapter. As if to underscore his 'progressive' position, al-Kurdī also references a book called *The Messenger: The Life of Mohammad*, written by R. V. C. Bodley and first published in both English and Arabic translation in 1946.[66] The mention is significant as Bodley, a British-American Orientalist, describes the untranslatability of the stylistic beauty of the Qur'an. Thus, al-Kurdī not only takes a typical Azhari position on the question of Qur'an translation but also demonstrates some level of interest in Western Orientalist approaches. Having said that, al-Kurdī's main interest was in the Arabic Qur'an, and he only mentions the issue of translation in passing. Al-Kurdī's *Tārikh al-Qurʾān* [History of the Qur'an] is relatively well known in the Muslim world; it has been republished recently by the Saudi publishing house Dār Aḍwāʾ al-Salaf li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīᶜ [Salafī House for Publishing and Dissemination].[67] In some ways, this relatively humble scribe was one of the many points of connection between al-Azhar, Western Orientalism, and the growing Salafi tradition in Saudi Arabia. He was not, of course, unique in this. During the 1920s and 1930s, most religious teaching activities in the Hijaz were carried out by scholars from Egypt and Syria, and many graduates from the area went on to undertake further studies at al-Azhar.[68] This exchange helped to develop Salafi networks in the Middle East, but it also opened the door to the theological discussions and trends happening outside the Salafi community, including debate over the translatability of the Qur'an.

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[61] Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Makkī, *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān wa-garāʾib rasmihi wa-ḥukmihi* (Jeddah: al-Fatḥ, 1946), p. 5. Since the book appeared two years before his edition of the Qur'an went into print, the author speaks of his copying out the muṣḥaf in terms of a completed project awaiting release. In the second edition (Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1953), he was described on the cover as '*kātib muṣḥaf al-Makka al-mukarrama*' ('a Qur'an copyist from the Holy City of Mecca').

[62] Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Makkī, *Tabarruk al-saḥāba* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1987).

[63] For example, Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Makkī, *Irshād al-zumra li-manāsik al-ḥajj wa-l-ᶜumra ᶜalā madhhab al-Imām al-Shāfiᶜī* (Cairo: Maṭbaᶜat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1955).

[64] al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān*, p. 163. Al-Kurdī omits from his history the Qur'ans printed in Kazan and Crimea in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but this is excusable as these editions were largely unknown in the Arab World.

[65] Ibid., p. 166.

Another reason for the upsurge in interest in Qur'an translation in Saudi Arabia in the early twentieth century is the increasing level of engagement with foreign languages throughout the Middle East at this time. English-language courses began being taught in schools in the urban areas of the Hijaz in 1926. A decade later, specialised English courses aimed at adults began to appear; these were mostly attended by members of the local merchant elite and the upper classes. Exemplifying that interest in language-learning extended beyond English, a 1936 issue of the newspaper *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* [The voice of the Hijaz] promotes courses in English, Persian, and Urdu.[69] The local Wahhabi clergy generally tolerated this development, especially in the case of courses aimed at mature students. Some, including Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī, actively encouraged Muslims to study foreign languages, even while warning them against reliance upon translations of religious texts that may 'distort' the true divine message and lead to 'the deception of the Ummah'.[70] Such a caution is standard; it does not indicate that al-Dīn took any kind of serious anti-translation stance. Generally speaking, in the late 1940s, there was no strong Salafi opposition to translation. In fact, there is a notable contrast between the enthusiasm for Qur'an translation in Saudi Arabia and the anti-translation discourse that dominated in other Arab countries at the same time.

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[66] R. V. C. Bodley, *The Messenger: The Life of Mohammad* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1966).

[67] The recent Saudi edition is Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Makkī, *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān wa-garāʾīb rasmihi wa-ḥukmihi* (Riyadh: Dār Aḍwāʾ al-Salaf li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīᶜ, 2008).

[68] See Ochsenwald, 'The Transformation'.

The absence of any sustained opposition to translation in Saudi Arabia effectively facilitated the rise of the translation movement over the following decades. This open attitude was not only the result of the influential discussions that disseminated outwards from al-Azhar, but also of their application in the Salafi theological context, which promoted the universal self-evidence of basic Qur'anic values such as *tawḥīd* [divine oneness]. The concept of 'translation of meanings' imported from Egypt seemed to reinforce the pre-existing discourses of Qur'anic hermeneutics—ones based largely on the modern reception of Ibn Taymiyya's approach to issues of textuality.

The Salafi movement, in calling for a return to the textual sources (such as the Qur'an and Sunna) and stressing the irrelevance of the *madhhabī* ['confessional' tradition], promoted the belief that the basics of Islam should be available without the need for any further intercessions or intermediaries. Such direct access was the promise of Qur'an translations, especially those made in accordance with Salafi hermeneutical theory. This raises the question of who, ultimately, could authorise translations and would define the interpretive boundaries? In general, the Saudi clergy can be divided into establishment and non-establishment ulema [teachers with specialist knowledge]. The first type hold official positions in religious institutions, while the second preach independently or are affiliated with educational structures inside the country.[71] During the 1950s and, especially, the 1960s, the non-establishment ulema were gradually incorporated into a semi-official network by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and their rejection or acceptance of specific religious approaches and issues came to play an important role in the religious life of the country. Their views on the concept of Qur'an translation would also influence the Saudi state's approach to the issue, as will be discussed in the following chapters. Originating beyond the borders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; in Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and India; the concept of Qur'an translation was firmly embraced by ulema working in official circles. Influential political institutions such as the Ministry of Islamic Affairs (later the Muslim World League) were guided by the Saudi royal family to understand translation as a tool through which the state could gain influence abroad. Support for the speedy instrumentalisation of translations to accelerate global Islamic missionary activism met with no strong opposition inside religious circles, even among non-establishment groups.

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[69] 'al-Madrasa al-layliyya li-taᶜlīm al-luga al-Injliziyya al-Fārisiyya wa-l-Urdiyya', *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 28 April 1936, p. 4.

[70] Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī, 'Taᶜlīm al-lugāt: ḥukmuhu wa-fīᶜīdatahu', *Lisān al-Dīn*, 3.10 (1949), p. 10.

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[71] See Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shia Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 18–21, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190233310.001.0001