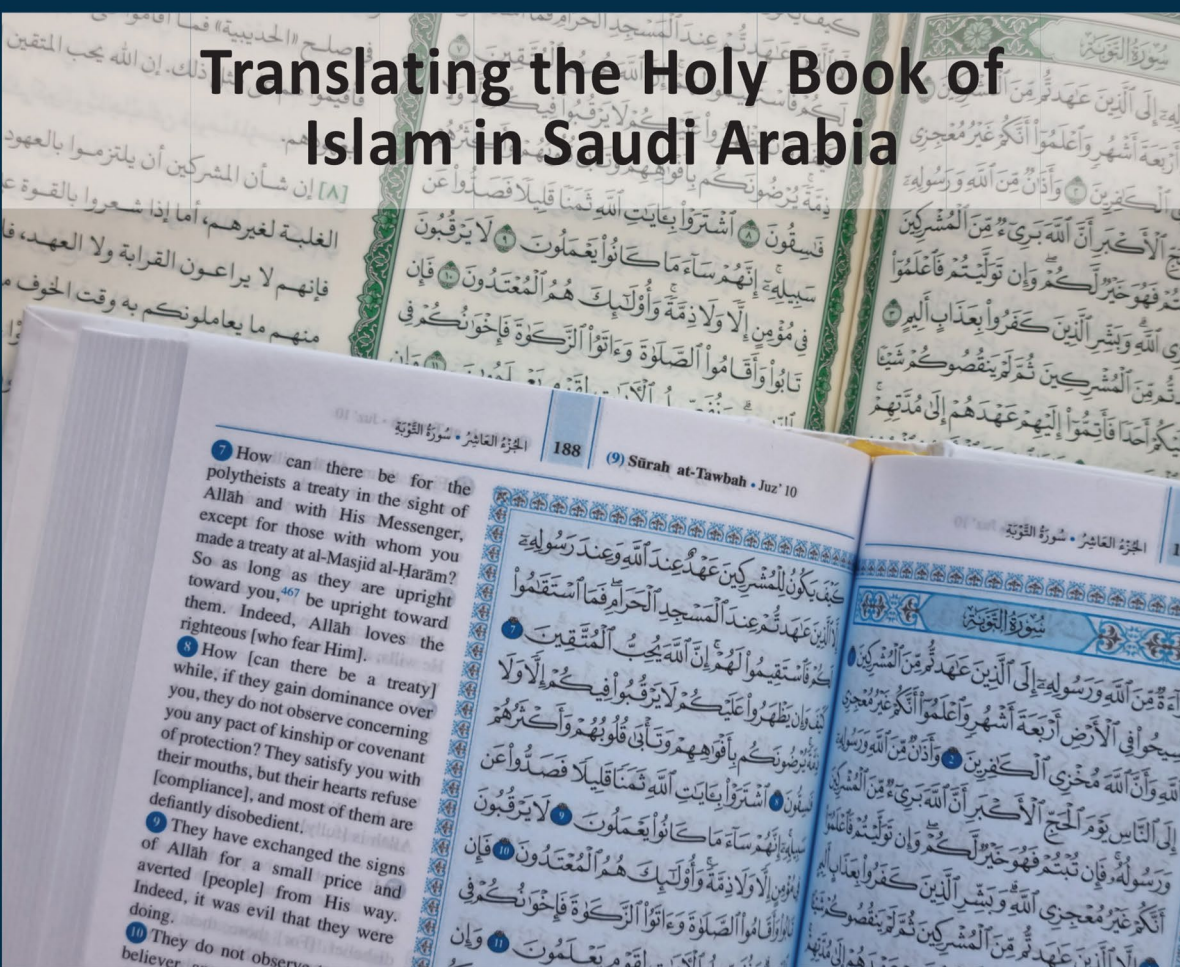


## The Kingdom and the Qur'an

### Translating the Holy Book of Islam in Saudi Arabia



MYKHAYLO YAKUBOVYCH



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Cover image: Photograph by Mykhaylo Yakubovych (2023) of the Qur'an with a commentary published by King Fahd Qur'an Printing Complex (2019) and the Saheeh International Qur'an Translation (Riyadh, 2018).

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# 4. The King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Qur'an: A Turning Point in the History of Qur'an Translations

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King Fahd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (1921–2005) is usually associated with the most conservative period in Saudi Arabian modern history. The crown prince of Saudi Arabia from 1975 to 1982 and its king from 1982 to 2005, Fahd established the basic principles of the late-twentieth-century politics of the country, especially its religious aspects. Three momentous events that took place in 1979—the Islamic revolution in Iran, the siege of Mecca by a radical religious opposition seeking to overthrow the ruling family, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—had already predetermined the attitude of the new Saudi ruler when he came to power. While his predecessor, King Fayṣal, is known for opening the door to the modernisation of the KSA, King Fahd added a strong Islamic component to the foreign policy of the country, and the vigour with which this was pursued can be measured by the fact that it is impossible to count the number of mosques and Islamic centres all around the globe that are named after him. King Fahd supported Islamic activism (from publishing to supporting jihadist fighters in Afghanistan) not only through foreign policy but also through internal policy, by strengthening alliances between the state and local ulema. This alliance was even strong enough to survive his decision to permit foreign troops to be stationed in the region (especially during and after the Gulf War). King Fahd came to power at a time when the Middle East was, in general, moving from a time of Pan-Arabist political sentiment

to a more Pan-Islamistic way of thinking<sup>1</sup> and, during the 1980s, his regime deliberately built on and developed this political trend.<sup>2</sup> It is also worth mentioning that King Fahd played a significant role in shaping educational reform in Saudi Arabia, and according to Abdulmohsen Al Saud, this was one of the main priorities of his rule.<sup>3</sup> At the very beginning of the 1980s, the Saudi Ministry of Education began to devote many more hours of the curriculum to the study of Islamic subjects than had previously been the case.<sup>4</sup> In addition, King Fahd supported many initiatives like the establishment of the National Library in 1990 (nowadays, it is known as the King Fahd Library). Thus, under his leadership, the 1980s and 1990s saw mass religious education in the country rise, and all of these educational efforts were oriented towards promoting the Salafi approach to Sunni Islam. One of the leading components of King Fahd's religious policies was the establishment of the KFGQPC, which remains the world-leading institution for Islamic publishing and, especially, Qur'an translation.

## The Emergence of the KFGQPC

Early sources suggest that the KFGQPC was established to address concerns about the printing of the Qur'an in Arabic. For example, in a 2010 issue commemorating twenty-three years of KFGQPC activities, the Saudi newspaper *al-Madīna* told the story of al-Sayyid Ḥabīb b. Maḥmūd Aḥmad (1920–2002), one of the locals responsible for initiating Qur'an printing in the country.<sup>5</sup> The biographical sketch revealed that al-Sayyid Ḥabīb b. Maḥmūd, who claims descent from the family of the Prophet and held a few professional positions in local courts and schools, was

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- 1 Haifaa A. Jawad, 'Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism: Solution or Obstacle to Political Reconstruction in the Middle East?', in *The Middle East in the New World Order*, ed. by H. A. Jawad (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 140–61 (p. 161).
  - 2 Madawi al-Rasheed, 'God, the King and the Nation: Political Rhetoric in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s', *Middle East Journal*, 50.3 (1996), 359–71 (p. 360).
  - 3 Abdulmohsen Al Saud, 'The Development of Saudi Arabia in King Fahd's Era', *Asian Culture and History*, 10.1 (2018), 48–57 (p. 48), <http://doi.org.10.5539/ach.v10n1p48>
  - 4 Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shia Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 21, 22.
  - 5 *Ṣarḥ-ʿālamī mundhu 23 sana wa-yahdī al-ʿālam al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf*, <https://www.al-madina.com/article/25824/صرح-عالمي-منذ-23-سنة-ويهدي-العالم-المصحف-الشريف>

particularly interested in the development of print culture in the region. He generously invested in a number of projects, including a rich private library in Medina called Maktabat al-Sayyid Ḥabīb al-ʿĀmma, which houses a special collection of handwritten and printed Qur'ans and also serves as a museum of Qur'anic print.<sup>6</sup> Sayyid Ahmad was not alone in his enthusiasm for Qur'anic print culture. Nāṣir al-Shaghār (1913–2007), an influential chief from the tribe of al-ʿUtayb who had close ties with the royal court, was also interested, and it is he who is reported to be the first person to raise with King Fahd the idea of a Qur'an printing complex. According to a popular story, al-Shaghār objected to printing the Qur'an abroad, proposing instead the creation of a facility in the *mahbīt al-wahī* ['place of revelation'], that is, Mecca and Medina.<sup>7</sup> Whether this story is true or not, by the late 1970s, regret was felt over the lack of Qur'an printing facilities in the Kingdom. While Syrian, Lebanese, and Egyptian publishers were successfully filling the market with Cairo editions of the Qur'an, other countries were also active in the Qur'an publishing field. Perhaps the best example is the Libyan World Islamic Call Society's (WICS) 1982 edition of the Qur'an in Arabic according to the *qālūn* reading variant, which is predominantly used in West Africa. This edition of the Qur'an is generally known as *muṣḥaf al-Jamāhīriyya* [The Qur'an of Jamahiriyya], and was used to send a political message to the Muslim world, demonstrating Gaddafi's reverence for Islam: it is reported that the leader himself wrote the last word of the Qur'an, *al-nās* from Q. 114:4, in the handwritten prototype. Meanwhile, there was only one printing press in Saudi Arabia that published the Qur'an, Muṣḥaf al-Makka al-Mukarrama, and this did not have the capacity to meet growing demand, especially as new mosques opened inside the Kingdom and beyond. This is why the first task of the KFGQPC, which was initiated by royal decree in 1982, was to print the Qur'an in Arabic.<sup>8</sup> Other aims mentioned in early sources include translation of the meanings of the Qur'an, the production of audio recordings of the Qur'an and of the Qur'an in translation, the publication of research

6 Aḥmad Ḥabīb, *al-Sayyid Ḥabīb b. Maḥmūd Aḥmad: lamaḥāt min sīra ḥayāt wa-masīra injāz* (Medina: [n. pub.], 1434/2013).

7 *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-sharīf wa-iqtirāḥ al-amīr Nāṣir al-Shaghār*, <http://www.otaibah.net/m/archive/index.php/t-117246.html>

8 'Mujamma' al-Maliki Fahd', *Fayṣal Magazine*, 13 (1990), 51–57.

in Qur'anic Studies, and the collection of manuscripts relating to the biography of the Prophet.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of a printing 'complex' [*mujamma'*<sup>c</sup>] was realised very quickly, between 1982 and 1984. The main contractor was a company named Saudi Oger Ltd (est. 1978), which was owned by the influential al-Hariri family from Lebanon. Located near the outskirts of Medina on the road to Tabuk, the Complex looks from the outside like a typical industrial facility. At the entrance, which is heavily secured, there is a picturesque square with a mosque for the use of the staff, as well as an administrative building. The main building just behind houses the general printing facility and quality-control line. Using mostly German printing equipment (specifically, the Manroland AG printing press), the KFGQPC has been able to print up to ten million books annually. Every work, after being designed and proofread by various special committees, has to pass three levels of control during the printing process, and every copy of every Arabic Qur'an and translation the Complex prints is stamped and numbered. In addition to this huge technological facility, the Complex also contains housing for workers and visitors, a Department of Academic Affairs with a library, and, finally, the Center for the Translation of the Qur'an (est. 1994), which consists of three units for European, Asian, and African languages. Most of the faculty working in this department are members of the religious elite and are specialised in *tafsīr* or Qur'anic Studies; many are in some way affiliated with the Islamic University of Madinah (IUM). On the structural level, the Complex is directed by the General Secretary, a post held since early 2020 by Shaykh Khālīd al-Nafīsī.<sup>10</sup> All major decisions are made by the Academic Council, which also approves or rejects each translation after receiving a special report from the relevant bodies. The General Secretary reports to the Minister of Islamic Affairs of the KSA.

Thus, 'The Complex' is something much more significant than a printing house. Though divided into a number of different units, it carries out all of the necessary processes involved in producing a Qur'an or a Qur'an translation in one place: each text it publishes is written, revised, approved, and finally printed there. Importantly, in 1985, the

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9 Ibid., p. 55.

10 Prior to holding this position, he was head of the human resources department at the MOIA.

KFGQPC started to produce its own *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya* [Arabic language edition of the Qur'an] with the help of the world-renowned Syrian calligrapher ʿUthmān Ṭāhā. The project—both to open a printing complex and to accelerate distribution of the Qur'an—has been extremely successful: around 270 million copies of this *Muṣḥaf* had been printed by the KFGQPC before 2013, in almost all the variant readings.<sup>11</sup> As far as I am aware, this is the largest number of Qur'ans printed in any edition in the history of Islam.

With the publication of a new Arabic text of the Qur'an, the KFGQPC became the leading Qur'an printing institution in the Muslim World and also a tourist site (it is often visited by pilgrims who travel to Medina on Hajj). However, its engagement with the question of publishing Qur'an translations was much more complicated. Discussions over the permissibility of translation had already been resolved in favour of scholars who supported the idea, as Chapter Three on the MWL's Qur'an printing project has shown. By the end of the 1970s, some scholars, such as the Egyptian-Qatari Qur'an expert Ḥasan al-Maʿāyriḡī (1927–2008), were even promoting the establishment of a 'World Committee for the Noble Qur'an', a global organisation which would produce, supervise, and publish translations in similar vein to the United Bible Society.<sup>12</sup> Al-Maʿāyriḡī's book on the role of translation in the propagation of Islam, written at the end of the 1980s and introduced by the well-known authority Yūsuf ʿAbd Allāh al-Qaraḡāwī (1926–2022), suggests that the idea of translation had already become an inherent part of Islamic revivalism, be it in terms of 'translation of the meaning' or some other approach. Even when the KFGQPC was in the very early stages of its activities, al-Maʿāyriḡī praised this institution and its future leadership in the field of Qur'an translation publishing.

Despite the support of many scholars for the KFGQPC project, Saudi domestic religious authorities were concerned enough about the future of the institution to issue a fatwa authorizing the translation of the Qur'an in early 1985. The fatwa, entitled *al-Ḥukm fi qaḡāyā tarjamat maʿānī*

11 'al-Saʿūdiyya wazaʿat 270 milyūn nuskhāt al-Qurʿān al-karīm mundhu 1985', *al-Iqtisādiyya*, 27 December 2013. [https://www.aleqt.com/2013/12/27/article\\_810812.html](https://www.aleqt.com/2013/12/27/article_810812.html)

12 al-Maʿāyriḡī, Ḥasan, *al-Ḥayʿa al-ʿalamiyya li-l-Qurʿān al-karīm: ḡarūruhu li-l-daʿwa wa-l-tabliḡh* (Doha: [n. pub.], 1991).

*al-Qurʿān*, was published by the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta of the Kingdom, and its timing was hardly a coincidence: not only was the KFGQPC just about to publish its first ever translation (a revised edition of Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English rendition), but the first Saudi edition of the Hilālī-Khān translation had just appeared, with the official approval of Shaykh Ibn Bāz, the then General President of the institution. This fatwa was decisive, effectively closing the longstanding discussions on the issue while also being a comprehensive apology for the future publication of Qur'an translations.

What does this fatwa actually permit? It is presented as a *ḥukm* [a legal statement] on the translation of the meanings of the Qur'an. The beginning of the fatwa references the permissibility of translating the Qur'an and goes on to mention the 'large demand' for translations in the context of Islamic missionary activity (*daʿwa*). It issues the caveat that any translator should be 'qualified in both languages' as well as knowledgeable in *asbāb al-nuzūl* ['circumstances of revelation']. The authors of the fatwa included this exegetical specification in response to a general insistence that translators have knowledge of the historical context behind the Qur'anic verses.

More surprising is the next section of the statement, which contains a long quotation from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥajjawī, 'someone who has discussed the translation of the meanings of the Qur'an'. It reads as follows:

Translation is one of the desirable deeds (*marghūba*). It is a collective obligation for the Umma to work on it, so if one person produces [a translation], then others do not sin by abstaining from doing so. But if no one produces [a translation], this will be sinful for everyone.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Ḥajjawī (1874–1956) was a famous scholar and reformer from Morocco who held many inspiring positions on a wide variety of topics related to the Muslim world and Muslim minorities. He was a proponent of female education and in many of his writings expressed support for some kind of inculturation, especially at a time that Muslim societies were experiencing major global change with the advent of secularism. For example, al-Ḥajjawī advised believers to use 'foreign dress' so as

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<sup>13</sup> See 'Tarjamat maʿānī al-Qurʿān bayn al-taʿāyid wa-l-taḥrīm', *Majallat al-buḥūth al-Islamiyya*, 12 (1405/1985), 311–25 (p. 311).



not to be excluded from secular circles of power.<sup>14</sup> The source for the quotation cited in the fatwa was a treatise dedicated to the translation of the Qur'an that he had written in early 1931 and published in the journal *al-Maghrib* in 1933.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to many other scholars of his time, al-Ḥajjawī never used the expression 'translation of the meanings' [*tarjamat al-maʿānī*] when discussing Qur'an translation, instead describing the process as 'translation of the basic apparent meaning (*al-maʿānī al-aṣlī al-zāhir*) of every verse [...] accompanied by the addition of the opinions of the exegetes'.<sup>16</sup> Among the many arguments al-Ḥajjawī puts forward in his treatise (which are mostly textual, and relate to the necessity of conveying the Islamic message to the whole of mankind), he makes the particularly interesting observation that:

ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, when opening up new lands from the valley of Balkh to Western Tripoli, where people speak Persian and Greek, up to the Egyptian Sudan and Berbers of the Cyrenaica, never ordered people to change their language or to learn Arabic instead.<sup>17</sup>

To this, he adds:

Islam is the religion of the nations of India, China, the Turks, the Khazars and Persians, the Syrians and Greeks, and the Berbers, and Africans, as well as others, but they do not stop using their [own] languages.<sup>18</sup>

For al-Ḥajjawī, the translation of the Qur'an is clearly not a problem at all, it reflects the 'historical reality' of the Muslim world.<sup>19</sup> The next few pages of the fatwa repeat al-Ḥajjawī's arguments in defence of translation, primarily the example he gives of the preservation of the original languages of various Muslim peoples. The authors of the fatwa draw from this a simple preliminary conclusion: if the Qur'an is being explained in the Arabic language, why not attempt to explain it in another language as well? Of course, in some way this equates

14 Etty Terem, 'Muslim Men, European Hats: A *fatwā* on Cultural Appropriation in a Global Age', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 28.3 (2023), 563–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2021.1973246>

15 A modern reprint is available: Muḥammad al-Ḥajjawī, *Ḥukm tarjamat al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Tétouan: [n. pub.], 2011).

16 al-Ḥajjawī, *Ḥukm tarjamat al-Qurʾān*, p. 39.

17 Ibid., p. 46.

18 Ibid., p. 48.

19 Ibid., p. 49.

translation with *tafsīr* (or at least conceptualises translation as a kind of *tafsīr*), which is why, in contrast to al-Ḥajjawī, the fatwa mostly uses the accepted expression 'translation of the meanings' to refer to Qur'an translation. What is innovative here is the way the fatwa takes the idea of historical Qur'an translations into Persian, Urdu, and the other languages of the Islamic world and extrapolates this to justify translations (or interpretations) in European languages. When it comes to directly acknowledging modern translations of the twentieth century, however, the authors of the fatwa mention only those published by 'the Ahmadiyya community' from Lahore and their publication of translations into 'English, Dutch, and German in 1951'.<sup>20</sup>

In their definitive statement on the matter, the Saudi scholars involved in the fatwa regard translation as a 'collective duty' of the Ummah, in exactly the same way that al-Ḥajjawī had proposed years before. The pronouncement, dating to exactly the same year as the KFGQPC started its translation activities, is more favourable towards the general idea of Qur'an translation than any issued before. It situates the undertaking of such projects as the community's responsibility and shows a flexibility that is generally found in Salafi attitudes to legal issues in such cases: whereas the Salafi school had previously relied on legal sources from Hanafi and Shafi'i scholarship to guide their position on the permissibility of the translation of the Qur'an (such as the opinions that had been disseminated from al-Azhar), here the Committee of Fatwas were willing to cite a source from the Maliki tradition that was much more suitable for their purpose.

## The First KFGQPC Translations

### English Translations: Yusuf Ali's *The Holy Qur'an*

The very first translation published by the KFGQPC was Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English-language work. As the preface to the first edition reveals, the decision to publish this text was made long before the KFGQPC started its activities. Yusuf Ali's translation went through a process of revision and approval prior to publication. In order to produce a reliable English translation that was free from personal bias, a royal

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<sup>20</sup> 'Tarjamat ma'ānī al-Qur'ān', p. 315.

decree (No. 19888, dated 16/8/1400 AH [29 June 1980]) was issued by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd b. ʿAbd al-Azīz, at that time deputy prime minister. It authorised the General Presidency of the Departments of Islamic Researches, Ifta, Call, and Guidance to undertake the responsibility for revising and correcting a specific, pre-existing translation which would be selected for this purpose. The resulting text was *The Holy Qurʾān: English Translation of the Meanings, and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali*.<sup>21</sup>

The establishment of the KFGQPC provided the opportunity to bring this project to fruition and, in 1985, according to Royal Decree No. 12412, the revised translation was approved for printing. Publication of Yusuf Ali's translation was announced only eight months after the project was launched and, given this very short time frame, either the KFGQPC undertook a very speedy revision, or—the more probable explanation—much of the work had already been carried out before the project's official start. The KFGQPC's publication of this new, revised edition of Yusuf Ali's translation marks the first instance of purposeful state-sponsored intervention into the target text by a Middle Eastern state. It is not clear exactly who was involved in the revision process, as neither the Arabic nor the English versions of the preface mention any names. These pages simply refer to the Presidency of Islamic Researches, Ifta, Call, and Guidance, and there were, undoubtedly, many Western-educated Saudi religious scholars with the relevant language skills and religious education to be able to carry out such a task.

The English text was published alongside the Arabic, in verse-to-verse format, and most of the editorial changes appear to fall into the following categories:

1. Formal changes: Yusuf Ali's introduction was removed, as was the poetry with which he had prefaced the translation as a whole and the individual suras;
2. Vocabulary revision: a return to the use of Arabic terms that relate to key concepts of the Qur'an, such as the use of 'zakāt' instead of 'charity', 'salāt' rather than 'prayer', etc.;
3. Modernisation of the language used; and

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21 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qurʾān: English Translation of the Meanings, and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1985), p. vi.

#### 4. Reductions to the commentary.

From the first two suras of the Qur'an, one can see that the amendments are not very extensive. The only change to Q. 1, for example, is the replacement of the archaic 'hath' with 'has' to give 'Thou has bestowed Thy Grace', a rendition which still retains the same overall 'King-James-Bible' style. Having said that, the commentary on the *al-hurūf al-muqatta'āt* that preface Q. 2 has been changed by the editors. The original 1937 edition provided a few opinions on what the letters *a-l-m* might mean, but the KFGQPC edition only mentions Yusuf Ali's final statement that 'much has been written about the meaning of these letters, but most of it is pure conjecture'.<sup>22</sup> Other changes include, for example, the relatively insignificant change from 'penalty' to 'chastisement' for *'adhāb* in Q. 2:7 and the more meaningful change in Q. 2:10 in which *yakdhibūna* has become 'they lied' instead of 'they are false'. In Q. 2:11, the phrase *nahnu muṣliḥūn* has been changed from 'Why, we only want to make peace' to 'We are only ones that put things right'.

The majority of the changes opt for a more grammatical (or even 'literal') meanings than Yusuf Ali's original, more rhetorical reading. However, theological alterations are also made in some verses. The verb *istawā* in Q. 7:54 reads as 'He settled Himself on the Throne', when the original text provides 'He is firmly established on the Throne (Of authority)'. Crucially for Salafi hermeneutics, with its abhorrence of 'allegorical readings', the KFGQPC edition interprets this verse in an explicitly literal fashion, based on the perspective that we should describe God as He describes Himself and 'without asking how' (*bi-lā kayf*). Moreover, the commentary to this verse has been shortened: the KFGQPC editors have erased the first two sentences of Yusuf Ali's text, notably removing his statement that the 'throne' is a metaphorical symbol of authority. In other instances, the commentary remains untouched even though changes have been made to the translation. For example, in his translation of Q. 103:1, Yusuf Ali has 'By (the Token of) Time (Through the Ages)', which has been changed to 'by the time' in the KFGQPC revision, although the name of the sura is still translated as 'Time (Through the Ages)' and the accompanying commentary has not been touched. This is repeated for Q. 112:1, in which Yusuf Ali's 'The

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<sup>22</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān* (1985), p. vii.

One and Only' is changed to 'The One', but the commentary on Allāh's qualities faithfully repeats the original 1938 edition.

In 1991, the KFGQPC published Yusuf Ali's translation for a second time, with just a few minor corrections. The text remained one of the institution's most distributed translations until 1997, when it was completely substituted by the Hilālī-Khān translation. The rationale behind the substitution was probably partly an attempt to establish a more 'correct' translation from the Salafi perspective but also to produce one that was more engaged with the *tafsīr* tradition (as Hilālī-Khān cites large blocks of text from classical exegetical works). It may also be that the modern language used by Hilālī and Khān played an important role in the choice to move over to this translation. Despite being replaced, the KFGQPC edition of Yusuf Ali's Qur'an translation has been reprinted by a number of private publishers and translated into other languages such as Russian (in 2008, under the title 'The *Tafsīr* of Abdullah Yusuf Ali').<sup>23</sup> In some ways, the fact that the translation now carries the KFGQPC label has given it more authority: it is now 'approved' by a leading Islamic institution. Furthermore, only a few years after KFGQPC stopped publishing it, another edition of Yusuf Ali's translation was published by the US-based Amana Publications and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)—one that has also been republished many times. In 2017, for example, it was printed by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs.<sup>24</sup> None of these editions have changed Yusuf Ali's original language extensively nor interfered with the commentary. Despite not being modernised very much over time, this English translation has been more successful than any published by the KFGQPC.

### French Translations: Hamidullah's *Le Saint Coran* and Mohamed El-Moktar Ould Bah's *Le Noble Coran*

The KFGQPC's first French translation, by the Indian scholar of Islam Muhammad Hamidullah (1908–2002), has a similar backstory to the

23 *Svyachennyi Koran. Smyslovoi perevod s kommentariyami*, ed. by Damir Mukhetdinov (Moscow: ID Medina, 2015).

24 *The Holy Qur'an. Tr. by Abdullah Yusuf Ali* (Ankara: TDRA, 2018).

one by Yusuf Ali.<sup>25</sup> First published in 1959 in Paris, the translation was well received by a Muslim readership during the 1970s when it was reprinted by a variety of publishers, including a 1973 version printed in Ankara by Hilâl Yayınları (who, as mentioned before, would later publish the Hilālî-Khān translation in 1978). Hamidullah himself, who had a special interest in the history of Qur'anic interpretation in foreign languages, thought his translation was one of the most important works he ever published.<sup>26</sup> In some ways, his text resembled an academic work more than a straightforward translation of a religious text: for instance, Hamidullah used two verse-numbering systems (from the Flügel and Cairo editions of the *muṣḥaf*), cited many Western studies on the Qur'an, and included a preface by the famous Oriental Studies scholar Louis Massignon (1883–1962), who was a Christian rather than a Muslim. However, the edition contained the Arabic text, and thus generally fitted the emerging model of 'Muslim' translations of the Qur'an into Western European languages. The first edition was entitled *Le Saint Coran. Traduction Intégrale* [The Holy Qur'an. Complete Translation] and there was no trace of the 'translation of the meanings' theology predominant among Qur'an translations authored by Muslims. Most of the proofreading of the French text was done by Hamidullah's collaborator, the French translator Michel Leturmy (1921–2000), and the editorial work was carried out by Nūr al-Dīn b. Maḥmūd, a journalist from Tunis who had been living in France since 1956.<sup>27</sup> The KFGQPC published its own edition of *Le Saint Coran* in 1989 after a fairly extensive revision process.

First of all, the KFGQPC changed the title to *Le Saint Coran et la traduction en langue française de ses sens* [The Qur'an and a translation of its meanings in the French language]. All the prefaces and introductions originally included by the author were removed, as was much of the commentary. To give an example of how significantly the core text of

25 Muhammad Hamidullah, *Le Saint Coran et la traduction en langue française de ses sens* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1989).

26 His general interest in Qur'an translation is demonstrated by the fact that the first edition of his translation contained a pretty comprehensive list of translations into dozens of languages, from Afrikaans to Ukrainian. Present in the 1959 edition (pp. xliii–lxvii), this list is absent from the KFGQPC edition.

27 For more on this figure, see al-Ḥabīb Shaybūb, *al-Ṣiḥāfī al-adīb Nūr al-Dīn b. Maḥmūd: ḥayātuhu wa-mukhtārāt min kitābihi* (Tunis: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 2000).

the translation was changed, I compare below the respective renditions of Q. 2:1-5:

**Hamidullah (1959)**

*Au nom de Dieu le Très Miséricordieux, le Tout Miséricordieux. Alif, Lâm, Mîm. Ce Livre, point de doute, voilà une guidée pour les pieux qui croient à l'invisible et établissent l'Office et font largesses de ce que Nous leur avons attribué, et qui croient à ce qu'on a fait descendre vers toi, et à ce qu'on a fait descendre avant toi. Et ceux-là croient ferme à l'au-delà. Eux sont sur la guide de leur Seigneur; et c'est eux les gagnants.*

**Hamidullah (1989)**

*Au nom d'Allah, le Très Miséricordieux, le Tout Miséricordieux. C'est le Livre au sujet duquel il n'y a aucun doute, c'est un guide pour les pieux, qui croient à l'invisible et accomplissent comme il faut la Ṣalāt et dépensent [dans l'obéissance à Allah], de ce que Nous leur avons attribué. Ceux qui croient à ce qui t'a été descendu (révélé) et à ce qui a été descendu avant toi et qui croient fermement à la vie future. Ceux-là sont sur le bon chemin de leur Seigneur, et ce sont eux qui réussissent (dans cette vie et dans la vie future).*

In addition to the omission of commentary, the changes made to the target text are so numerous that accounting for them all would require a separate article, or even monograph. They can be summarised, however, as following the same trajectory as the changes made in the Yusuf Ali translation. For example, 'Dieu' has been changed to 'Allah', basic Qur'anic terms such as '*al-ṣalāt*' are provided in transliteration rather than translation, and some interpretative insertions have been added in brackets. The changes suggest a clear strategy to 'Islamise' the translation, so that it was more appealing to a confessional readership, and to restrict the interpretation of the Arabic text to a more one-dimensional, Salafi, reading. In addition, the KFGQPC attempted to modernise the target text, using vocabulary that makes it more accessible to contemporary readers, especially to French-speaking Muslims living outside France. This shift is not coincidental: Hamidullah's 1950s translation was aimed at a domestic French readership that included a Christian and Secular audience, whereas the KFGQPC's priority was to render his text more 'Muslim-oriented' and broaden its appeal to an international readership.

The committee that carried out the editorial revisions to Hamidullah's translation was entirely of West African origin. Its members included Muhammad Ahmad Lo, a scholar from Senegal who was educated at the IUM; Shaykh Ahmad Al-Chinquity, a representative of the scholarly

al-Shinqīfī family from Mauritania; and, finally, Fode Camara from Guinea, who had been a secretary general for his country's Embassy in KSA. Notably, Hamidullah, who was still alive at this time, was not engaged in the revision process and, in 1989, just after the translation appeared, he published an open letter to King Fahd, objecting to many of the revisions that had been implemented.<sup>28</sup> He disagreed with, among other things, the use of 'Allah' instead of 'Dieu', arguing that this 'correction' would lead non-Muslims to continue to view him as the 'God of Muslims'. Hamidullah's opinion was effectively ignored and, even today, some Saudi scholars defend the revisions that were made, insisting on their necessity on both theological and grammatical grounds.<sup>29</sup> What also usually goes unnoticed is that the KFGQPC edition was based not on Hamidullah's original text but on a previous revision of it undertaken under the aegis of the MWL and prepared by two scholars, Houssein Nahaboo and Maḥmūd Bāballī, some years before. Nahaboo later published his own trilingual translation into French, English, and Creole.<sup>30</sup>

*Le Saint Coran* remained in print until 2007, when the KFGQPC introduced a new translation by Mohamed El-Moktar Ould Bah (Muḥammad al-Mukhtār Walad Abbāh).<sup>31</sup> Born in 1924 in Mauritania, he obtained a PhD from the Sorbonne in 1975, and worked in many Islamic organisations internationally, including the Organisation of Islamic the Conference (OIC, now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation). A renowned expert in many fields of Islam, and especially Qur'anic Studies,<sup>32</sup> Ould Bah wrote his translation in line with the KFGQPC

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28 Muhammad Hamidullah, 'Lettre ouverte du Pr. M. Hamidullah au Roi Fahd de l'Arabie Saoudite', *Le Musulman*, 5.6 (1989), 13–15.

29 al-Traif, Hamad bin Ibrahim, 'Révision de la Traduction Coranique de Hamidullah par le Complexe du Roi Fahd (CRF): (Sourate Al-Hajj en tant que modèle)', *Altralang Journal*, 3.1 (2021), 26–50.

30 Houssein Nahaboo was a Mauritian dentist and scholar, while Maḥmūd Bāballī was a Syrian lawyer and Islamic activist. See Johanna Pink's discovery of this: 'Qur'an Translation of the Week #152: Between Mauritius and Saudi Arabia: The Trilingual Qur'an Translations of Houssein Nahaboo', 14 April 2003, <https://gloqur.de/quran-translation-of-the-week-152-between-mauritius-and-saudi-arabia-the-trilingual-quran-translations-of-houssein-nahaboo/>

31 Mohamed El-Moktar Ould Bah, *Le Noble Coran et la traduction en langue française de ses sens* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2007).

32 See, for example, one of his most popular books on variant readings of the Qur'an: Muḥammad al-Mukhtār Walad Abbāh, *Tārīkh al-qirā'āt fi al-mashriq wa-l-maghrib* (Sale: ISESCO, 2001).



approach: he presented it as a kind of *tafsīr*. Criticising 'Orientalism' in modern translations, he also made claims for the untranslatability of terms like *ṣalāt* and *zakāt* (although he still translated them in his work, as, respectively, 'priere rituelle' ['ritual prayer'] and 'le aumône légale' ['legal alms']) and advocated paying particular attention to the rendition of the divine names. A comment comparing the process of translation to 'organ transplantation in surgery' gives an interesting insight into his overall approach.<sup>33</sup> The first edition of Ould Bah's work was published in 2001 by Najah Press in Casablanca under the title *Le Saint Coran*,<sup>34</sup> a second edition, which he prepared for the KFGQPC, was edited by Bello Mana from the Islamic University of Niger. Whereas the first edition was based on the reading of Warsh, the most popular interpretative variant in West Africa, to reflect the religious practices of its main intended readership, the new edition followed the Ḥafṣ reading, although some of the Warsh variant readings are mentioned as well. For example, for Q. 72:20, where the Warsh reading provides *qāla* ('He said') instead of *Qul* ('Say!'), Ould Bah includes a footnote to explain that 'Dis!' ('Say!') does not conform to the Warsh reading. This is interesting because Ould Bah's translation seems to be the only one published by the KFGQPC in which the differences in variant readings are specially addressed. When compared to Hamidullah's translation (even in terms of the KFGQPC edition of this), Ould Bah's translation looks to be more of a literal interpretation, with very little additional commentary. This can be clearly seen in their different renderings of the expression *yawma yukshafu ʿan sāqin* ['A day on which the shin is shown'] in Q. 68:42:

**Hamidullah (KFGQPC edition)**

*Le jour où ils affronteront les horreurs [du Jugement] et où ils seront appelés à la Prostration mais ils ne le pourront pas*  
 ['The day they face the horrors [of Judgment] and be called to Prostration but they cannot'].

**Ould Bah**

*Le jour où un pied sera découvert, ils seront appelés à se prosterner, mais ils en sont incapables*

33 'Tarjamat al-Qurʾān shabīha bi-baʿḍ ʿamaliyyāt zaraʿa al-aʿḍāʾ', *al-Quds al-ʿArabī*, 14 June 2006, <https://www.alquds.co.uk/> / ترجمة القرآن - شبيهة - بعض - عمليات - زرع - ال /

34 Ould Bah, Mohamed El-Moktar, *Le Saint Coran*, tr. par Mohamed El-Moktar Ould Bah (Casablanca: Maktabat al-Najah, 2001).

[‘The day a foot is discovered, they will be called to prostrate, but they are unable to do so’].

Ould Bah opts for a more literal reading that is more in line with Salafi ideas of the *sāq* as a divine attribute and not merely a rhetorical figure. Nevertheless, his translation has never really challenged the established popularity of Muhammad Hamidullah’s translation, though it did get some attention in academic circles.<sup>35</sup>

### Albanian Translations: Sherif Ahmeti’s *Kur’an-i përkthim*

Albanian, one of the ‘Islamic languages’ of southern Europe, has some eight million native speakers, a predominant share of whom are Muslims, especially in Albania and Kosovo. These two regions are connected by ethnic and cultural ties, however, when it comes to the Islamic religious tradition, the effect of their recent political realities are very different. Kosovo, as a part of socialist Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1992, had at least nominal religious freedom and a basic level of functional religious infrastructure. Communist Albania, by contrast, instigated a Soviet-style total ban on religion in 1967, which was lifted only after 1985. It is, therefore, not surprising that the first modern Qur’an translations into Albanian were primarily produced in Kosovo.

The author of one of these first translations, Sherif Ahmeti (1920–1998), was a national activist, educator, and scholar of religion. After graduating from a local Islamic school, he started out on a career in the state education system as a teacher of Albanian but was later pressured to leave his position because of his religious affiliations because these did not accord with the predominant secular socialist ideology. Ahmeti moved to the Alaudin Islamic school (Medreseja Alaudin) in Prishtina (now the capital of Kosovo), where he embarked on a long-term religious career. By 1968, he had published a short handbook on Islamic religious practices (*ilmihal*) in Albanian, as well as number of articles and translations. By 1985, Ahmeti had been made Mufti of Prishtina. A translation of the Qur’an he had begun to work on in the early 1980s,

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35 See, for example: Aicha Bint Mohamed, ‘Une traduction mauritanienne du Saint Coran’, *al-Mutarğim*, 10.1 (2010), 27–36.

*Kur'an-i përkthim me komentim në gjuhën shqipe* ['The Qur'an and the translation of its meanings into the Albanian language'] was finally published in 1988 by the Kryesia e Bashkësisë Islame (Presidency of the Islamic Community). Soon after that, the second edition was produced by the Libya-based World Islamic Call Society in Tripoli.<sup>36</sup> On the back of growing interest in religion in the Balkans after the fall of the communism and the close attention paid by the Muslim world to the region during the military conflicts it endured in the 1990s, Ahmeti's translation has also been printed by the KFGQPC. Their first edition appeared in 1992<sup>37</sup> and was reprinted in 1994; it was further reissued several times in the 2000s. Typically published under its original name, Ahmeti's translation is based on the Arabic text and informed by plenty of Sunni *tafsīrs*, both classical works such as those by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr, and the more modern exegesis of Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qannawjī (1832–1890). It seems that Ahmeti also consulted some Bosnian translations of the Qur'an as well, for example those by Džemaludin Čaušević and Muhammed Pandža (1937) and Bessim Korkut (1977), both of which were quite accessible in Yugoslavia at the time. A 1992 KFGQPC edition of the work includes some extra introductory material, including a history of the Qur'an and a statement by the publisher that the translation was initiated by the MWL—but no further details on that are given. It does name Mansur Halil, an Albanian graduate of the IUM, as having had primary responsibility for revising the original translation for publication by the KFGQPC.

Comparing the first 1988 edition of *Kur'an-i përkthim* and the 1992 KFGQPC edition, we see that Halil's revisions mostly involved the addition of more explanatory material into the core text and footnotes (including the original Arabic pronunciation of various terms) and a shift from a more literal to a more explanatory style, a trend typical of many KFGQPC translations. The suras are also introduced by short forewords that describe their content, which in some ways is reminiscent of many translations of the Qur'an into Turkish (and their associated

36 For details on his biography and works, see Rajab al-Kūsūfī, *al-Ittijāh al-ʿaqdī li-l-Shaykh Sharīf Aḥmadī min khilāl muʿlafaṭihi wa-atharihi ʿalā al-wāqīʿ* (Baghdad: Dār al-Māʾmūn li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2010).

37 Sherif Ahmeti, *Kur'an-i përkthim me komentim në gjuhën shqipe* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1992).

commentaries). The names of the suras are not translated at all, just given in transliteration. As to language and style, Albanian readers have commented on the use of a 'northern' dialect of their language that is spoken in Kosovo. This is slightly unusual as the modern standard literary language of Albania is based on the so-called 'southern' variant. However, the same approach was taken by two other Albanian Qur'an translations, both of which were also published in Kosovo (Feti Mehdiu, 1985, and Hasan Nahi, 1988).<sup>38</sup> New translations in recent decades, such as those by Emin Emer<sup>39</sup> and Salih Ferhat Hoxha,<sup>40</sup> have challenged the impact of earlier works; however, Sherif Ahmeti's translation and its foreign reprints still remain a very important monument of the post-communist revival of the Muslim tradition in Albania and Kosovo.

### Kazakh Translations: Halifa Altay's *Kālam- Şarīf*

With a population of around nineteen million people, Kazakhstan is the largest Central Asian state. Its official language, Kazakh, is the mother tongue of some fifteen million people living both within Kazakhstan and beyond. Kazakh belongs to a Turkic language group of the Kipchak branch and is thus closely related to Kyrgyz, Karakalpak, and Nogai. As is the case with most of the other Turkic languages of the former USSR, Kazakh has moved away from the use of the Arabic script to Cyrillic and is currently undergoing a further transition into using Latin script.

The first printed translation of the Qur'an into the Kazakh language appeared as recently as 1988, with the target text based on the Arabic script. The translator, Halifa Altay (1917–2003), was born in East Turkestan (also known as Altishar) in the south west of Xinjiang and fled China during the Kazakh exodus to take up residence in Turkey (where he lived from 1954 until his move to Khazakstan in 1991). He was known as a writer, scholar, and activist in the Kazakh diaspora movement and produced a lot of material on the history of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh

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38 See the short review in Zymer Ramadani, 'Tarihte Yapılmış Arnavutça Kur'an Mealleri', *Marife*, 6.2 (2006), 241–47, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3343729>

39 Emin Emer, *Kurani Me perkthim ne gjuhen shqipe* (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2007).

40 Salih Ferhat Hoxha, *Kur'ani me përktim në gjuhën shqipe nga Ferhat Hoxha* (Skopje: Logos—A, 2016).

people.<sup>41</sup> Having received a traditional Islamic education from religious schools in both Xinjiang and Turkey, Altay had close connections with the Turkish religious establishment. After his move to Kazakhstan in 1991, he was also active there as preacher and national educator, and became a symbol of the Kazakhstan National Revival: one of the biggest mosques in Kazakhstan is named after him—the Halifa Altay Mesheti. Altay was very interested in scholarship on both the Qur'an and Qur'an translations. Qur'an expert Ḥasan al-Ma'āyriḡī, in his introduction to the Volga-Ural Tatar translation of the Qur'an by Shaikhislam Hamidi, *al-Itqān fī tarjamāt al-Qur'ān*, mentions meeting a meeting in Istanbul in 1984 with Altay, who introduced him to that translation (which al-Ma'āyriḡī later published in Doha, Qatar).<sup>42</sup> Altay also introduced him to many other works published by Russian Muslims towards the end of the imperial era.

The first edition of Altay's Kazakh translation was disseminated among the Kazakh diaspora in Turkey and Iran by the author,<sup>43</sup> while the second, 1990, edition was printed by a local press in Almaty (the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, or KazSSR, at the time).<sup>44</sup> This second edition was written in the Cyrillic script, on the basis that very few of its target audience were able to read Arabic script. In the same year, Altay visited the KFGQPC, where he stayed for two months to discuss with the academic committee there some of the exegetical choices he had made. This visit was enough to ensure the KFGQPC's approval for his translation, on top of the one he had already received from the MWL, and it prepared a third edition of his translation in 1990 and 1991.<sup>45</sup> Dalilkhān Dzanaltay, a Kazakh diaspora leader from

41 See K. N. Baltabayeva, S. E. Azhigali, S. S. Korabay, G. Gabbassuly, R. S. Kozhakhmetov, K. M. Konyrbayeva, and Abd. H. Altay (eds), *Altay Halifa Gaqypuly: Bibliographic index* (Almaty: [n. pub.], 2017).

42 See Shaikhislam Hamidi, *al-Itqān fī tarjamāt al-Qur'ān* (Doha: [n. pub.], 1987), p. 2. It is not mentioned in reprints of the Istanbul edition of 1984 (which is also based on the earlier edition from Kazan, 1911).

43 Halifa Altay, *Kālam-Ṣarīf: tūzetip, toluqtırıp bastırısı X. Altay* (Istanbul: Elif-ofset baspası, 1989).

44 Halifa Altay, *Quran Ṣarīf* (Almaty: Jazwşı: Sözstan, 1991).

45 Halifa Altay, *Quran Kārim: qazaqs, a maḡna jāne tūsinigi* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1991).

Xinjiang who was living in Turkey at the time, is named in this edition as its editor.<sup>46</sup>

The third edition, produced by the KFGQPC, was much like the second. Its text was published in Cyrillic script and was not significantly revised. The volume contains a standard introduction from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, followed by an introduction by the author, the main text, and finally an index of terms used. A slight deviation from the previous two editions appears on the first page of the introduction. A scene-setting sentence on the place of the Qur'an in Arabic literary tradition that can be found in the 1990 Almaty edition is completely excluded; the paragraph begins with the concept of Qur'anic inimitability. The list of the sources used by the translator, however, has not been changed: in addition to works from the classical *tafsīr* corpus, it includes references to a number of post-classical works, from Ottoman ones, such as *Rūḥ al-bayān* by al-Burūsawī, to various Tatar and Uzbek works produced in the twentieth century. In general, the style of the translation imitates that of a number of Turkish interpretations, for example, the well-known work by Ali Özek and other scholars widely known as 'the Turkish Diyanet translation' [Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Kur'an Meali], which has been published frequently since 1982. Altay's translation, as well as conforming to the layout used in these Turkish translations, contains the short Arabic introductions to the suras, the actual text of the translation with some insertions and additional commentary, and also notes on places where phrases are repeated in other suras. Reviewers have observed that Altay tends to use vocabulary that would be familiar to members of the Kazakh diaspora, to the extent that there are some parts of the work that might be completely unintelligible to a native speaker of Kazakh born and bred in the former KazSSR. Comparing to Almaty's 1990 edition, the KFGQPC edition contains only a very few insignificant changes to the core text. Even the final 'Amin' that is added to the text after the seventh verse of Q. 1 in his original is faithfully preserved. This is an obvious translatorial addition as it does not exist in the original text of the Qur'an but is recited as part of ritual practice during collective

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46 Mykhaylo Yakubovych, 'Qur'an Translations into Central Asian Languages: Exegetical Standards and Translation Processes', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 24.1 (2022), 89–115 (pp.94–97), <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2022.0491>

prayers. It looks as if the KFGQPC printed this translation 'as is', despite it reflecting the translator's personal reading of the scripture.

When one looks at the text from the perspective of exegetical choices and overall approach, Almaty's translation tends towards an explanatory rather than a very literal reading. For instance, he renders the phrase *hunna ummu-l-kitāb* in Q. 3:7 as 'Solar Kitaptın negizgi irge tası' ['they are the basic meanings of the Book'] instead of 'anası' ['mother meanings'] as is given in some later Kazakh translations. Furthermore, Altay's rather metaphorical understanding of some verses, especially theological ones, differs from the more literal readings found in other KFGQPC translations of the Qur'an. For example, the word *kursī* [literally 'chair', 'throne'] in Q. 2:255 is interpreted by Altay as 'bilimi' ['knowledge']. This has not passed unnoticed by some Salafi readers, and, on the Saudi-run website Qur'anEnc (probably the biggest collection of Qur'an translations available online), the unknown editor of Altay's translation has added another explanation: 'Alla tağalanıñ eki ayağına arnalğan ornı' ['This is a place for both of God's feet'], probably based on a *ḥadīth* attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī.<sup>47</sup>

Reprinted several times, Altay's translation of the Qur'an has played an important role in the religious revival that has taken place in Kazakhshtan. New translations, however, have challenged its authority (especially that prepared by Muhammed Cingiz Qaci and Ermek Muhammed Qali and published by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in 2015), but it is noteworthy that the KFGQPC has never printed any other Kazakh translation.

## Other Early Translations: Turkish, Indonesian, and Bosnian

In 1987, the KFGQPC also published a Turkish translation of the Qur'an, reprinting a text that had been prepared by the Muslim World League. No major changes were introduced into their new edition; the complex just published it 'as is'. They also published a translation into Indonesian, the language with the largest number of Muslim speakers

<sup>47</sup> For this verse and correction, see [https://quranenc.com/en/browse/kazakh\\_altai/2](https://quranenc.com/en/browse/kazakh_altai/2). On the tradition see, for instance: al-Qurṭubī, Abū ʿAbd Allāh, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʿān*, 11 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2013), II, p. 180.

after Arabic. In 1990, the KFGQPC published their own new edition of the Indonesian state-commissioned *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* ['The Qur'an with translation', which was first published between 1965 and 1969 by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) and then subsequently revised and republished. According to a recent, comprehensive study by Fadhli Lukman, MORA and the Saudi authorities established a joint committee to assess the first edition of the translation and to produce recommendations for its revision.<sup>48</sup> Lukman finds that the original *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* already accorded with Saudi theological ideas, so only minor edits were introduced in the Saudi edition. Nevertheless, some of these interventions were quite challenging, especially the reference to 'Jews and Christians' in Q. 1:7 (for exactly the same reasons as in the first edition of the Hilālī-Khān translation of the Qur'an discussed in Chapter Three). Later, however, the KFGQPC prepared their own, new revision of *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*, but this happened only after the establishment of the Center for Qur'an Translation inside the KFGQPC.

In 1991, the KFGQPC's Bosnian translation appeared in print. The translator, Besim Korkut (1904–1977), was a scholar of Islamic Studies from Bosnia. After attending Shariah school in Sarajevo in 1925, Korkut continued his religious education at al-Azhar. He graduated in 1931 and returned home to Bosnia, Korkut, where he started working as a lecturer in Arabic, a historian, and a translator. During the era of socialist Yugoslavia (that is, after 1946), Korkut was affiliated with the Philosophical Faculty and Oriental Institute in Sarajevo. Although he completed his Qur'an translation, it was never published during his lifetime. The first edition of *Kur'an: prevod Besim Korkut* appeared in 1977 and included, besides the core text and commentaries, an appendix written by another Bosnian scholar of Islam, Sulejman Grozdanić (1933–96),<sup>49</sup> which outlines typical hermeneutic problems encountered when translating the Qur'an, mostly in relation to its stylistic features. Further editions also include prefaces by other scholars and some specialised supplements (indices, etc.). Korkut's translation is written in very

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48 'MORA's decree No. P/15/1989, issued on 4 July 1989, thus established *Tim Penelitian dan Penyempurnaan Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* ("The Committee for Research and Perfection of *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*")' Fadhli Lukman, *The Official Indonesian Qur'ān Translation* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2022), p. 79, <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0289>

49 Besim Korkut, *Kur'an: prevod Besim Korkut* (Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut, 1977).



accessible and simple language and is, therefore, suitable for all kinds of readers. It is not overly literal, uses clear idioms, and opts for familiar vocabulary. Only in a few places does the translator employ archaic expressions in order to make his text more impressive and eloquent. New editions (including the revised one prepared and published by the KFGQPC in 1991)<sup>50</sup> contain some minor corrections. Despite being produced in an academic context, Korkut's Qur'an translation uses short but valuable footnotes, plain language, and other features make it popular with even a nonacademic readership. Consequently, around twenty editions have appeared in print up to 2023, and it is available in many bookstores and online. Moreover, it has been used for as the basis for further translations into the Macedonian and Slovakian languages.

Compared to Western European languages, the KFGQPC has been less active in terms of its editorial interventions in translations into 'Muslim' languages such as Bosnian, Kazakh, Turkish, and Indonesian. These translations have not been challenging to Salafi doctrine as, oriented towards Muslim readers, they follow mainstream Sunni readings of the text—with the exception of verses that relate to specific theological issues, such as the divine attributes. However, translations into (European) languages that were intended at least partly to introduce Islam to non-Muslim readers have tended to adopt a more confessional style. This explains why the KFGQPC Turkish translation retains traces of the 'scientific hermeneutics' of the Qur'an and the Kazakh translation allows some 'metaphoric' interpretations of verses relating to God's anthropomorphic attributes when such things have been erased from both the English and French translations.

## The KFGQPC Center for Translations: The Production of New Translations<sup>51</sup>

As outlined in the previous section, all of the Qur'an translations published by the KFGQPC prior to 1991 (English, French, Kazakh, Turkish, and Bosnian) were initially published elsewhere and reproduced by the KFGQPC with varying degrees of editorial

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50 Besim Korkut, *Kur'an s prevodom* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1991).

51 This section is written on the basis of my personal experience while visiting the KFGQPC in April and May 2010 as well as a number of other secondary sources.

intervention. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, there was a shift in policy. The Complex began to develop a framework for not merely revising and publishing pre-existing translations but also for producing new translations in house. The KFGQPC started to publish exclusive works, hiring translators, processing revisions, and undertaking their own publishing and distribution. The following section will address the production processes involved.

Markaz al-Tarjamāt, the Center for Translations, was established in 1994. Its declared remit relates almost entirely to the study of translations and interpretations of the Qur'an in non-Arabic languages. The Center also gathers information on translators of the Qur'an all over the world and publishes bibliographies, dictionaries of the Qur'an, and other auxiliary literature. Initially, the Center consisted of six units: European Languages, African Languages, Asian Languages, the Encyclopedia Unit, the Information Unit and, finally, the Publishing Section. The first head of the Center was a figure who had been associated with the KFGQPC from the very beginning of its activities, Dr 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Vaniyāmbādī, generally known by the name V. Abdur Rahim. Born in India, he attended Presidency College at the University of Madras, where he majored in English Language and Literature, graduating in 1957. He attended al-Azhar in 1964, where he obtained both an M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Arabic Philology. Five years later, he joined the IUM to teach Arabic to students admitted from abroad. Here, he was associated with the TAFL (Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language) programme; one set of his many Arabic course materials entitled 'Lessons in Arabic for non-Arabic speakers' is still used in Islamic schools around the globe. Abdur Rahim has outstanding skills in a number of foreign languages (it is reported that he is fluent in more than ten languages, both Asian and European), has also authored many books on Qur'anic grammar (including some dedicated to particular suras), and annotated editions of classical works in Qur'anic Studies<sup>52</sup> and basic *tafsīrs*.<sup>53</sup> It is at least partly due to his

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52 For example, in 1990, F. Abd al-Rahim published his edition of *Kitāb al-Mu'arrab* by Abū Manṣūr Mawḥūb al-Jawālīqī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalām, 1990). This edition remains one of the most popular for academic usage.

53 See, for example, F. 'Abd al-Raḥīm, *Iqṣām al-aymān fi aqṣām al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalām, 2016).

outstanding intellectual abilities<sup>54</sup> and his broad international contacts that the Center for Translations went on to be such a success.

In the first eight years of its operation, up to 2002, the Center supervised the production of more than ten new translations of the Qur'an, all of which were prepared exclusively for the KFGQPC in accordance with its guidelines for translators. These guidelines were prepared in the 1990s, set out in a document dating from 2002,<sup>55</sup> and updated in the early 2020s. They can be summarised as follows:

The translator should:

- Not inflict his own doctrinal theories, personal interpretations, and philosophical opinions on the translation or his or her<sup>56</sup> commentary on the target text.
- Translate any Qur'anic words that are repeated in the source text consistently, unless their meanings differ according to the context.
- Provide an accurate understanding of the Quranic verses by not departing from the text by adding or removing anything.
- Avoid literal translation.<sup>57</sup>
- Retain Islamic terms that cannot be translated into other languages, such as *zakāt*, *ḥajj*, and *ʿumra*, presenting them according to their Arabic pronunciation and adding explanations of their meaning in a special appendix.
- Demonstrate commitment to the use of Islamic terms and expressions when translating and avoid the use of words and terms specific to other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism.

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54 During the 1980s, he spent time working as a lecturer in Arabic in many countries, from Surinam to Taiwan.

55 *Shurūṭ al-tarjama* (author's personal archive).

56 As of 2023, the only translation to be carried out by a woman is into Polish, a project that is currently in progress but about which no information is currently available.

57 This rule is not really explained, but it seems to refer to the general concept of translation of the Qur'an as 'translation of the meanings' rather than as a word-by-word 'Qur'an in another language' (which is theologically prohibited as the Qur'an is considered to be inimitable).

- Adhere to the 'appropriate' transliteration system when writing Arabic words in other languages.<sup>58</sup>
- Present personal names according to their Arabic pronunciation. Any reference to their pronunciation in the target language should be made in footnotes or in parentheses.
- Use contemporary language that is understood by most of the speakers of the target language, and avoid the use of archaic language.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to these general principles, the KFGQPC developed its own translation strategy, which promoted grammatical rather than interpretative translation. Translators must also preserve the original word order whenever possible and indicate all additions through the use of parenthesis. Many of the rules, such as the requirement to preserve Qur'anic vocabulary and to use modern language, relate to issues of linguistics rather than theology. That is, apart from the edict to 'avoid terms specific to other religions', they are, on the surface, religiously neutral. In their actual contracts with translators, however, the KFGQPC has exerted control over the translators' hermeneutical approach, as they advocate the use of the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, al-Baghawī, Ibn Kathīr, and, finally, the twentieth-century Saudi scholar and author of *Taysīr al-karīm al-mannān*, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir al-Sa'adī (1889–1957). This choice of recommended exegetes is quite understandable: their works all belong to the established Salafi canon. However, the situation is nuanced because, in cases where opinions given in these texts differ, the KFGQPC recommended the use of *al-aqwāl al-rājiḥa*, that is, the meanings that are described in these *tafsīrs* as being most plausible. This leaves quite a lot of room for discussion and variation since, in many cases, exegetes present several different interpretations without giving any final answer as to which meaning they consider to be most applicable. Al-Ṭabarī sometimes uses the expression *fa-ūlū 'indī* ('the foremost one for me'), and Ibn Kathīr *aṣaḥḥi qawlan* ('the most correct statement'), but, still, there are many occasions on which they give no clear answers. As a result, this nonspecificity in the *tafsīr* tradition has carried over into

58 No further explanations are given.

59 See the brief official report of activities until 2002: *Taqrīr al-mujamma'* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2003).

the many translations published by KFGQPC: for instance, the Russian translation by Elmir Quliyev includes 'alternative' interpretations in parenthesis, even when it comes to theologically loaded phrases, such as 'God rose over the Throne' in Q. 20:5. Nevertheless, most, if not all, of the translations exclusively published by KFGQPC tend to quite openly adopt a Salafi hermeneutical approach, providing the 'correct' interpretation of the Qur'an in terms of the Salafi religious creed. This is a result of not only the translation strategy used by the translators but also the overall editing, revision, and production processes that the translation goes through, which will now be described here in detail, as the impact of these on the final translation cannot be understated.

First of all, there is question of how the KFGQPC chooses in which languages to produce its translations. Predictably, at the very beginning, the major world languages came under focus—which is why English and French translations were published during the Complex's early years. Chinese, Spanish, and Russian translations appeared a little later, meaning that the KFGQPC had already produced translations into several of the most widely-spoken world languages during first ten years of operation. In many other cases, the decision to translate the Qur'an into a particular language was not initiated by the KFGQPC itself. Usually, a translation was the result of an initiative from below: either the translators (or translation teams) themselves or a local Islamic community. This goes some way to explaining why, in the cases of Central Asian languages like Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz, for example, the KFGQPC only started to develop these translation projects in the late 2000s, when some well-trained individuals appeared on the scene. Those people, who primarily worked on revising existing translations in their own languages, were usually graduates of the IUM or other Saudi institutions of Islamic higher education such as Umm al-Qura in Mecca or Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh. Most of the translations produced for the post-Soviet space, for example, took the form of pre-existing translations that were edited by graduates of IUM, and same is true for some of the translations into African languages. These projects were often set in motion when the KFGQPC was contacted by relevant Islamic organisations via the MOIA, sometimes with the help of Saudi embassies, the MWL, or independent Saudi missionary activists. Languages with an indigenous Muslim population of native

speakers provide focus: for example, by 2022, the KFGQPC had printed translations into Albanian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Greek, and Hungarian (with the Macedonian and Hungarian translations being produced exclusively for the KFGQPC), whereas it has not pursued many projects in Scandinavian or Baltic languages.<sup>60</sup> Pre-existing Muslim networks have thus played a very important role in the choice of target languages.

Usually, the translator (or whoever proposes the translation) is asked to provide a CV and two references, usually from Saudi-related circles or established Muslim institutions around the world: the latter refers broadly to Muslim-majority regions such as Pakistan, parts of India, Bangladesh, or Sudan, where many Islamic universities have close ties with Saudi Arabia. There are three basic requirements for translators: they should be Muslim, possess a level of religious knowledge (usually demonstrable via a degree from an Islamic university), and have proven expertise in both Arabic and the target language. Once all the documents have been received, these are usually sent on to the academic council of the KFGQPC, which is made up of scholars from its academic department and official representatives of the MOIA. Approval of a translator is followed by the drafting of a contract. This document outlines the terms of reimbursement, the time frame for the project, and the aforementioned translation guidelines.

Around 2020, the KFGQPC updated its translation guidelines to incorporate a few new rules. One introduced a requirement that translators use *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* (for more on which, see below) to guide their exegetical choices; another asks them to pay special attention to topics such as *jihād*, 'relations with non-Muslims', and 'beating women'.<sup>61</sup> The guidelines also mention a document called *Dalīl al-mutarjim* ('The Translator's Guide') but, as of 2023, this source is still in preparation.

The translation is prepared and submitted in parts, normally between three and six instalments (each containing ten or five parts of the Qur'an, respectively). This explains why some KFGQPC translations, such as the

60 The KFGQPC published one work in Swedish (by Abdul-Haleem Joseph) in 2011–2012, and it only comprised the first five parts of the Qur'an. See Abdul-Haleem Joseph, *Den Ädla Koranens fem första delar* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2011).

61 *Shurūṭ al-tarjama* (personal archive). The last point clearly refers to the phrase *wa-ḍribūhunna* in Q. 4.34. It translates literally as 'beat them', 'strike them'.

Russian or Azerbaijanian, were first published partially (beginning with the last, thirtieth, part of the Qur'an, from Q. 78 to the end—the part usually used for Qur'an memorisation). After the first part of the work has been submitted, the KFGQPC sends it out for review and revision.

Revision is performed by either an individual or a small team with the same linguistic proficiencies as the translator. Their role is to compare the work to the original Arabic text and to provide the KFGQPC with a report. Most revisers are Saudi Arabian (and usually graduates of IUM) or religious figures from abroad. An example of the first case is the 1997 translation into Greek (discussed below), which was revised by Khalīl Jihād Bilāl, a graduate of Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University. A contrasting example is the Spanish translation by Abdel Ghani Melara Navio, also published in 1997. It was revised by Omar Kaddoura, the imam of a mosque in Venezuela, and Isa Amer Quevedo, the head of the Islamic Centre in Bolivia.<sup>62</sup> The latter was also the editor of another translation into Spanish by an Argentinian convert and graduate of Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, Isa Garcia.<sup>63</sup> For some languages, the selection of the reviser seems not to have been an easy task: a few translations do not mention a reviser but an oversight committee, suggesting that responsibilities were divided across a number of individuals. An example is the Macedonian translation by Hasan Dzilo that appeared in 1998.<sup>64</sup> For the Korean translation by Hamid Choi (1997), no reviser mentioned at all.<sup>65</sup>

However, greater emphasis seems to have been placed on revision in recent years as all translations published since 2015 provide the names of at least two revisers.

62 *El Noble Coran y Su Traducción Comentario En Lengua Española* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1997).

63 See Isa Garcia, *El Corán. Traducción Comentada. Traducción Isa Garcia* (Bogota: [n. pub.], 2013).

64 *Kur'an so Prevod* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1997).

65 *Seong kkulan uimiui hangug-eo beon-yeog* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 1997). Still, his work (mostly based on A.Y. Ali's English translation) has been edited by some local proofreaders consisting of Korean Muslim scholars of Arab origin. See: Hamid Choi, 'Tajribati fi tarjama ma'ānī al-Qur'ān ilā al-Lughah al-Kūriyya', in *Abhāth al-nadwa tarjamat ma'ānī al-Qur'ān: taqwīm li-l-māḍī wa-takhṭīṭ li-l-mustaqbal*, 2 vols (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2002), II, p. 270.

Sometimes the translations are reviewed by the experts from within the KFGQPC itself, as was the case with the Persian translation by Walī Allāh al-Dahlawī (1703–1762) that was published by the KFGQPC in 1997.<sup>66</sup> On this translation, the revisions were carried out by ‘Abd al-Gafūr al-Bulūshī, one of the KFGQPC’s leading scholars, and another Saudi scholar, Muḥammad ‘Alī Dārī.<sup>67</sup> The KFGQPC’s edition of al-Dahlawī’s translation met with some criticism, as the changes that had been made to the original text were not always marked clearly as interventions.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the revisers seem to have generally followed the same practice as was used by the KFGQPC in its earlier versions of the English translations of Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Hamidullah: prioritising the ‘usability’ of the translation as a more or less approximate ‘meaning’ of the Qur’an over protecting the original translator’s intellectual rights, and thereby treating the translation as no more than a kind of auxiliary text. These interventions also reflect an attempt to strengthen the Sunni discourse in the translation, which is used mostly by Shii speakers of Persian. The official Saudi religious elite has always been extremely critical of Shi’ism, especially in the late 1980s and 1990s, before the reign of King Abdullah.<sup>69</sup>

The report submitted by the reviser consists of a spreadsheet with a list of ‘errors’ (*akḥṭāʾ*), divided into mistakes of four kinds:

1. *lughawī*—‘language errors’. These include typos, the usage of incorrect words, etc;
2. *‘aqāidī*—‘dogmatic errors’. This refers to things that arise from theological issues, such as ‘misinterpreting’ the divine attributes;

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66 According to al-Bulūshī, the KFGQPC considered publishing various other Persian translations, in particular one by Elahi Ghomshei, but the committee found it ‘weak when compared to the Arabic original’. See ‘Abd al-Gafūr al-Bulūshī, ‘Tārīkh taṭwīr tarjamāt ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān ilā al-Fārisiyya’, in *Abḥāth al-nadwa tarjamāt ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān: taqwīm li-l-māḍī wa-takḥīṭ li-l-mustaqbal*, 2 vols (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur’an Printing Complex, 2002), I, p. 145.

67 ‘Abd al-Gafūr al-Bulūshī, *Tafsīr Qur’āni Karīm (Lahore: Daw‘atu l-Ḥaqq)*, 1433/2011. Al-Bulūshī also authored his own translation of the Qur’an into his native Balochi, which was published in Pakistan.

68 See, for example, Bahā‘ al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, *Terjume Shāh Weli Allah Dehlawi*. *Terjuman e-Wahy*, 9 (Shahriyār 1380), 61–71.

69 Ismail, *Saudi Clerics*, pp. 105–07.



3. *shar'iyya*—'legal errors'. These are usually related to legal issues mentioned in the Qur'an; and
4. *minhajī*—'methodological errors', such as ignorance of the context of the revelation for a particular verse.

Once the revision on all parts is complete and positive reports have been handed over to the KFGQPC, the translator is usually invited to Saudi Arabia to visit the KFGQPC, if possible. A special committee is convened during this visit to discuss any final matters. This stage of the process usually relates to issues to do with the commentary and additions to the text. Special attention is also given to questions relating the treatment of verses that deal with the divine attributes and legal rules and to those that contain special vocabulary. This might also involve discussing the rendition of verses for which a literal translation is considered 'misleading', for instance how to translate *inna-llahu ma'anā* ('God with us' Q. 9:40). As any implication of 'physical presence' is completely unacceptable to Sunni Islam, a comment might be added to explain that this 'presence' relates to God's power and knowledge only. Another example of this kind of verse can be seen in Q. 4:93, *man yaqtul mu'minan mu'tamidan fa-jazā'uhu jahannam khālidan fihā*. The literal translation—'But anyone who kills a believer deliberately, his punishment will be Hell, abiding therein forever'—must be amended to make it compatible with a doctrine of final salvation from hellfire for every believer.<sup>70</sup>

After final approval has been given, the translation then goes through one more proofread. A special committee checks the Arabic text, and the translator re-reads his text one more time. Finally, a formal introduction by the head of the MOIA is added in and, often, also a statement by the translator or reviser. Just before 2020, the KFGQPC also started to include an additional introduction in Arabic to its new translations.<sup>71</sup> This outlines the divine origin and earthly history of the *muṣṣḥaf* [the Arabic text] and what translation actually is, equating 'explanatory

70 In the Sunni tradition, this verse is interpreted as *wa'īd*, that is, 'threatening', as the Saudi exegete al-Sa'dī explains in his *tafsīr*. See Nāṣir b. 'Abd Allāh al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām al-mannān* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2002), pp. 209–10.

71 *Muqaddimat tarjamāt al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2019).

translation' to *tafsīr*. The premise upon which the permissibility of translation is built in this, not surprisingly, is Ibn Taymiyya's statement about the 'obligation to convey the Qur'an' [*ḍarūrat tabliḡh al-Qur'ān*].<sup>72</sup> This introduction has already appeared in a number of translations, for example, the 2020 translation into the Kurmanchi dialect of Kurdish by Ali Ismail Taha.<sup>73</sup>

Once the translation has been printed and passed through three levels of quality control, it is sent out for distribution. Copies are provided as gifts to pilgrims visiting Medina, and all translations are available in Saudi Arabia's two main mosques, the Holy Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. At an international level, the KFGQPC also distributes translations via Saudi embassies worldwide, and these are, again, mostly distributed gratis. In addition, the KFGQPC is also active in some bookfairs, mostly in the Gulf region. These activities, together with the digital availability of recently published works via the qurancomplex.gov.sa website, makes any newly issued translations easily accessible. Statistics about how many copies of each translation are printed are not openly available, but the decision seems to depend on the number of native speakers of each language. For languages such as Indonesian, the initial print run could come to over 100,000 copies; for others the number is much smaller, often between 10,000 and 20,000 copies. According to the Saudi database 'Open Data', during 2016–2017, the total number of Qur'an translations distributed by the KFGQPC was as follows:<sup>74</sup>

Asia: 334,280

Australia: 1,810

Africa: 25,750

South America: 3,780

North America: 1,080

Europe: 21,020

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72 Ibid., p. 16.

73 *Qur'ānī Pīrūz* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2020).

74 MOIA statistics, <https://data.gov.sa/Data/ar/dataset/holy-quran/resource/7e7664db-3793-49a1-9a58-544b9c8aad9f>

These figures show that a much larger number of translations was distributed in Asia than in all other regions. This distribution pattern correlates with the languages of translations. As of 2022, the KFGQPC had produced Qur'an translations in thirty-nine Asian languages, nineteen African languages, and only sixteen European languages, including English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese which have many speakers outside Europe. Of course, these figures should be approached with the caveat that they only pertain to one year and thus may not be particularly representative, especially given that most of the KFGQPC's translations into European languages mainly date from the late 1980s to the early 2000s.

### *Al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*: The First Exegesis Designed for Use in Translation Projects

In 1998, the KFGQPC published a Qur'an commentary entitled *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* ['The simplified *tafsīr*']. This work continues a long tradition of exegetical publications that are intended to provide a 'simple' and 'accessible' explanation of the Qur'anic verses. Although some works of this sub-genre were written in the premodern period of Islamic history,<sup>75</sup> most 'simplified' commentaries were written in the twentieth century and grew out of the Islamic reformist movement and the idea of propagating religious knowledge to the masses. An early example of this kind of *tafsīr* is the Ibadī work *Taysīr al-tafsīr* ['The simplification of the *tafsīr*'] by Muḥammad Aṭfayyash, which was written around 1910.<sup>76</sup> Later on, Salafī scholars in particular contributed to this field, perhaps most notably in terms of ʿAbd Allāh Khīyāt's *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar: khulāṣat muqtabasa min ashḥār al-tafāsīr al-muʿtabara* ['The simplified *tafsīr*: short extracts from the most authoritative *tafsīr*'],<sup>77</sup> ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Saʿdī's aforementioned *Taysīr al-laṭīf al-mannān fī khulāṣat tafsīr al-Qurʾān* ['A facilitation from the Sublime, the Generous: a digest of Qur'anic exegesis'], and Abū Bakr al-Jazaʾirī's *Aysar al-tafāsīr li-l-kalām al-ʿālī*

75 For example, *al-Taysīr fī al-tafsīr* by Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, who died in 1143.

76 Muḥammad Aṭfayyash, *Taysīr at-tafsīr* (Muscat: Wizārat at-Turāth wa-l-Thaqāfa, 2004).

77 ʿAbd Allāh Khīyāt, *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar: khulāṣat muqtabasa min ashḥār al-tafāsīr al-muʿtabara* (Jeddah: Maktabat al-Najāh, 1377/1958).

*al-kabīr* [‘The simplest explanation of the speech of [God] the Exalted, the Great’].<sup>78</sup> The introductions to these *tafsīrs* express a common aim: the authors’ desire to make their interpretations as broadly accessible as possible. For instance, al-Jazāʿirī (who was a preacher at the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina), writes:

I am often asked by those attending my *tafsīr* classes if I could write a *tafsīr* for Muslims that was written in a simple style, with easily understandable interpretations, that would help [the reader] to understand the words of God the Almighty.<sup>79</sup>

This trend for ‘simplified’ *tafsīrs* reflects the Salafi perspective that making religious knowledge available for every Muslim is a requirement, above all because it is imperative that believers understand the reality of Islamic monotheism, *tawhīd*. For this reason, religious writing and publishing in the Saudi context focuses on the popularisation of religious knowledge and the propagation of Salafi doctrine rather than taking a more encyclopaedic approach. The KFGQPC’s production of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* seems a deliberate attempt to propose a more standardised approach to Qur’anic hermeneutics. On one hand, we can see in this text the idea of Qur’an translation as the delivery of the ‘approximate’ basic meaning of the divine word at work. On the other, the KFGQPC’s *tafsīr* introduces an approach to exegesis that prevents any ‘distortions’ from the ideal of ‘the correct creed’ [*al-ʿaqīda al-ṣaḥīḥa*], which, for Salafi scholarship, equates to ‘belief of the early Muslims’ [*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*]. Thus, the appearance of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* and its growing influence on KFGQPC translations (as well as the official requirement that it is used in the preparation of these) is an important step towards the development of a specifically Salafi approach to both Qur’an interpretation and translation.

Given the growing significance of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*, one has to ask: why is this exegesis regarded as a ‘better’ reference work for those undertaking Qur’an translation than other *tafsīrs*? How can one *tafsīr*, written in Arabic, be useful for conveying the meanings of the Qur’an

78 Abū Bakr al-Jazāʿirī, *Aysar al-tafāsīr li-l-kalām al-ʿalī al-kabīr*, 2 vols (Jeddah: Rāsim, 1990).

79 Al-Jazāʿirī, *Aysar al-tafāsīr*, I, p. 5.

into other languages, taking into consideration all the differences in syntax and grammar that can occur between languages?

Written in the mid-1990s, *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* appeared in print in 1998 with an enigmatic authorship: the title page credits *nukhba min al-ulamā'* ['an elite group of scholars']. No more information is provided in either this or any subsequent editions (the second edition came out in 2008) about the identity of these scholars. This anonymity is extremely unusual in contemporary Islamic religious scholarship, especially when it comes to Qur'anic Studies, as the name of the author often conveys authority (as do the names of the previous authorities cited who 'transmit' knowledge from earlier generations). To provide some comparison with other collaborative tafsīr projects, the voluminous *al-Tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* ['The thematical commentary'], for example, which was first published by the University of Sharjah in 2010, lists on its initial pages all of the scholars who worked on it.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* ['A short commentary on the Qur'an'], published in 2014 by the Markaz al-Tafsīr li-l-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya [The Tafsīr Centre for Qur'anic Studies] in Riyadh, lists all the contributing authors and editors by name.<sup>81</sup>

*Al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* thus demonstrates a new approach to exegesis. The institution that produces the exegetical works is the authority: here is a *tafsīr* 'by the KFGQPC'. This impression is reinforced by references in the introduction that identify the KFGQPC as the initiating force behind the work: '*ra'ā al-mujamma' an yuṣdira tafsīran muyassaran*' ['the Complex decided to publish a simplified commentary'].<sup>82</sup> They position this *tafsīr* as the product of a collective effort by an institution that has already gained perceived authority in the field of Qur'an printing due to the global popularity of its Arabic 'Medinan Qur'an', the *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawīyya*. The fact that KFGQPC's Arabic *muṣḥaf* is the most widely distributed Arabic Qur'an in the world<sup>83</sup> would lend authority to any *tafsīr* it produced.

80 *al-Tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī li-l-suwar al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Sharjah: Jāmi'a al-Shāriqa, 2010).

81 *al-Mukhtaṣar fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Riyadh: Markaz al-Tafsīr li-l-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya, 1436/2014).

82 *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2019), p. h.

83 By 2007, that is, in the first twenty-three years of its operation, the KFGQPC had printed 127,420,423 copies of the holy book of Islam.

However, despite efforts to anonymise the authors of the *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*, a few of the individuals who worked on the project have been named subsequently by other sources. One member of the editorial board has been identified as Shaykh Ḥāzīm Ḥaydar al-Karmī, a Palestinian graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah.<sup>84</sup> Al-Karmī has received numerous testimonials from many twentieth-century authorities in *tafsīr*, including ‘Abd Allāh al-Shinqīṭī, the son of Muḥammad al-Mukhtār al-Shinqīṭī, who wrote the popular *tafsīr Aḍwāḥ al-bayān fī idāḥ al-Qurʾān bi-l-Qurʾān* [‘Lights of Clarity in the Explanation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an’].<sup>85</sup> Another contributor to *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* was ‘Abd al-Azīz Ismā‘īl (1942–2010), a scholar of Qur’anic Studies from Egypt (and a graduate of al-Azhar) who has taught at Muhamamad bin Saud Islamic University and also worked for the MOIA and the Saudi broadcast company Al-Qurʾān.<sup>86</sup> His involvement, alongside other scholars from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, was confirmed in an obituary published by the Rābiṭat al-‘Ulamā’ al-Sūriyyūn [‘League of Syrian Scholars’].<sup>87</sup> Thus, it appears that an international team worked on the project, while the final copyright belongs completely to one institution, the KFGQPC.

What approach does this *tafsīr* adopt? From its several introductions—two official ones (provided by the heads of the MOIA and the KFGQPC) as well as a more substantial general one—we learn that the work follows the tradition of *al-tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*, that is, ‘transmitted *tafsīr*’ (as opposed to *al-tafsīr bi-l-ra’y* [‘*tafsīr* based on reason’]). The anonymous KFGQPC authors reference and thereby invoke the authority of the ‘classical’ Salafi canonical commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Baghawī, and Ibn Kathīr, then describe the main aim of their project in the following terms: ‘There is a strong need in this era to produce a short commentary, which observes the principles of *tafsīr* and its sources in accordance with

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20110715141722/http://www.qurancomplex.com/Display.asp?section=7&l=arb&f=nobza05&trans=>

84 For more on Shaykh Ḥāzīm Ḥaydar (in Arabic), see [https://areq.net/m/حازم\\_حيدر\\_الكرمي.html](https://areq.net/m/حازم_حيدر_الكرمي.html)

85 Ilyās al-Birmāwī, *Imtāʿ al-fuḍalāʿ bi-tarājim al-qurʾān fīmā baʿd al-qarn al-thāmin al-hijri*, 2 vols (Riyadh: Dār al-Nadwa al-‘Ālamiyya, 2000), I, p. 78.

86 ‘Rāḥil al-‘Allāma ‘Abd al-Azīz Ismā‘īl, ṣāḥib *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*, <https://al-maktaba.org/book/31617/71606>.

87 Majd al-Makkī, ‘Rāḥil al-‘Allāma al-Duktūr ‘Abd al-Azīz Ismā‘īl’, <https://islamsyria.com/ar/التراجم/المترجمين/جمع-وترتيب-مجد-مكي>

the method of the righteous predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*).<sup>88</sup> Next, the KFGQPC's introduction relates their commentary to their translation activities:

After detailed study, the Complex decided to publish a simplified commentary to the Glorious Qur'an, which will summarise the principles of *tafsīr* and its original sources, so that it can form the basis for translations of the Qur'an into the languages of Muslim and non-Muslim nations [produced] by the Complex.<sup>89</sup>

The introduction goes on to give more detailed explanations of the methodological principles that guided the writing of the *tafsīr*. The primary aim of the *tafsīr*, as cited above, confirms the KFGQPC's commitment to 'the *madhhab* of the righteous ancestors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*)'; other stated exegetical principles mainly relate to fairly standard ideas about 'simplification' (presenting one, the 'predominant', opinion only) and the provision of explanations for unusual or rare words (*gharīb*). However, the authors' final point is very definitely innovative: 'The exegete should be mindful of the fact that this *tafsīr* will be translated into various languages, thus [the use of] any terms that cannot be translated should be avoided.'<sup>90</sup>

How are those principles realised in practice, especially when it comes to languages from different families? To address this question, I will discuss four translations of this *tafsīr*, two published by the KFGQPC (a complete Tajik translation dating to 2014 and the Swahili translation of 2019), and two partial ones, in English and Ukrainian, that were printed by Maktab al-Ta<sup>ʿ</sup>āwunī li-Taw<sup>ʿ</sup>īyyat al-Jāliyyāt (the Communities Awareness Bureau in the Old Industrial City), an Islamic NGO based in Riyadh. The latter two translations comprise suras 1 and 58–114, known as *al-ʿushr al-akhīr*, or the 'final tenth' of the Qur'an. Thus, the sample texts include translations into both 'Islamic' (Tajik and Swahili) and 'non-Islamic' (English and Ukrainian) languages.

Before embarking on this comparison, it is necessary to address the style of the commentary in the original Arabic. The *tafsīr* takes an extremely literal approach to textual reasoning, and many words

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88 *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*, p. h.

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid.*, p. ʔ.

are simply explained through the use of more popular synonyms in Modern Standard Arabic. On other occasions, mainstream explanations are provided in quite a concise way. A good example of this can be seen in its treatment of the story of the people who are described as being *ummatan wāḥidatan* ['one community'] in Q. 2:213 and Q. 13:19. For both verses, *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* provides the simple explanation that the story refers to 'one religion which is Islam'.<sup>91</sup> This appears to be based on al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of this phrase, which, he argued is 'the most correct', above the two others he cites.<sup>92</sup>

Some parts of the *tafsīr* look as if they would present more challenges for translators than others. For example, the phrase *innā makkannā lahu fī-l-ard* occurs in Q. 18:84, at the beginning of the story of Dhū-l-Qarnayn that is related in this sura. The verb *makkannā* here is generally translated into English in one of three ways: 'Indeed We **established him** upon the earth: (Saheeh International); 'We **made him strong** in the land' (Yusuf Ali); and 'We **established his power** in the land' (Abdel Haleem). However, the commentary in *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* reads exactly the same as the Qur'anic text itself, with no further explanation or use of synonyms. The same expression occurs again in Q. 12:21 (*makkannā li-Yūsuf fī-l-ard*), and it is again reproduced in *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*. Explanation of *makkana* is provided only on the first instance of its use, in Q. 7:10, *makkannākum fī-l-ard* ['We **established them** on the earth], where it is glossed with the addition *ja<sup>c</sup>alnāhā qirāran lakum* [literally 'We made it [the earth] a place for them']. To the authors of the original Arabic *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*, it seems the meaning of the verse was self-evident. However, this is not necessarily the case for those translating *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* into other languages. The Tajik translation renders the relevant phrase in Q. 7:10 as *hamono -ej mardum-dar zamin çoıgohaton dodem* ['We have given you a place on the earth, O people'], but in Q. 18:84 it is translated differently, as *hamono Mo ūro dar zamin qudrat dodem* ['We gave him power on earth']. This is just one example, but it illustrates clearly that the exegesis presented in *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* is not clear enough to provide a strong basis for a monolithic translation, as it was intended to be.

91 Ibid., p. 210.

92 The alternatives he rejects understand the verse to refer to Adam as the father of humanity. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi<sup>c</sup> al-bayān <sup>c</sup>an tā<sup>c</sup>wīl āy al-Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān*, 16 vols (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 2001), III, p. 625.



In other cases, the exegesis presented in *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* gives rise to even greater variation in translation. A very interesting example is an extra-Qur'anic term *karāmāt*, which *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* uses in its commentary on Q. 58:22 with reference to the phrase *raḍīya-llahu ʿanhum wa-raḍū ʿanhu* ['God is well pleased with them, and they with Him']. The verse itself generally describes the reward that awaits believers:

[Prophet], you will not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day giving their loyalty to those who oppose God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or other relations: these are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His spirit. He will let them enter Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay: God is well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are on God's side, and God's side will be the one to prosper.<sup>93</sup>

The original Arabic *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* provides the following commentary on the phrase *raḍīya-llahu ʿanhum wa-raḍū ʿanhu*: '*raḍū ʿan rabbihim bimā aṭāhum min al-karāmāt wa-rafiʿa al-darajāt*', which means 'And they are pleased with their Lord for the *karāmāt* and high levels He gave them'. This raises the question of what the word *al-karāmāt* really means.

The authors of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* seem to follow al-Saʿdī's interpretation of the verse, since he also mentions *anwāʿ al-karāmāt* ['various *al-karāmāt*'].<sup>94</sup> In the Islamic tradition more generally (especially Sufism), *karāmāt* is used to denote the 'blessings' or miraculous wonders performed by the *awliyāʾ* ['friends of God'], which God grants them the power to bring about.<sup>95</sup> However, the Salafi perspective does not consider *karāmāt* to denote supernatural powers. This can be seen in the commentary of Saudi authority Shaykh Ṣāliḥ b. Fawzān al-Fawzān on Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's treatise on belief. Al-Fawzān writes, 'People of Sunna and community recognise true *karāmāt* [...] still, it is necessary to be careful in those issues, neither denying it fully nor accepting it absolutely.'<sup>96</sup> His words imply that Salafis do not deny

93 The translation here is by Abdel Haleem.

94 al-Saʿdī, *Tafsīr al-Karīm*, p. 1000.

95 L. Gardet, 'Karāma' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2012), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0445](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0445)

96 Ṣāliḥ b. Fawzān al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ ʿaqādat al-Imām Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Minhāj, 1436/2011), p. 113.

the existence of supernatural powers (especially those given by God to 'righteous people', *awliyāʾ*), but recommend against calling them *karāmāt*. In the same text, al-Fawzān also warns against believing in any sorcery that could come 'from *shayṭān*' [an evil spirit].<sup>97</sup> The concept of *karāmāt* is a major tenet of some Sufi brotherhood and is closely linked to the veneration of *awliyāʾ*, both of which are heavily criticised by Salafi scholarship, which makes it surprising that this term appears in a Salafi commentary, especially given that Sufi exegesis on this verse explicitly link it with *awliyāʾ* and their *karāmāt*.<sup>98</sup> Given this, it is not entirely clear why the authors of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* chose to use this term.

The way the word is treated in the different language versions of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* indicates that the translators were not expecting to come across any language with Sufi connotations.<sup>99</sup> The anonymous English translation uses the term 'noble things', so the text reads as 'And they are pleased with their Lord for the noble things and high levels He gave them'. This might, in some way, reflect an attempt to provide a literal translation for *karāmāt*, on the basis that it is a plural of the singular *kirāma* ['dignity', something 'noble'] but, in reality, the use of 'noble things' here is not clear and comprehensible to the reader. The Ukrainian translation renders it as 'dana jim poshana' ['the respect they have'], which could be said to be 'correct' if one understands *karāmāt* to denote a divine gift [*ikrām*], but this is unrelated to the concept of *karāmāt* outlined above. The Tajik translation opts to completely omit this expression. Since most of the text is rendered in a very faithful way, this omission was probably intentional, a way of avoiding the need to explain a Sufi concept in the context of a Sunni-Salafi translation. Finally, the Swahili version interprets *karāmāt* using the single word 'utukufu', which generally means 'glory'. This one example shows the level of variation that can arise from even a serious attempt to write a 'standard' interpretation for many languages at once, and it demonstrates the difficulties that can arise with the re-translation of the meaning of individual words and terminology.

97 al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ*, p. 281.

98 See, for example, Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī Afandī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, 10 vols (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1985), IX, p. 414–15.

99 All the versions compared here are available online on the multi-language website <https://tafseer.info/>

A few more examples illustrate other translation-related differences that appear in the various language versions of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*. The difficulties presented by culturally specific terminology direct the various treatments of the *ẓihār* formula [‘You are to me like the back of my mother’] that is referenced in Q. 58:2. This expression is described in *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* as ‘used by “someone”’, but there is no explanation that it was a declaration of divorce used in pre-Islamic times. This absence led the Tajik translator to break from a literal translation and add in an explanatory footnote. Also challenging for translators are the historical ‘facts’ included in the original text of KFGQPC’s *tafsīr* about believers of other religions that are not entirely clear. An example is its exegesis on the following verse:

Indeed, those who have believed and those who were Jews and the Sabeans [*al-ṣābiʿūn*] and the Christians and the Magians and those who associated with Allah—Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed Allah is, over all things, Witness (Q. 22:17)

*Al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* gives a fairly atypical explanation of *al-ṣābiʿūn*, describing the community as ‘those people [who] remain in their inborn nature with no religion to follow’. This is quite strange because all of the other communities mentioned in the verse are interpreted in a historical sense: apart from ‘believers in God and His Messenger’, there are Jews, Christians, ‘fire-worshippers’ [*maǰūsīyūn*], and, finally, ‘polytheists’. The same explanation is given at Q. 2:62 (‘The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve’), in which *al-ṣābiʿūn* are also mentioned. The identity of this group is a subject of debate in modern discourse (whether they are followers of some ancient cult from Harran or Mandeans), and medieval Islamic scholars also proposed different options, ranging from their being adherents of a particular monotheistic religion to their being people who shift from one belief to another. Muslims jurists have also debated their status as *ahl al-kitāb* [‘People of the Book’]: Hanafis include them in the *ahl al-kitāb* along with Jews and Christians, the Malikis generally do not, and the Shafiis and Hanbalis have not historically had a shared consensus.<sup>100</sup> *Al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*’s

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<sup>100</sup> For a general outline of exegetical opinions on this community, see Muhammad Azizan Sabjan, ‘The Al-Ṣābiʿūn (the Sabians) in the Quran: An Overview from the

treatment of *al-ṣābiʿūn* follows the opinion of Ibn Kathīr on this issue, although some nuance still exists. When the medieval scholar Ibn Kathīr uses the expression *lā dīn muqarrar lahum* [‘they have no established religion’], he means the word *dīn* to carry a sense of ‘monotheistic belief’, rather than the sense of ‘religion’ that it carries in contemporary Arabic.<sup>101</sup> That is why, for example, the Tajik translator adds a footnote explaining ‘Sovijon’ as a monotheistic group that existed from the times of the prophet Ibrahim or, ‘as al-Saʿdī suggests, a group of Christians’. In contrast, the Swahili version faithfully repeats the wording of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* verbatim. This example is further evidence that the basic claim that *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* can serve as an auxiliary tool to simplify and clarify the process of Qur’an translation is untenable: the Arabic source text gives rise to differences in translation, even in what seem to be the most easily interpreted verses.

To conclude this general overview of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*, it can be said that the main priorities of the authors relate to issues of doctrine, especially when it comes to the divine attributes and other important points of Salafi theology. The *tafsīr* tends to preserve these topics in the most literal way, even in cases such as Q. 68:42, ‘The Day the shin will be uncovered’ (Saheeh International), when the verse is interpreted in such a way that it is understood to mean ‘the noble shin of God, which is not similar to any other thing’. There is one final aspect of the exegetical approach taken in *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* that is worth mentioning, and this relates to the treatment of Q. 1:7, *ṣirāṭa-lladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim ḡayri-l-maḡḡūbi ʿalayhum wa-la al-dāllīn* (‘[Guide us to] the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, those who do not feel God’s anger and who are not in error’), which is often read as referring to Jews and Christians. Like the Hilālī-Khān (see Chapter Three), which is the only English translation to explicitly name these two religions in the target text, *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* refers to them directly. Both the Tajik and Swahili translations of the *tafsīr* replicate this exegesis exactly as it is presented in the Arabic original: ‘those who felt God’s anger’ are

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Quranic Commentators, Theologians, and Jurists’, *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 13 (2014), 79–87.

101 For more on this term in classical Islam, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, ‘Islamic Dīn as an Alternative to Western Models of “Religion”’, in *Religion, Theory, Critique*, ed. by Richard King (New York: New York Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 163–72.

the Jews, and 'those in error' are the Christians. In contrast to the later editions of the Hilālī-Khān translation printed by the KFGQPC, where this controversial reading was erased from the text, the most recent printing of *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* (2019) still retains it.

The *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* has been followed by translators of the Qur'an; it certainly seems to have been a key source for those producing recent KFGQPC translations. However, it is unrealistic to expect it to replace all other exegetical approaches and interpretations that are used to understand and translate the Qur'an, especially by non-Muslim audiences. Above and beyond this, the brief discussion above demonstrates that any translators undertaking an uncritical reproduction of the *tafsīr* will be unable to prevent questions concerning the text and its meaning. This is partly because *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* concentrates on theological issues of belief and, so, covers others only briefly, sometimes insufficiently. It was written in line with the inherent Salafi approach to Qur'an translations as texts intended to introduce the basic idea of *tawhīd*, the concept of Divine Oneness, while all but ignoring the Qur'an's eloquence, style, historical realities, and even legal rules.

## Newly Standardised Editions: Qur'an Translations Published After the Mid-1990s

The establishment of the Center for Translations of the Qur'an in 1994 opened KFGQPC operations to new opportunities. From the mid-1990s onwards, new editions that had been subject to very thorough review began to appear in print. In the following sections, I will explore some examples of both new commissions by the Complex and its revised editions of previously published works to assess how successful they were and why.

### Greek Translations: *To Ieró Koránio*

In 1978, one of the first 'Muslim' renditions of the Qur'an into Greek was produced under the aegis of al-Azhar, from the original Arabic.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *To Iero Koranio* (Athens: Marianna Latsis, 1978).

Financed by Yiannis Latsis (1910–2003), a Greek shipping tycoon, the first edition of this translation was prepared by a group of academics that consisted of both scholars from al-Azhar and experts in the Greek language. This version was edited and published by the KFGQPC in 1997.

Among the eight Egyptian members of the committee listed in the introduction to the translation are such notable religious authorities as ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Shilbī, the general secretary of the Islamic Research Academy in al-Azhar University, and ‘Abd al-Muhaymin al-Fiqī (see Chapter One). The Greek translation was published alongside the original Arabic text (following the standard Cairo edition) in verse-by-verse format and also contained a small preface and two pages of commentary. Entitled *al-Qurʾān al-karīm* in Arabic and *To Ieró Korávio* in Greek (both of which can be translated as ‘The Holy Qur’an’), it features a verse from the Qur’an in a header above the Arabic title: ‘God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice at God’s help’ (Q. 30:4–5). A second edition of this translation appeared in 1987, thanks to the support of Latsis’s daughter Marianna. According to the publishing information on the back cover, this second edition was published ‘for the sake of Arab-Greek friendship before God’ [*‘ih̄tisāban ‘alā al-ṣadāqa al-‘Arabiyya al-Yunāniyya li-wajh Allāh’*].

*To Ieró Korávio* was one of two Muslim-authored translations of the Qur’an into Greek that were available in the early 1990s (the second was published by the Ahmadi community in 1989). It attracted interest from the KFGQPC, who published a third edition in 1997 with the permission of the copyright holder Marianna Latsis. The new edition refers to its original translators simply as a ‘group of al-Azhar scholars’ but names Shaykh Jihād Bilāl Khalīl as its most recent reviser. He is a Saudi scholar with a high level of expertise in both Arabic and Greek. Originally from the Turkish-speaking Muslim minority area of Thrace in Greece, Jihād Bilāl Khalīl graduated from the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh and went on to obtain a PhD on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Greek Orientalism in 2000.

Jihād Bilāl Khalīl’s revisions are significant: the KFGQPC edition of *To Ieró Korávio* greatly diverges from the previous edition. For instance, the translation of the *bismillah* (*bi-smi-llāhi-l-rahmāni-l-rahīm*) was changed from ‘Στό όνομα του ΑΛΛΑΧ Ελεήμονα, Φιλάνθρωπου’

[‘In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Human-loving’] to ‘Στο όνομα το ΑΛΛΑΧ του Παντελεήμονα, του Πολυεύσπλαχνου’ [‘In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Gracious’], probably because the basic meaning of ‘Φιλάνθρωπου’ as ‘Human-loving’ too closely echoed terminology used in Greek Christian texts.

Some of the sura names were changed. Οικογενεια Ιμραν [‘The family of Imran’, Q. 3] was modified to η Οικος Ιμραν [‘The household of Imran’] and Τραπεζα [‘The table’, Q. 5] became Το Στρωμενο Τραπεζα [‘The table set’]. To those that include the names of prophets (Q. 10, 11, 12, and others), Ο Προφétης [‘The prophet’] has been added. Some of the basic vocabulary that appears throughout the text has also been altered—but not consistently. For example, the first/second edition uses Κύριος for the Arabic *rabb* [‘Lord’] throughout, while the KFGQPC’s third has Αρχοντας in Q. 1:2 but retains Κύριος in other instances, such as Q. 113:1 and Q. 114:1. Most of the Islamic religious terms used in the earlier editions were retained in this one.

Although the KFGQPC usually attends specifically to the use of ‘Shariatic terms’, its *To Ieró Koránio* treats these with some variation. *Zakāt*, for example, is rendered as Ελεημοσυνη (Ελεημοσυνη [‘alms’] is used in Q. 7:156 and Q. 9:5 in both versions, while sometimes other expressions are used). The same word, Ελεημοσυνη, is used to translate *ṣadaqa* in Q. 2:263, where the original Arabic term means ‘charity’ in a broad sense rather than the obligatory *zakāt*. However, at the first usage (in Q. 2:43), both versions provide transliteration of the Arabic term (Ζακατ in the al-Azhar edition, and Ζεκατ in the KFGQPC edition) and both give a rather general explanation about this referring to one-fortieth of income received. Interventions in the KFGQPC edition are also evident in some—but not all—verses of particular theological import. For example, for Q. 7:54, both versions provide ‘κι επειτα μουιμα εγκατασταθηκε πανο στο Θρονο (τησ εξουσιωσ)’ [‘and then He established Himself on the Throne [of power] firmly’]. Contrast, however, Q. 20:5, where one finds εχει επικρατησει πανο στο Θρονο [‘He ruled over the Throne [of power]’] in the first/second edition and ‘εγκατασταθηκε στο Θρονο’ [‘He established Himself on the Throne’] in the KFGQPC’s third.

The issue of style presents quite a challenge to anyone translating the Qur’an into Greek, specifically whether or not to echo Biblical language

and style (notably that of the Greek New Testament). Many translations of the Qur'an, including into Russian and Romanian languages, have tended to reflect the religious discourse of the Eastern Orthodox Church. However, in contrast to the earlier 1886 Pentakos translation into Greek, the KFGQPC's Muslim-authored edition has very few parallels with the wording of the Greek New Testament. A recent study by Sofia Koutlaki and Hekmatollah Salehi comparing the translation of Q. 13:24 in the three editions of *To Iερό Κοράνιο* with that in Luke 20.19 identifies the shared usage of the expression Ειρήνη ὑμῶν ['Peace be with you'] for salāmun ʿalaykum.<sup>103</sup> Apart from this and the usage of Greek Bible variants for personal names, though, the language of the two texts is not similar. This is also true of the commentary, which consists of fifty-four short remarks with no mention of any sources such as *tafsīrs*. Some stylistic heterogeneity, likely the result of collective team work, is present in the KFGQPC's edition, but the complex seems to be generally successful in its goal of representing a 'Muslim' rendition of the text.

In the 1990s and 2000s, *To Iερό Κοράνιο* was one of the most commonly used texts for referencing the Qur'an in Greek, but new translations have since overshadowed its popularity. It is also rumoured that a team of Greek Salafi Muslims (drawn from both the Arab diaspora and Greek converts) are currently discussing the production of a completely new Muslim-authored translation into Greek. The realisation of such a work may further erode usage of this edition.

### Italian Translations: Hamza Roberto Piccardo's *Il Nobile Corano*

One of nearly a dozen modern translations of the Qur'an into Italian, Hamza Roberto Piccardo's rendition plays an important role for the Islamic community in Italy. First of all, his seems to be the first complete Muslim-authored translation of the Qur'an from Arabic. Secondly, Piccardo's translation has been widely promoted through different Muslim organisations in Italy, such as the Unione delle Comunità e Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia (UCOII), as well as various

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103 Sofia Koutlaki and Hekmatollah Salehi, 'Quranic Translation in Greek: Challenges and Opportunities', in *International Conference for Quranic Translation* (Tehran: Allameh Tabataba'i University, 2014), pp. 125–34.



authoritative institutions in the wider Islamic world: not only the KFGQPC but also the TDRA.

Piccardo converted to Islam in the mid-1970s and became a religious activist, authoring books on Islamic topics that were most often printed by the Al Hikma publishing house. The first edition of his translation was printed in 1994,<sup>104</sup> while the 'revised' version (modified with the help of the editorial committee of the Union of Islamic Communities and Organisations of Italy, UCOII) appeared in 1996.<sup>105</sup> The latter garnered a great deal of attention for being 'carried out under the doctrinal control of the UCOII' and was selected for revision and reprinting by the KFGQPC in 1432 (2010/2011). In contrast to previous editions in Italy, which had simply been called *Il Corano*, the complex's translation took the title *Il Nobile Corano e la tradizione dei suoi significati in lingua Italiana* to accord with the common, modern Sunni concept of translation as merely 'translation of the meanings'.<sup>106</sup> Other changes include updates to some of the footnotes and the addition of short introductions to the suras. The text of the translation was also slightly changed. For example, the Italian edition has '*il sangue*' for the Arabic *damm* ['blood'] in Q. 5:3, but the KFGQPC edition has '*il sangue effuso*' ['flowing blood'], that is, that which comes out of an animal's body. This change seems to have been implemented on the basis of *tafsīrs*: for example, *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar* interprets the term as '*al-damm al-sā'il al-murāq*', which corresponds with the revised translation. Another change can be seen in Q. 5:6, where the Saudi edition provides '*mani*' ['hands'] in place of '*avambracci*' ['forearms'] in the Italian one. The Saudi edition also better conveys the sense of Arabic *aydiyakum* ['hands']. More significant changes can be seen in some footnotes in the KFGQPC edition. Most of the 'anti-Christian' and 'anti-Western' objections in the Italian edition have been completely removed; instead, there are rather traditional notes regarding parallels, explained terms, and quotations from *tafsīrs* (mostly al-Ṭabarī's).

104 Hamza Roberto Piccardo, *Il Corano* ([n. p.]: Newton & Compton, 1994).

105 Hamza Roberto Piccardo, Pino Blasone, and Grandi tascabili economici Newton, *Il Corano* (Rome: Grandi tascabili economici Newton, 1996).

106 Hamza Roberto Piccardo, *Il Nobile Corano e la tradizione dei suoi significati in lingua Italiana* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2011).

The second edition of Piccardo's translation was also revised by the Turkish company TDRA and republished by them in 2015. Many more changes were introduced, including some prefatory statements and appendices that discuss the basics of Islam. The title was modified, too, to *Il Sacro Corano: traduzione interpretativa in italiano* ['The Sacred Qur'an: an interpretative translation into Italian'].<sup>107</sup> However, both the KFGQPC and TDRA preserved some of the core lexical features from the earlier editions produced in Italy. For the Qur'anic *al-naṣārā*, which is usually translated as 'Christians', for example, Piccardo used '*nazareni*' and described his choice as a faithful reflection of the Arabic text: '*Per ragioni di fedeltà al testo coranico [...] "nazareni" deriva da Nasira (Nazareth) la città natale di Gesù*' ['For reasons of fidelity to the Qur'anic text [...] "*nazareni*" is derived from Nasira [Nazareth], the city where Jesus was born']. All other Qur'an translations into Italian use the more conventional '*cristiani*', so the question arises: did the TDRA and KFGQPC revisers intend to distinguish between seventh-century and present-day Christians, or were there other reasons for that choice?

The different editions of Piccardo's translation illustrate various contemporary translation strategies, mostly implemented through footnotes. The first edition, issued in Italy over twenty times, shows a kind of ideological, missionary approach targeting in a predominantly Christian society. The KFGQPC edition pays more attention to the historical, theological, and ritualistic discourse of the Qur'an; while recent editions from Turkey attempt to produce a comprehensive manual that introduces the holy book of Islam using plenty of extra-Qur'anic material. Today, Piccardo's translation (in its many versions) is a major domestic reference for Italian-speaking Muslims, despite the many other translations available on the market.

## Macedonian Translations: Hasan Dzilo's Work

The 1997 translation of the Qur'an into Macedonian (since republished twice) comprises the first, and so far only, full translation of the Qur'an into a Balkan language to be produced by the KFGQPC (two others, into Bosnian and Albanian, were published independently before).

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<sup>107</sup> Hamza Roberto Piccardo, *Il Sacro Corano: traduzione interpretativa in italiano* (Ankara: TDRA, 2015).

Its author, Dr Hasan Dzilo, is a leading North Macedonian scholar of Islamic and Qur'anic Studies who graduated first from the Gazi Husrev Beg medrese and then from the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo. Dzilo has authored numerous books and articles on the history of Islamic philosophy, Islam in North Macedonia, and Islam and modernity. He is currently affiliated with the Faculty of Islamic Studies of the Islamic Religious Union in Skopje, North Macedonia.

Dzilo's translation contains, in addition to a translation of the entire Qur'anic text, a short dictionary of Arabic terms and names and a thematic index. The translation itself is more literal than explanatory, and Dzilo replicates Qur'anic ellipses and favours the use of short sentences. Dzilo's approach is successful when it comes to conveying the style of the Qur'an: his translation often delivers not only the meaning but also the emotional impact of the Qur'anic verses.

Regarding the more linguistic aspects of his translation, Dzilo adopts the full spectrum of Islamic terms of Arabic and Turkish origin that are used in the religious practice of Macedonian Muslims (some of the Divine Names are transliterated rather than translated—such as *al-Qadīr*, for example). He shows a preference in places for the Western dialects of the Macedonian language, which is widely spoken by the Slavic Muslims of Macedonia (the Torbesh). There is no commentary or exegetical appendices in this translation; however, it is obvious that the author has worked with the most authoritative Sunni *tafsīrs*, especially when it comes to his handling of doctrinal issues. This can be seen in the way many words are rendered into through transliteration rather than translation, for example the Macedonian 'halal' is used for the Arabic *ḥalāl*. Other examples include 'haram' (*ḥarām*), 'hasret' (*ḥasra*), 'selam' (*salām*), 'zekat' (*zakāt*), 'sadaka' (*ṣadaqa*), 'rsk' (*rizq*), 'mihrab' (*miḥrāb*), and 'miraz' (*mīrāth*). Dzilo chose to explain these terms, instead, in his included dictionary, which helps to make the translation accessible for a non-Muslim audience. Likewise, the names of the prophets and other individuals are rendered in accordance with Arabic pronunciation, though the later editions provide a table with the corresponding Christian names. Dzilo is not entirely consistent in this, however, as some key concepts are given in translation (the Arabic word *muslimūn*, for example, is translated as 'Poslušni' ['the obedient ones'] and *rasūl* is translated using the Turkish loan-word 'Pejgamber', which is widely used

by Bosnian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian Muslims. Some purely stylistic features are preserved in the translation as well. For example, in some Meccan suras, Dzilo uses end rhyme to reflect the style of the original. Thus, in *Sūrat al-Ādiyāt*, he opts for the ending *-at*: the Macedonian 'ržat' is used for the Arabic *ḍabḥā* and, likewise, he uses 'iskrat' (*qadhā*), 'napagaat' (*ṣubḥā*), 'digaat' (*naq'ā*), 'vleguvaat' (*jam'ā*):

*Se kolnam vo trkačkite konji koi 'ržat, pa, so nozete svoi po kamenjata iskri iskrat, i koi vo utrinsite časovi napaĝaat, i koi, trčajki, prašina digaat, i, taka, vo mestoto zaednički vleguvaat! Da, čovekot e neblagodaren kon Gospodarot svoj, toj za toa, navistina, e svedok, i toj, navistina, e čorst vo ljubovta kon imotot, dobroto. Ne znae li deka koga ke bide oživeano ona što e vo mezarite, i koga ke izleze ona što e vo gradite (Q. 100:1–10).*

The first (1997) edition of this translation was published in Medina. Since then, it has been reprinted twice (most recently in 2011) in North Macedonia with the addition of an introduction and short commentaries. As well as in these three print editions, the text is accessible online via many Islamic websites and a standalone app. Both of the locally printed editions are available in larger Macedonian libraries and are widely used by local Muslim communities. The translation is also widely referenced in Islamic books and academic studies in the Macedonian language.

## Azerbaijani Translations: Alikhan Musayev's *Qurani kerim* and *Qurani-Kərim*

There is a rich Azerbaijan Islamic tradition and, consequently, there are a number of modern translations of the Qur'an in Azerbaijani—a language spoken by twenty-five million people. For example, translations by Ziya Bunyadov and Vasim Mammadaliyev (1991), Nariman Gasimzade (1994), Memmedhasan Ganioglu and Tariyel Bilaloglu (2000), and Aladdin Sultanov (2011) were all made directly from the Arabic text.<sup>108</sup> Unlike other post-Soviet regions, Azerbaijan has

<sup>108</sup> The first of these was commissioned by the centralised Islamic religious board in Baku, Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi. For the older translations, see Mykhaylo Yakubovych, 'The First Vernacular Tafsir in the Caucasus: The Legacy of Two 20th Century Azerbaijani Qur'ān Commentaries', *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 7.1 (2022), 72–95, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v7i1.457>. For the newer ones, see

a predominantly Shii population (of around sixty percent). However, the state promotes a multicultural ideology that prevents any direct criticism of Sunni or Shii beliefs in religious discourse. This has affected the field of Qur'an translation there somewhat: it is usually hard to tell from an Azerbaijanian text whether the translator has a Shii or Sunni background.

The KFGQPC has published two Azerbaijanian translations. In 2004 it brought out a partial translation of the *Fātiḥa* and the *juz*<sup>2</sup> *amma* (suras 1 and 78–114); and, in 2013, they published a complete translation.<sup>109</sup> The earlier edition does not name the translator, but it was the work of Alikhan Musayev. We can be sure of this as his translation of the entire Qur'an was published in Baku by the KFGQPC later in the same year under the title *Qurani-Kərim və Azərbaycan dilinə mənacə tərcüməsi*. Musayev was a graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah who returned to Azerbaijan to pursue a career as a preacher and translator of Islamic literature. His published translations include large parts of the *ḥadīth* corpus, such as the *Şahīḥ* of al-Bukhārī. As with the 2004 partial translation, the KFGQPC's 2013 complete translation of the Qur'an into Azerbaijanian does not include much introductory information. It does include a short statement from the (anonymous) translator, but this consists mostly of Qur'anic verses selected to emphasise the divine origin of the Qur'an and the importance of following its teachings. In contrast to most other translations produced by the KFGQPC, this rendition does not include any commentary apart from some minor interpolations in italics (mainly relating to the referents of Arabic pronouns such as *-hu*, *-hā*, *-hum*).

The Azerbaijanian language is abundant in Arabic loan words (much more so than modern Turkish, for example), which makes it possible to preserve almost all of the Qur'an's basic religious vocabulary. Thus, for example, Musayev renders Q. 2:2-4 as follows:

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Erdoğan Pazarbaşı, 'Kur'an'ın Azerbaycan'da Yaygın Tefsir ve Tercümeləri', *Bilig*, 25 (2003), 73–97.

109 *Qurani kerim və Azərbaycan dilində manacə tercümesi* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2013). The decision to initially publish a partial translation is typical of the KFGQPC: the complex's first publication of translations in Tamazight, Swedish, and Russian consisted solely of the *juz*<sup>2</sup> *amma*.

*Bu, qətiyyən şübhə doğurmayan, müttəqilərə doğru yol göstərən bir Kitabdır. O kəslər ki, qeybə iman gətirir, namaz qılır və Bizim onlara verdiyimiz ruzidən Allah yolunda xərcləyirlər. O kəslər ki, sənə nazil olana və səndən əvvəl nazil olanlara iman gətirir, axirətə də yaqinliklə inanırlar.*

[This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God, who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them; those who believe in the revelation sent down to you [Muhammad], and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter' (Abdel Haleem).]

Many of the Azerbaijani words used in the translation of this verse correspond to Arabic concepts ('müttəqilər' for *muttaqīn* [those who are mindful of God], 'qeybə' for *ghayb* [unseen], 'axirətə' for *akhīra* [Hereafter], in addition to widely used words like *imān* [faith].

No *tafsīrs* are mentioned in either the introduction or the actual text, but, on the basis of the translation itself, contemporary Salafi theology seems to be the primary lens through which at least some verses are interpreted. Musayev translates the beginning of Q. 2:255 as: '*Allah Özündən başqa haqq məbud olmayandır*' ['He is Allah! There is no object of worship but Him']. Compare this to Aladdin Sultanov's 2011 Azerbaijani translation: '*Allah! Ondan başqa tanrı yoxdur*' ['Allah! There is no god but He alone']. In Musayev's rendition, his choice of '*məbud*' ['object of worship'] rather than '*tanrı*' ['deity'] suggests adherence to the Salafi concept of godhood [*ulūhiyya*] as 'oneness of God in worship'. His translation, largely because of its Salafi leanings, quickly became popular on Islamic websites and mobile apps, and it went on to be published by a Baku publishing house independently of the KFGQPC. At least among Sunni Muslims (especially Salafis), Musayev's translation is nowadays one of the most used and cited translations of the Qur'an in Azerbaijanian.

## Portuguese Translations: Helmi Nasr's *Nobre Alcorão*

The history of the KFGQPC's Portuguese Qur'an translation, *Nobre Alcorão*, which was printed in 2006 and widely distributed all over

Brazil, begins in the mid-1980s.<sup>110</sup> In 1984, the MWL contracted Helmi Nasr (1922–2019) to carry out this project.<sup>111</sup> Nasr is a particularly interesting character. Not a native speaker of Portuguese, he was born in Egypt, where he pursued an education in Arabic and, later, French. He moved to Brazil in 1962 with the mission of establishing a chair of Arabic studies at a university in São Paulo. For many years, he was one of the most active members of the growing Arabic community in Latin America and had close ties with the Muslim World League. Nasr began work on his translation in 1984 and completed it in 1988. He himself has explained that the translation was never published by the MWL because it lacked an appropriate committee to review the translation: quite simply, no one had the required linguistic skills in Arabic and Portuguese combined with a basic knowledge of the Qur'an and Islam. Only in the early 2000s, when the file was transferred to the KFGQPC, was the draft translation reviewed and published. Two reviewers are named as the reviewers of this edition, Shaykh Muhammad Kassim Gifa and Shaykh Yunus Zacaria Hamid, but I have been unable to trace information about either of them. They were probably members of local Muslim communities in Brazil.

The *Nobre Alcorão* is usually promoted as the first Muslim translation of the Qur'an into Portuguese (by those who do not count the Ahmadiyya translation that came out in 1988<sup>112</sup>). It was published with a parallel Arabic text in a standard KFGQPC print edition. Nasr's translation contains a great deal of commentary, especially when it comes to the first few suras, and this is oriented towards both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. The language used is described by some reviewers as Brazilian Portuguese ('português brasileiro'), which differs from that spoken in Portugal in both phonology and prosody. In addition, Nasr makes recourse to some specifically Brazilian domestic sources to provide some of his religious vocabulary. For example, when explaining his translation of the *bismillah* formula, he compares different terms to phrases used in Christian sermons in the local form of Portuguese.

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110 Helmi Nasr, *Nobre Alcorão: para a língua portuguesa* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2006).

111 Aida Hanania and Jean Lauand, *O diplomata da língua e cultura árabes—estudos em homenagem a Helmi Nasr* (São Paulo: Factash Editora, 2015), pp. 39–40.

112 *O Sagrado Alcorao* (Tilford: Islam International Publications, 1988).

Nasr's use of Christian vocabulary and avoidance of Arabic-specific vocabulary makes his translation easily accessible for a non-Muslim audience. For example, in the commentary provided at the beginning of Q. 2, Ibrāhīm is named 'Patriarca Abraão' ['Patriarch Abraham'], which seems to be an exclusively Christian term used to refer to Biblical prophets. The text is mainly literal in its style of translation, although it does include some insertions, which are emphasised in bold. This, again, is a stylistic device found in many Bible translations. Nasr also provides quite long introductions to the suras, located in footnotes, mostly covering the history of the events mentioned in the text. Generally, there is no direct reference to any specialist *tafsīr* literature, but it does seem that the translator did consult *tafsīr* works. For example, Q. 8:5 reads as follows:

**A situação de desagrado, acerca da distribuição de espólios, é como aquela havida, quando** teu Senhor, em nome da verdade, te fez sair de tua casa **para combateres**, enquanto um grupo de crentes, o estava odiando.

[The situation of displeasure, concerning the distribution of spoils, is like that which took place, when your Lord, in the name of truth, made you go out of your house to fight, while a group of believers, were hating this.]

The text presented in bold denotes insertions from exegetical sources, without which the literal meaning of the Qur'anic text would be not clear to the reader. Even in the most literal translations of this verse (such as Yusuf Ali's rendition 'Just as thy Lord ordered thee out of thy house in truth, even though a party among the Believers disliked it'), additional commentary is supplied. Nasr follows this approach, providing a few footnotes specifically for this verse. His choice to indicate insertions by using bold text (rather than brackets, as is the format in almost all other KFGQPC editions) has clearly posed some challenges to later editors. For example, the 2020 edition of this work published in Brazil (which contains no Arabic text or commentary) presents all the text in the same format, so it is completely impossible to distinguish the actual translation from Nasr's explanatory interventions.

Although a few other Muslim translations into Portuguese are available, such as the 1975 text by Samir El Hayek, Nasr's work seems to be the most popular source of reference for Muslims living in Brazil (a



minority constituting an uncertain number somewhere between 20,000 and 200,000 people out of a total population of some 214 million<sup>113</sup>) as well as for domestically produced academic studies on Islam.

## The KFGQPC's Status as the Largest Producer of Qur'an Translations

Before coming to any general conclusions about how the KFGQPC emerged as a global actor in Qur'an publishing and translation, a few more specific examples of translations that have been published should be briefly mentioned. The use of special hermeneutical approaches (above all, Salafi ones) is mostly found in the newly-produced translations like the Russian *Sviashchennyĭ Koran* by Elmir Quliyev (2002).<sup>114</sup> This work is a literal, but still readable, translation and includes plenty of commentary, primarily from the Sunni corpus. It has enjoyed enormous success in Russia and beyond, having been published in other post-Soviet countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova, and, even further afield, in Germany. Published at a time of growing interest in primary Muslim sources and, of course, the Salafi movement, the *Sviashchennyĭ Koran* has been printed by dozens of publishers and is widely available online. Numerous copies have also been distributed gratis.<sup>115</sup> Despite this success, a ban on this translation (for being an 'extremist work') was imposed by a Russian court in 2013—although, later, this was lifted.<sup>116</sup> *Sviashchennyĭ Koran* may have run into opposition because it was perceived as being an especially 'Muslim', tafsīr-based interpretation, in contrast to other Russian translations produced in academic context or not so deeply rooted in Qur'anic exegesis.

The case of the KFGQPC's Ukrainian translation, *Preslavnyi Koran. Pereklad smysliv Ukrainkoju movoju* (produced in 2013 by the author of

113 Vitória Peres de Oliveira, 'Islam in Brazil or the Islam of Brazil?', *Religião & Sociedade*, 2 (2006), 1–20 (p. 4).

114 Elmir Quliyev, *Sviashchennyĭ Koran: Smyslovoi perevod na russkij jazyk* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2002).

115 Like the German Salafi-run 'Lies!' project, or the Ukrainian 'Chytai' ['Read!'].

116 The story gained some coverage in world media. See, for example, Alissa de Carbonnel, 'Russian Muslim Clerics Warn of Unrest over Ban of Translation of Koran', 20 September 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-koran-idUSBRE98J0YW20130920>

this volume)<sup>117</sup> is a similar story. This was not only the first 'Muslim' translation of the Qur'an into Ukrainian but also the first-ever complete translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into this language. *Preslavnyi Koran* has been reprinted fourteen times, including once by the official press of the TDRA in Turkey. In contrast, the Kyrgyz translation (by Shamsuddin Hakimov) has only been reprinted once after its initial publication in 2013 and has not made much headway with readers. There are several possible reasons for this, but it seems to be primarily due to the fact that Salafi influence in the Kyrgyz Republic has been limited due to tight levels of state control.<sup>118</sup>

These and other cases generally show that the success of translations published by the KFGQPC so far has been due primarily to factors other than its institutional authority. Editions' popularity depends, rather, on market demand, whether similar products in the target language are already being promoted, how active the translator is in pursuing publication of his work with different publishers, and so on. As with many other translations of sacred texts, it is quite hard to find an exemplary 'success story'. What is obvious is that a particular translation can become popular only when it is reprinted by other printing houses, since the print runs of the KFGQPC are limited by design. The copies it produces are intended for free distribution, they are almost never available in bookstores, and those provided for pilgrims visiting the KFGQPC have had quite a small impact on demand. Nevertheless, whether or not its translations have been used on a large scale, the Arabic Qur'an published by the KFGQPC, in almost all the common variant readings, has remained one of the most published religious books in the world. Theirs has become the gold standard source text for use in the production of Qur'an translations.

In conclusion, it can be said that the establishment of the KFGQPC is one of the most significant events in the modern Qur'an translation movement, not only for the KSA but for the entire Muslim world. Although it is not the first institution to supervise the production of its own translations (a few projects were earlier undertaken by WICS in Libya and the Turkish TDRA, not to mention the Ahmadis), the

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117 Mykhaylo Yakubovych, *Preslavnyi Koran. Pereklad smysliv Ukrainskoju movoju* (Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex, 2013).

118 See Yakubovych, 'Qur'an Translations into Central Asian Languages'.

KFGQPC succeeded the MWL in creating 'official', 'state-authorised', and 'Muslim-approved' translations of the Qur'an. The Complex introduced the concept of the publishing institution acting as an authoritative mediator between the reader and the translator, which is why its translations are often referred to merely as 'the Saudi translation' or 'the King Fahd translation'. This perception is underlined through the design and format of the translations it publishes, not least by the inclusion of text on the cover page of every edition that explicitly names the ruling king as the royal authority who distributes the translation as a gift. The KFGQPC translations also make a point of making visible the Arabic text or, rather, textuality: every translation opens with an introduction provided by the current head of the MOIA in Arabic then, secondarily, in translation. Many later reprints of KFGQPC translations by other printers and publishers still carry the KFGQPC label (even if they have been edited by the 'new' publisher) as, for many Muslims, this has become a mark of quality assurance. For those who are critical of Salafism, the opposite may be the case; however, as this and previous chapters have demonstrated, Salafi hermeneutics has had only a limited impact on the actual translations produced, the most obvious example being that of the Hilālī-Khān translation (see Chapter Three). Even recent efforts to ensure all the KFGQPC translations conform to a particular theology and format—as prescribed by its own *al-Tafsīr al-muyassar*—have not prevented variation in the target texts. The translations take diverse approaches to the most crucial theological issues in their interpretations of the Qur'anic verses. This is especially apparent when one compares those the KFGQPC merely revised to those it specifically commissioned or fully produced.

Of the sixteen translations into European languages the KFGQPC has published, only seven were prepared specifically for (or by) the institution.<sup>119</sup> The proportion is higher for translations into non-European languages: fifty percent of the nineteen 'African' and thirty-nine 'Asian' translations are 'exclusive works'. The reasons for this discrepancy relate to the KFGQPC's strict requirements for translators and revisers. Because the institution requires them to have knowledge

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119 This number includes the Portuguese translation that was prepared in collaboration with the MWL but only published after the KFGQPC had taken over responsibility for it.

of the source and target languages as well as a reasonably advanced level of Islamic education, it is not always easy for them to find two (or two sets of) people with such skills in languages that have fewer Muslim native speakers. In such cases, a text may be approved without subsequent revision if members of the 'Academic Affairs Division' are satisfied with the exegetical choices explained by the translator(s) during their in-person conversations (which are conducted in Arabic).

The KFGQPC has developed a network—with the help of the Muslim World League and several Saudi Institutions of higher Islamic education operating within the Kingdom—that has allowed it to become a global institution. Over the last thirty years, it has had a significant impact on the understanding of both the function of translation and the meaning of the Qur'anic text all over the Muslim world. The policies and publications of the KFGQPC both reflect and have influenced the changing strategies of Islamic missionary activities in recent decades, in which the Qur'an in translation has come to play a decisive role.