

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# ALI 571: History of Quran Translation into English Session 1: Oct 21, 2020

## Du‘ā of Mutali‘ah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ \* اللَّهُمَّ أَخْرِجْنِي مِنْ ظُلُمَاتِ الْوَهْمِ  
وَأَكْرِمْنِي بِنُورِ الْفَهْمِ اللَّهُمَّ افْتَحْ عَلَيْنَا أَبْوَابَ رَحْمَتِكَ  
وَأَنْشُرْ عَلَيْنَا خَزَائِنَ عُلُومِكَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ \*  
اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent. O Allah, remove me from the darkness of doubt and error, and favor me with the light of understanding. O Allah, open for us the doors of Your mercy and unfold for us the treasures of Your knowledge. O the Most Merciful of the merciful.

○ ALI 5711 History of Quran Translations into English 1  
O Allah, bless Muhammad and his family.

# Why study the Quran?

3 عنه (ص): إِنَّ أَرْدَيْتُمْ عَيْشَ السُّعْدَاءِ وَمَوْتَ الشُّهَدَاءِ وَالنَّجَاةَ يَوْمَ الْحُسْرَى وَالظِّلَّ يَوْمَ الْحَرُورِ وَالْهُدَى يَوْمَ الضَّلَالَةِ فَادْرُسُوا الْقُرْآنَ فَإِنَّهُ كَلَامُ الرَّحْمَنِ وَحِرْزٌ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَرُجْحَانٌ فِي الْمِيزَانِ.

Prophet Muhammad (s): *if you desire :*

*Life of the fortunate and those with felicitations, The death of the Martyrs,*

*Salvation on the Day of Judgment, Security on the Day of Fear,*

*Light on the Day of Darkness, Shade on the Day of Scorching Heat*

*Quenching on the Day of Thirst*

*Weighing [down of good deeds) on the Day of Light (weight of scales)*

*Guidance at the occasion of going astray **then study of the Quran.** This is because the Quran is the word of Allah, instrumental in saving you from Shaytān and helpful in increasing the weight of your good deeds.*

*(Mīzān-ul-Hikmah, H. 16156; Jami' al-Akhbar of al-Sha'iri, p. 41, Bihar 89:19)*

# Seven phases of English translation

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- Phase 1: opposition to translating into another language when the Holy Book was in Arabic
- Phase 2: first English translation from French
- Phase 3: first English translation from Arabic followed by two more translations
- Phase 4: the Qadiyani/Ahmadi influence
- Phase 5: Muslim translators' lasting impact
- Phase 6: Orientalists improved translation
- Phase 7: More Muslims attempt the translation
- Future: selecting the 'appropriate' rendering from existing translations

# Is it blasphemy to translate the Quran?

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إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ | إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Q 12:2 *Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran that you might understand.*

Q 43:3 *Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Quran that you might understand*

Those who oppose the translation:

- Both the contents and language are sacred
- Every translation is indeed a human interpretation
- Hadiths encouraging learning of Arabic

Those who support the translation:

- It is in Arabic because the Prophet and his audience were Arabs
- How can non-Arab Muslims appreciate from the Divine message?
- To refute allegations from Christian missionaries about the Quran
- Translated versions assist in making others appreciate Islam.

# The first English translation

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Alexander Ross translated from Du Ryer's French version and published in 1649 and titled it *The Alcoran of Mahomet, Translated Out of Arabic for the Satisfaction of All That Desire to Looking into Turkish Vanities*. Copies of this available in print and scanned format. Numerous objections:

- The title of work & the wrong claim that it was from Arabic
- Accompanying articles to the translation: (i) A summary of the Religion of the Turks, (ii) The translator to the Christian Reader, (iii) A Needful caveat of Admonition for them who desire to know what use may be made or, or if there be danger in reading the Alcoran, & (iv) The Life and Death of Mahomet.
- Its source in French was, “very corrupt, altering and omitting many passages.”
- Ross did not know Arabic.

# The first English translation from Arabic

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George Sale was assigned to translate the New Testament into Arabic for promoting Christianity to Arabic-speaking people. In liaison with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), London, he later undertook the task of translating the Quran and published it in 1734. with a title: *The Koran, Commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammed*. He was the first to use ‘the Koran’ – anglicized of ‘The Qur’an.’

- His objective was polemical (see p. iv under “To the Reader.”)
- He renders *yaa ayyuhan-naas* as ‘O Men of Mecca.’
- Verse 15:43 which as fourteen words have been enlarged into forty-seven in the translation
- Throughout in his Preliminary Discourse and notes he claims that the Quranic text is imperfect, and Muhammad erred in composing it.
- He distorted by paraphrasing and deliberate mistranslation due to omission, lack of understanding, use of Christian theological concepts and including faulty notes.

## 8 Two translations published in 19<sup>th</sup> century

- Rodwell, John Meadows, *The Koran, The Suras Arranged in Chronological Order with Notes*, 1861.

As an Orientalist he was interested in discrediting Islam and he was not satisfied with Sale's translation. He believed that Islam "contains fragments of disjointed truth" and it is based upon Christianity and Judaism. He ignored the traditional arrangements of the suras.

- Palmer, E. H., *The Quran*, 1880. No less than 65 instances of omission and mistranslation pointed out in one article. Palmer alleges that the language of the Quran is not elegant, rather it is "really rude and rugged."



# The Ahmadi/Qadiyani Influence

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British mandated English as a dominant language of public exchange in Indian subcontinent. Additionally missionaries disseminated English Bible freely. The Ahmadi took the challenge of translating the Quran into English first via Persian and Urdu and then from Arabic directly. Their influence was pervasive, and the publications were competent. Here are their works:

Khan, Muhammad Abdul Hakim, *The Holy Quran*, 1905

Muhammad, Ali, *The Holy Quran*, 1917

Ahmad, Mirza B. Mahmud, *The Holy Quran*, 1947 – 1963

Ali, Sher, *The Holy Quran*, 1955

Farid, Malik Ghulam, *The Holy Quran with English Translation and Short Commentary*, 1969.

# References: For further reading

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Khan, Ja'far Razi, "A Critical Review of English Translations of the Quran", n.d.,(online copy at: [www.academyofislam.com//quran/select-articles/](http://www.academyofislam.com//quran/select-articles/))

Ali, Muhammad Mohar, *The Quran and the Orientalists*, Norwich, UK, Jamiyat Ihyaa Minhaaj al-Sunnah, 2004.

Kidawi, Abdur Raheem, *Translating The Untranslatable*, New Delhi, India, Sarup Book Publishers Ltd, 2011.

Kidawi, Abdur Raheem, *God's Word, Man's Interpretations*, New Delhi, India, K.A. Nizami Center for Quranic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 2018

Lawrance, Bruce B., *The Koran in English*, New Jersey, USA, Princeton University, 2017.