

# **ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE HOLY QUR'AN**

**An Annotated Bibliography**

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**[Note]**

Before the fairly recent publication of the massive World Bibliography of The Translations of The Meanings of The Holy Qur'an (Istanbul, OIC Research Center, 1986), it was hard to even track down the material on the translations of the Holy Qur'an in various languages. Nonetheless, since the Bibliography is not annotated, the reader gets no idea about the translations make-up, his dogmatic presuppositions and his approach to the Qur'an, as well as the quality of the translation. The present annotated bibliography, taking into account only complete English translations to date, attempts to answer some of the above questions. In preparing the bibliography I received all possible help from the Islamic Foundation, Leicester (UK), which is thankfully acknowledged.

**By Muslims 1905-59**

**By Muslims 1960-86**

**By Non-Muslims, Qadiyanis, 1917-70**

**By Other Non-Muslims, 1649-1956**

**BY MUSLIMS, 1905-59**

**1905**

Khan, Mohammad Abul Hakim, The Holy Qur'an, (Patiala, 1905), 2 edns. Subtitle: 'With short notes based on the Holy Qur'an or the authentic traditions of the Prophet (pbuh), or/and New Testaments or scientific truth. All fictitious romance, questionable history, and disputed theories have been carefully avoided. A physician by profession, Abul Hakim Khan was not thoroughly versed in Islam. Initially he had Qadyani leanings which he later recanted. His translation is more of a rejoinder to the anti-Islam missionary propaganda rife in the day than a piece of sound Qur'anic scholarship. Contains scant notes. His translation is badly marred by literalism.

## 1912

Dehlawi Mirza Hairat (ed.), *The Koran: Prepared by Various Oriental Learned Scholars and Edited by Mirza Hairat* (Delhi, 1912). 2 edns. Though intended as 'a complete and exhaustive reply to the manifold criticisms of the Koran by various Christian authors such as Drs. Sale, Rodwell, Palmer and Sir W. Muir', it contains little material to justify this claim. Verses numbered part-wise instead of Sura-wise. The language used in the translation is quite weak.

**1912**

Abu'l Fadl, Mirza, The Qur'an Translated into English from the Original Arabic (Allahabad, 1912). 3 edns. Dedicated to Sultan Jahan Begum, [Lady] ruler of Bhopal [India]. References to the Bible with a view to bringing out the superiority of the Qur'an. Refutation of the missionary views in a casual manner. Includes few notes.

**1930**

Pickthall, Muhammad Marmaduke William, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (London, 1930). At least 27 edns. One of the most widely used translations done by an English man of letters who accepted Islam. Faithfully represents the sense of the original. His use of the Biblical English, however, tends to be a stumbling block for an average reader. Too brief notes on the circumstantial setting of the Suras and the Qur'anic allusions hence not very helpful for an uninitiated reader of the Qur'an.

**1934-37**

Ali Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary* (Lahore, 1934-37). At least 35 edns. Another extremely popular translation. Written in style and couched in chaste English, it stands out above other translations as a highly readable rendering of the Qur'an into English. Copious notes are reflective of Yusuf Ali's vast learning. Nonetheless, some of his notes, particularly, on the Qur'anic eschatology and angelology smack of apologia and pseudo-rationalism. Sufistic bias is also quite marked in his notes. (For a detailed discussion on Yusuf Ali's unorthodox views, please see Kidwai, A.R., 'Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Views on the Qur'anic Eschatology', *Muslim World League Journal* 12 (5) February 1985, pp. 14-17).

**1941-57**

Daryabadi, Abdul Majid, The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary (Lahore, 1941-57). At least 4 edns. A faithful, though largely unacknowledged, translation.

**BY MUSLIMS, 1960-86**

**1962**

Jullundri, Ali Ahmad Khan, Translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'an with Commentary (Lahore, 1962). 3 edns. The translator boastfully entitles his work as 'After few centuries a True and Easy translation of the Glorious Holy Qur'an'. Marred by numerous mistakes of translation. Appended to the translation is a lengthy appendix dealing with diverse topics in a bizarre way, heaps abuses in the Saudi rulers and slights the role of Sunna. A simply unreadable work.

**1964**

Ali, S.V. Ahmad, The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary according to the version of the Holy Ahlul Bait. With special notes from Ayatullah Agha Haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya Yazdi (Karachi, 1964). 3 edns. Vindicates on the authority of the Qur'an itself such sectarian doctrines of Shias as Imamah, Muta'a (temporary marriage), the nomination of Ali as the Prophet's successor, Taqqiyya (hiding the faith), Tabarra (cursing), and mourning in the month of Muharram. Invectives used against both the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers. Strongly refutes the view that the Shias believe in the alteration (Tahreef) of the Qur'an.

**1966**

Tariq, Abdur Rahman and Gilani, Ziauddin, The Holy Qur'an: Rendered into English (Lahore, 1966). 1 edn. An explanatory translation supplemented by brief notes, without the Arabic text. Though this translation is in consonance with the orthodox Muslim viewpoint, its language and presentation leave a lot to be desired.

**1969**

Latif, Syed Abdul, al-Qur'an: Rendered into English (Hyderabad, 1969). 1 edn. Apart from the translation of the Qur'an, Syed Abdul Latif also rendered Abul Kalam Azad's incomplete Urdu tafsir *The Tarjuman al-Allah* into English. Devoid of notes and the text, this translation does not advance much one's understanding of the Qur'an. At best, it represents the author's pious enthusiasm to undertake a noble enterprise.

**1974**

Ali, Hashim Amir, *The Message of the Qur'an Presented in Perspective* (Tokyo, 1974). 1 edn. In his zeal to bring out the thematic unity of the Qur'an, the translator has devised a new Sura order, re-arranging the Suras under the following five sections which he calls as the five 'books' of the Qur'an: Book I - The Portal, al-Fatihah; Book II - The Enlightenment, ar-Ruh, 18 earliest Meccan Suras; Book III - The Guidance, al-Huda, 36 early Meccan Suras; Book IV -The Book, al-Kitab, 36 late Meccan Suras; and Book V - The Balance, al-Mizan, 24 Medinite Suras. Going a step further, he has made up 600 sections of the Text, in place of the standard 558 sections, for, what he calls, perspective purposes. In making a mess of the Sura and ruku order of the Qur'an, it does not occur to Hashim Amir Ali that the thematic unity of the Qur'an has been quite remarkably demonstrated by some exegetes without disturbing the traditional arrangements of the Qur'an. The level of translation is, however, fairly good.

**1977**

al-Hilalai, Taquiuddin and Khan, Muhammad Muhsin, Explanatory English Translation of the Meaning of the Holy Qur'an (Chicago, 1977). 2 edns. It is, in fact, a summarized English version of Ibn Kathir's exegesis, supplemented by al-Tabri's, with comments from Sahih al-Bukhari. Both the translators have been introduced as Salafi (traditional followers of the way of the prophet). The translation is intended to 'present the meanings of the Qur'an which the early Muslims had known'.

**1979**

Ahmad, Muhammad Mofassir, *The Koran: The First Tafsir in English* (London, 1979). 1 edn. Explanatory notes have been interpolated into the translated text. It marks a serious deviation from the norms of the Qur'anic exegesis in that it would open the floodgate for presenting any material as the translation of the Text itself. Grossly misinterprets several Qur'anic terms. For example, al-Ghayb (the Unseen) is rendered as the 'consequence of one's action'.

**1980**

Muhammad Asad, *The Message of The Qur'an* (Gibraltar, 1980). 1 edn. Translated in chaste, idiomatic English by a convert from Judaism to Islam. However, it contains some serious departures from the orthodox viewpoint on a number of Qur'anic statements. Asad appears to be reluctant to accept the literal meaning of some Qur'anic verses. For example, he doubts the throwing of Ibrahim into fire, Jesus speaking in the cradle; refers to Khidr and Dhulqarnain as mythical figures and expresses unconventional views on abrogation (Naskh) theory. (For details please see Arfaque Malik's review in the *Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1980), pp. 5-7)

**1980**

Zayid, Mahmud Y. (checked and revised) in collaboration with a committee of Muslim scholars, *The Qur'an: An English Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an* (Beirut, 1980). Based mainly on a Jew, N.J. Daud's English translation of the Qur'an hence repeats the mistakes of mistranslation that mar Daud's translations. In the supplement on Muslim religious practices and law both the Sunni and Shia doctrines have been presented.

**1981**

Sarwar, Sheikh Muhammad, The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text and English Translation (Elmhurst, 1981). 1 edn. Without any notes this explanatory translation paraphrases the contents of the Qur'an in a lucid style.

**1982**

Shakir, M.M., Holy Qur'an (New York 1982). An example of blatant plagiarism in that about 90% of this English translation has been verbatim copied from Muhammad Ali Lahori's English translation of the Qur'an. Though it does not contain any notes, the Shia doctrines have been indicated in the Subject index of the Qur'an with pointed reference to the Qur'anic verses in order to give the impression that such Shia doctrines as Imamat, Ali as the chosen one, martyrdom of Hussain, khums, Masoom (the infallible ones) and Vali occur in the Qur'an itself.

**1984**

Ali Ahmad, al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation (Karachi, 1984), 2 edns. Devoid of explanatory notes or background information about Suras, this translation rendered in fluent idiomatic English is vitiated by several instances of mistranslation. Contains unorthodox, apologetic and pseudo-rationalistic views on the hell, stoning of Abraha's army, the Tree, the Verses II:73, 248 and 282, III:49 and IV:01.

**1985**

Irving, T.B., *The Qur'an: the First American Version* (Vermont, 1985). 1 edn. Apart from the obnoxious title this translation is not al-together free from mistakes of translation and loose expressions, such as in al-Baqarah II:37 and 157. Assigns theme(s) to each Qur'anic ruku (section). Contains neither the Text nor explanatory notes. Uses American English expressions.

**1986**

Khatib, M.M., *The bounteous Koran: A Translation of Meaning and Commentary* (London, 1986). 1 edn. An authentic and faithful translation of the Qur'an in readable, fluent English. Free from irksome use of archaic Biblical English as in Pickthall, Yusuf Ali and Daryabadi. Contains a historically based 'Introduction' discussing Islam, the Qur'an and Sirah, and brief yet insightful notes on the circumstantial setting and the meaning of certain Qura'nic allusions and expressions. Suffers from a few inaccuracies in translation. For example al-Furqan XXV:16, 29, 46 and 62, al-Maidah V:67 and Maryam XIX:26 and 34, etc. (For details see A.R. Kidwai's review on it in *Muslim World Book Review* (Spring 1988), Vol. 8, No.3, pp. 11-13.

**BY NON-MUSLIMS, QADIYANIS, 1917-70**

**1917**

Ali, Muhammad, The Holy Qur'an: English Translation (Lahore 1917). At least 10 edns. The translation supplemented by exhaustive notes betrays the translator's Qadiyani beliefs. Grossly twists and misinterprets the Qur'anic verses related to the Promised Messiah and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the seal of prophethood. Swayed by pseudo-rationalism, Muhammad Ali denies the occurrence of some miracles such as the gushing forth of twelve springs as a result of the Prophet Moses' striking his staff (al-Baqarah II:60), angelhood of Harut and Marut (al-Baqarah II:102), Jinns listening to the Qur'an (al-Jinn LXXII:01) and the stoning of Abraha's army to death by the birds (al-Fil CV:3). The language used in his translation is not also up to the mark.

### 1920

Sarwar, Ghulam, Translations of the Holy Qur'an (Singapore, 1920). 8 edns. The introduction constitutes a brilliant critique of the English translations of the Qur'an by Sale, Rodwell, Palmer and Muhammad Ali. Devoid of the Text and notes. Lavishes a gushing eulogy on both the translation and approach of Muhammad Ali. The only defect Sarwar discovers in Muhammad Ali's translation is the 'very poor construction of a great many passages in the body of the translation' hence his new translation.

**1955**

Ali, Sher, The Holy Qur'an (Lahore, 1955). 13 edns. The official Qadyani translation of the Qur'an. Apart from retaining the unpardonable faults of misinterpretation and mistranslation found in Muhammad Ali's translation, Sher Ali interpolated more blatantly the Qadyani doctrines into his translation.

**1960**

Peer, Salahuddin, The Wonderful Koran (Aminabad, 1960). 2 edns.  
Another Qadyani translation of the Qur'an.

**1964**

Nuri, Khadim Rahman, The Running Commentary of the Holy Qur'an with under- bracket comments (Shillong 1964) 1 edn. Sufistic leanings of the translator characterize this Qadyani translation of the Qur'an.

**1969**

Farid, Malik Gulam (ed.), *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation and Commentary* (Rabwah, 1969). 2 edns. The commentary is based on Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad's Urdu Translation of the Qur'an. Published under the auspices of Hadrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad, Third Successor of the Promised Messiah and Head of the Ahmadiyyah Movement in Islam'.

**1970**

Khan, Zafrullah, The Qur'an: Arabic Text and English Translation (London, 1970). 4 edns. A notable Qadyani translation. Marred by unaccountable liberties in that Zafrullah Khan, following the footsteps of other Qadyanis, does not recognize the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the last Prophet.

**BY OTHER NON-MUSLIMS, 1649-1956**

**1649**

Ross, Alexander, *The Alcoran of Mahomet translated out of Arabique into French, by the Sieur Du Ryer...And newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities* (London, 1649). 8 edns. The latest edition came out in 1856. A very crude specimen of the Orientalist-missionary approach to the Qur'an. In his 'Introductory Note to the Christian Reader' Ross specifies his purpose: 'I thought good to bring it to their colours, that so viewing thine enemies in their full body thou must the better prepare to encounter...his Alcoran'. In the same rabidly anti-Islamic vein is the Appendix to the work entitled as 'A needful caveat or Admonition, for them who desire to know what use may be made of or if there be danger in reading the al-Coran'. As to the quality of the translation itself, Zwemer's remark is quite illuminating: 'He (Ross) was utterly unacquainted with Arabic, and not a thorough French scholar; therefore his translation is faulty in the extreme'. Zwemer, S.M., *Muslim World*, V, (1915), p.250.

**1734**

Sale, G., *The Koran: Commonly called the Alkoran of Mohammed* (London, 1734). At least 123 edns. The latest edition appeared in 1975. Contains an exhaustive Preliminary discourse on Sira and the Qur'an. In translating the Qur'an Sale's missionary intent is quite marked. For in the note to the reader he suggests the rules to be observed for 'the conversion of Mohammedans' (p. v); evaluates the Prophet thus: 'For how criminal soever Mohammed may have been in imposing a fake religion on mankind, the praises due to his real virtues ought not to be denied him' (p. vii), talks of different editions of the Qur'an which, for him, vary in contents (p. 45), points out the borrowings in the Qur'an, (pp. 49 and 50) and refers to the piecemeal revelation of the Qur'an as a 'contrivance' (p.50). Full of instances of omission and mistranslation. For example, Ar-Rahman nir Raheem, is simply rendered as 'Most Merciful'. The recurrent Qur'anic address, Ya aayuhan nas is translated as 'O people of Mecca'. Renders as 'Substitute' and as 'Secret History'. Parts of some verses have been altogether omitted, as for example, in Ale-Imran III:98 is not translated.

**1861**

Rodwell, J.M., *The Koran* (London, 1861). 32 edns. Question the authenticity of the traditional Sura order and invents a new so called chronological Sura order. In the Introduction he refers to the prophet as the crafty author of the Qur'an; indicates the Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian and other sources of the Qur'an; advises missionary activists how to carry out their work and hold the prophet a victim of self-deception, a cataleptic subject from his early youth...liable to morbid and fantastic hallucinations (p.14). Suffers from a number of mistakes of mistranslation and misinterpretation. For example, (al-Mudathir LXXIV:39) is translated as 'they of God's right hand', (al-Kauthar CVIII:2) as 'Pray therefore to the Lord and slay the victims'. Explains the use of the word *abd* (al-Alaq XCVI:10) in the Qur'an thus: 'Since it was the slaves who had embraced Islam, the Qur'an uses this expression'.

**1880**

Palmer, E.H., *The Koran* (London 1880). 15 edns. A Cambridge scholar entrusted with the preparation of a new translation of the Qur'an for Max Muller 'Sacred Books of the East Series'. Nykl notes no less than 70 instances of omissions and mistranslation in his translation. Nykl, A.R., 'Notes on E.M. Palmer's *The Qur'an* in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56 (1936), pp. 77-84.

**1937**

Bell, Richard, *The Qur'an translated with a crucial rearrangement of Surahs* (London 1937). 4 edns. His aim in translating the Qur'an is to 'understand the deliverances of Muhammad afresh' (p. v). Apart from describing the Prophet as the author of the Qur'an, Bell believes that the Qur'an in its written form was 'actually written by Muhammad himself' (p vi). Illustrates 'alteration, substitutions and derangements in the text'. For example, II:209 is a later addition, 206-208 are unconnected scraps and 210 is the original continuation of the verse No. 205. On each page he indicates his peculiar arrangement of verses.

### 1955

Arberry, A.J., *The Koran Interpreted* (London, 1955). 12 edns. Contains no explanatory notes or background information about Suras. Not altogether free from omissions and mistranslations. For example al-Anfal VIII:59 is rendered as: 'And thou are not supposed that they who disbelieve have outstripped Me' whereas the correct translation would be: 'Let not those who disbelieve deem that they have escaped Me'. An-nabi-ul Ummi is mistranslated as 'the Prophet of the common folk'. Other instances of mistranslation are: Ale-Imran III:43; Nisaa IV:72, 147 and 157; Maida V:55; Araf VII:157; al-Sajdah XXXII:23; al-Anfal VIII:59 and Yunus X:88, etc.

## 1956

Dawood, N.J., The Koran (London, 1956). 11 edns. An Iraqi Jew. Speaks of the influence of Jewish and Christian teachings on the Prophet and condemning the traditional Sura order follows the chronological Sura order. Marred by serious mistakes of translation 'bani Adam' (al-Araf VII:31) is rendered as children of Allah [correct translation is 'children of Adam'], in Al-Baqarah II:191 'al fitnatu asyaddu minal qatl(i)' is mistranslated as 'idolatry is worse than carnage' [correct translation is 'oppression is worse than slaughter'].

Those who wish to understand the specific and broader meaning of the verses of the Qur'an, it is recommended that they should also read commentary on the subjects and verses of the Qur'an. The English readers will find either Yusuf Ali's or Maududi's commentaries a good source. Allama Yusuf Ali presents the meaning Ayah (verse) by Ayah with detailed footnotes for relevant words in each verse and includes a detailed index of the topics mentioned in the Qur'an. Maulana Maududi's work covers commentary for each Surah (chapter) of the Holy Qur'an.

Pickthall writes in his foreward of 1930: "... The Qur'an cannot be translated. ...The book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Qur'an, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Qur'an-and peradventure something of the charm in English. It can never take the place of the Qur'an in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so..."

"The Holy Qur'an," Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1934. (Latest Publisher: Amana Publications, Beltsville, MD, USA; Title: "The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an," 1992). A pocket edition of Yusuf Ali's translation is also available in contemporary English.

"The Meaning of the Glorious Koran," An Explanatory Translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, a Mentor Book Publication. (Also available as: "The Meaning of the Glorious Koran," by Marmaduke Pickthall, Dorset Press, N.Y. and several Islamic book publishers; Published by several publishers since 1930). Note: The Mentor publication (451 MJ1529 195) contains a few errors/omissions, e.g., in Surah 72: the last part of Verse 2 should read "we ascribe no partner unto our Lord", and Surah 68: Verse 22 should read "straight" road instead of "beaten" road. In case of any doubt, the reader is advised to check with a copy from an Islamic publisher and also check with an Islamic scholar for the meaning directly from the Arabic original.

