TRANSLATING THE SACRED:

ISLAMIC LAW, OTTOMAN READERSHIP, AND TWO EXAMPLES OF A TRANSITIONAL GENRE

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Abstract

The historical tenses around the translation of the Qurʾān have brought about transitional genres in Qurʾānic exegetical literature. In the absence of contemporary Qurʾān translations, the first genre to appear was "interlinear translations", which were study books that provided disjointed translations of the words and phrases of the Qurʾān's passages but not textual translations of the passages. The characteristics of a contemporary Qurʾānic translation were absent from these study books, which began as fragmented works and developed into comprehensive works. The jurisprudential question of whether the Qurʾān could be translated into other languages was joined by a new argument in the 8th/15th century: the Qurʾān's reproduction on printing presses. Thus, conservatism about the sacred

nature of the Qurʾānic text expanded from translation to publication. This standpoint shifted, particularly in the 11ᵗʰ/17ᵗʰ century in Ottoman Turkey, as a result of the transformative impacts of modernity. Thus, another transitional genre of what I call "quasitranslations" emerged. They were books that included translations of certain short Qurʾānic commentaries written in Arabic or Persian alongside translated excerpts from other Islamic works. Two of the most popular early examples of this genre in Turkish were the *Tibyān* of ʿAyntābī Meḥmed Efendī (d. 1110/1699) and *Mawākib* of Ismāʿīl Farrūkh Efendī (d. 1256/1840). Much like the broader process of Ottoman modernization, these works had a hybrid character: they were neither literal translations of the Qurʾān nor merely translations of the short *tafsīr* volumes whose titles they bore; instead, they were a mixture of both, offering a scope of interpretation customized according to local demands and sensibilities. Second, the barriers before the publication of the Qurʾān and other Islamic books were lifted, marking a great transformation in Islamic intellectual history. Those who adhered to the same theological tradition now allowed and even encouraged the Qurʾān translation, which had been met with resistance a century ago. This study addresses the transformation of the Qurʾānic scripture from the perspectives of Islamic law and theology, Ottoman theopolitics, and modernity.

Key Words: Islamic law, the Qurʾān, *Tibyān*, *Mawākib*, ʿAyntābī Meḥmed, Ismāʿīl Farrūkh, Turkish Qurʾān translation, Ottoman theopolitics

Introduction

The Turkish language today has hundreds of different translations of the Qurʾān,[1] all of which were produced over only the last century. Some might regard this as a sort of intellectual wealth, but these translations sell very well, and the explosion in their number is driven largely by commercial motivations. Most are the products of pseudo-translators working on the basis of a few respectable earlier translations, with copyright concerns accounting for the varying names on the covers.

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[1]   For an inventory covering the 228 Qurʾānic translations in Turkish as of 2022, see Mehmet Akif Koç, "Ek 2. Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkçe Kur'an Çevirmenleri Listesi", *Kur'ân İlimleri ve Tefsir Tarihi*, ed. Mehmet Akif Koç (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2022), 415-418.

As the number and popularity of these translations make clear, most Turkish-speaking Muslims today favor translating the Qurʾān. Historically, however, developing a pro-translation theology was painful and quite evolutionary. Before Islamic law fully permitted modern Qurʾān translations in the 14th/20th centuries, it had to facilitate the composition of two transitional categories that would be easily welcomed. The first category included interlinear translations, which primarily functioned as study aids for individuals with foundational knowledge of the Arabic language seeking to engage with the Qurʾān in its original text. The second category comprised concise *tafsīr* books translated from Arabic or Persian into Turkish, aimed at a broader readership. This article analyzes the theo-political factors contributing to the emergence of the second category that I refer to as the quasi-translations of the Qurʾān, with a focus on two examples, *Tibyān* and *Mawākib*, their stylistic elements, theological discourses, and classical references.

1. Early Opposition to Qurʾānic Translation

We do not have enough evidence to suggest that the early scholars had exclusively addressed the issue of Qurʾānic translation in the modern sense. Historically, the earliest context in which we can find theological debates about the translation of the Qurʾān was the doctrine of *al-iʿjāz*, the inimitability of the Qurʾān. Although the doctrine basically rules out the possibility of creating another Qurʾān with the same level of eloquence, style, and content, it seems to have been expanded later to challenge creating any kind of equivalent of the Qurʾān in a non-Arabic language. Since there were no such attested attempts to translate the entire Qurʾān, the theories put forward within the context of *al-iʿjāz* must not have been meant to be against translating the Qurʾān in the first place. On the other hand, the word *tarjamah,* which eventually came to mean "translation", originally meant "explanation" or "interpretation" in early times, which is why Ibn ʿAbbās was called *tarjumān al-Qurʾān*, even though he did not translate it into another language. The biographical notes and the headings that feature explanations about chapters in the ḥadīth books are also called *tarjamah* for other reasons than covering any translation.

The alleged early stance against the translation of the Qurʾān is primarily concluded in retrospect from the meaning of the debates on the nature of the Qurʾān, for the most part, and supported by the actual lack of entire Qurʾānic translations. According to this back-projectionist account, early opposition to the translation rested on two pillars: First, the literary translation of the Qurʾān, a word-for-word interpretation maintaining the syntactic, grammatical, and aesthetic qualities of the original, was a challenge to the doctrine of *al-iʿjāz* and had been viewed as impermissible or even impossible.[2] On this view, translating the Qurʾān into another language would have been tantamount to producing a new Qurʾān, which was considered impossible even in Arabic, which supposedly has a richer linguistic potential.[3]

One of the few early examples of making a case for why the Qurʾān is untranslatable, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muslim Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) argued that Arabic in general, rather than Qurʾānic Arabic specifically, is superior to other languages in terms of rhetorical arts:

> Arabs do have figurative patterns in their language… All of these metaphorical styles are included in the Qurʾān… That is why no translator is able to translate the Qurʾān into another language, unlike the Gospel, which was translated from Syriac into Ethiopic and Greek, and the Torah and Psalms, as well as other books of God, into Arabic. Because non-Arabs do not use figurative language as widely as Arabs do.[4]

The inimitability of the Qurʾān was viewed not just as a creed but also, allegedly, as historical fact, supported by the observation that no one throughout history had ever produced anything comparable to the Qurʾān. Those who had purportedly tried to do so were dismissed as fools and heretics.[5]

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[2]   Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ʿirfān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Maṭbaʿat ʿĪsá al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakāh, n.d.), 2/144.

[3]   Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-l-Kitāb, 1990), 9/66.

[4]   Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muslim Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī, *Taʾwīl mushkil al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2014), 22.

[5]   Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) refers to Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965), who proclaimed himself prophet and wrote poetry that was similar to some Qurʾānic passages, as a weak-minded man: Abū l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nihāyah*, ed. ʿAlī Shīrī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1988),

Some adopted a softer position. Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsá ibn Muḥammad al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388), for instance, distinguished between two categories of Qurʾānic verses in terms of feasibility of translation: verses with a simple topic and style, which are expressible in another language, and verses with more intricate linguistic characteristics and meanings, which are not.[6] In another example, Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) appears to have permitted the oral interpretation of Qurʾānic passages to promote and clarify Islam's message.[7] However, he did not mention his opinion on whether the entire Qurʾān might be translated into writing, most likely because such a trend did not exist. Yet, in terms of prayers in non-Arabic languages, he asserted that "we do deny translating the Qurʾān because its words are meant to be primary".[8]

This legalistic opposition has been based on an extensive theological grounding: Islam is a strictly aniconic religion in terms of how the divine is represented, yet it has other sacred elements to establish associations with the divine. The *muṣḥaf*, the Qurʾānic codex, is one of them: it is the only authoritative written material representing the Qurʾān, God's original speech, which was revealed orally and not in writing, unlike the inscribed stone tablets of Moses (Ex. 31:18, Q 7/145). Thus, the *muṣḥaf* is to be the only source of Arabic scripture, the only substitute for the Arabic speech of God, which, in turn, is the only supplier of divine meaning. These all make up the Qurʾān. According to this conception, the meaning of the Qurʾān could not be separated from its speech and script, which are both Arabic. In this context, the Qurʾān's constant emphasis on its Arabic character becomes more relevant: "*Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qurʾān (Qurʾānan ʿarabiyyan).*" (Yūsuf 12/2), "*Thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Qurʾān.*" (al-Shūrá 42/7),

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10/291. For a few other classic examples of individuals alleged to have engaged in verbal imitation of the Qurʾān, see Muṣṭafá Ṣādiq al-Rāfiʿī, *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān wa-l-balāghah al-nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2005), 120-130.

[6] Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsá ibn Muḥammad al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, ed. Abū ʿUbaydah Mashhūr ibn Ḥasan Āl Salmān (Cairo: Dār Ibn ʿAffān, 1997), 2/105.

[7] Taqī al-Dīn Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā - Muṣṭafá ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭa, *al-Fatāwá l-kubrá* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.d.), 5/334.

[8] Taqī al-Dīn Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ fatāwá*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim (Medina: Majmaʿ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibāʿat al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1995), 12/477.

and "*We have made it an Arabic Qurʾān.*" (al-Zukhruf 43/3). Islamic theology, therefore, has usually viewed Arabic as an intrinsic, rather than an extrinsic, property of the Qurʾān, without which it would not be.

The Arabic quality of the Qurʾān relates not just to the scripture but, more significantly, to God's nature as well, as Muslim theologians discussed whether God's speech must be among the divine attributes that Muslims are required to believe in, such as oneness, eternity, everlastingness, and nonresemblance to creatures. According to the traditionalist (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) perspective, well represented by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), the Qurʾān is not an incidental outcome of His attribute of speech but rather an eternal attribute of God's speech.[9] Therefore, the Qurʾān represents the *muṣḥaf* itself as the written, audible, and understandable speech of God.[10] From this perspective, the Qurʾān is inextricably linked to God's divine nature and distinct from all creation. On the other hand, the Ashʿarī theory, which has not generally enjoyed as much popularity, distinguishes between God's attribute of speech and the Qurʾān, which is viewed as its product. According to this reading, the former is the unuttered inner speech of God (*al-kalām al-nafsī*), which is, in a sense, identical to Him, while the latter is God's speech put into letters and words, recited by mouths, and heard by ears.[11] Advocating for the traditionalist position, Ibn Taymiyyah summed up the opinions of both Ibn Kullāb (d. 240/854) and Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-36) as follows:

> Ibn Kullāb used to say, "This Qurʾān is the verbal transmission of the eternal meaning (*ḥikāyah ʿan al-maʿná l-qadīm*)." Al-Ashʿarī disagreed with it… and said, "Rather, the Qurʾān is the utterance of the eternal meaning (*ʿibārah ʿan dhālika*). None of these views are correct![12]

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9   Abū l-Faḍl Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī - Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1379/1959), 13/492.

10 Taqī al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ibn Surūr al-Maqdisī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī l-iʿtiqād*, ed. Aḥmad ibn ʿAṭiyyah ibn ʿAlī al-Ghāmidī (Medina: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa-l-Ḥikam, 1993), 130.

11 Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf fī mā yajib iʿtiqāduhū wa-lā yajūz al-jahl bihī*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li-l-Turāth, 2000), 89-99.

12 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwá*, 6/634.

This assessment notwithstanding, neither the Ashʿarīs nor the Kullābīs went so far as to say that the uttered or transmitted speech of God, the Qurʾān, was created. Only Muʿtazilah took that step, coming up with the theory of the Qurʾān's createdness (*khalq al-Qurʾān*), according to which God has no eternal attribute of speech. When He wants to speak, He creates it through a speaker.[13] Both this and the softer Ashʿarī position regarding the nature of the speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) provided the grounds for permitting translating the Qurʾān into other languages. However, the consensus sided with the more conservative theory, which bestows sacredness upon all aspects of the Qurʾān, including its meaning, script, and recitation. Even the *muṣḥaf*, made of paper and ink, has also sometimes been seen as sacred, in line with the impermissibility of touching it without first performing ablutions.[14]

Second, a literal but nonliterary translation of the Qurʾān, a word-for-word interpretation to convey the meaning of the Qurʾān without claiming to imitate aesthetic qualities of the original, was likewise frowned upon, at least until comparatively recently,[15] out of a fear that such translations might eventually create literary works that would be understood as rivals to the Qurʾān.[16] The early out-of-context reservations on Qurʾānic translation eventually evolved into a list of more specifically articulated fears toward the modern era when demands for literal translations of the Qurʾān increased:[17] First, even though neither literal nor literary translations were expected to be as eloquent as the original Qurʾān, some people might mistake the translation for the original scripture and base their rituals and beliefs

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[13] Qāḍī Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsah: taʿlīq al-Imām Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Abī Hāshim,* edʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān(Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2ⁿᵈ ed., 2010), 531-35.

[14] Abū l-Ḥasan Sayf al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Āmidī, *Ghāyat al-marām fī ʿilm al-kalām*, ed. Ḥasan Maḥmūd ʿAbd al-Laṭīf (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlá li-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1391/1971), 96.

[15] Mannāʿ ibn Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 2000), 325.

[16] Muḥammad Ṭāhir ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Kurdī al-Makkī, *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Jeddah: Maṭbaʿat al-Fatḥ, 1946), 190.

[17] Among many others, a concise *risālah* on the risks of translating the Qurʾān is *Tadhkirah* by Muḥammad Muṣṭafá Shāṭir in 1936, which was addressed to the sheikh of al-Azhar, Muṣṭafá al-Marāghī (1881-1945), who supported the idea of Qurʾān translation.

on it.[18] Second, amid an abundance of translated versions, "the miraculously inimitable eloquence of the Qurʾān" would be lost or its significance reduced in the eyes of believers.[19] Third, with a translation of the Qurʾān into their languages, non-Arab Muslims, in particular, would lose their enthusiasm for learning the Qurʾānic language and Islamic sciences, the traditional authorities guiding the legitimate understanding of the religion.[20] Without the Arabic text's authority, the Muslim *ummah* would be divided over religious and political issues.[21] Finally, the Qurʾān would be vulnerable in the face of conspiracies.[22]

The premodern conservative position on the translation and publication of the Qurʾān has also been associated with interreligious dialectics. On these accounts, the Islamic theo-psychology has usually been that, as with many other religious matters, Muslims must behave differently from Jews and Christians with regard to sacred scripture and its preservation.[23] On this view, Jews and Christians had lost the original texts of their sacred writings when they translated them into other languages centuries ago, and when they later published these books, their wide dissemination risked shattering their political and religious unity.[24] Even the Qurʾān's emphasis on its Arabic character was, according to some comments, a response to its Judeo-Christian detractors.[25]

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18 Muṣṭafá Ṣabrī, *Masʾalat tarjamat al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Salafiyyah, 1351/1932), 21.

19 Mālik ibn Nabī, *al-Ẓāhirah al-Qurʾāniyyah* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2000), 49.

20 Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 9/66, 274.

21 Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 9/66.

22 Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 9/270; Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Bundāq, *al-Mustashriqūn wa-tarjamat al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1983), 104.

23 Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 9/267; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Abū Zahrāʾ, *al-Muʿjizah al-kubrá al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 418.

24 Muḥammad Muṣṭafá Shāṭir, *Tadhkirah li-ūlī l-baṣāʾir wa-l-abṣār ilá mā fī tarjamat maʿná l-Qurʾān min akhṭār* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Naṣr, 1936), 4; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 51.

25 John Andrew Morrow, "Arabic", *Islamic Images and Ideas: Essays on Sacred Symbolism,* ed. John Andrew Morrow (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2014), 252.

2. Permissible Acts of "Translation" in the Islamic and Turkic Traditions

2.1. Oral Translation

While the debate so far has centered on written translations, the oral translation of Qurʾānic verses was permitted and practiced from the beginning, as it was always required for Islamic *daʿwah*. However, jurists were generally opposed to the use of oral translations in Islamic ritual prayers, despite the exceptional view of figures like Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), who held that anyone may recite in translation even though he could pronounce Arabic properly.[26] His disciples, Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) and Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), believed that reciting in translation was permissible, but only for people who were unable to correctly recite the Arabic. Therefore, as far as the liturgy is concerned, Abū Ḥanīfah prioritized the meaning of the verses regardless of the language in which they were uttered. In contrast, his two disciples required the Qurʾān to be recited in its original language whenever possible.[27] Meanwhile, some claim that Abū Ḥanīfah later changed his mind and came out against the use of oral translation in prayers,[28] which is the view that Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī (d. 593/1197) regards as the most trustworthy in the Ḥanafī *madhhab*.[29] Although the Ḥanafī tradition tends to relegate Abū Ḥanīfah's opinion in support of non-Arabic prayer, Abū Bakr al-Kāsānī (d. 587/1191), a highly esteemed Ḥanafī jurist, argues for it overtly, which is, according to Muṣṭafá Ṣabrī (1869-1954), due to his fanatical loyalty to the Imām:[30]

> They say, "The Qurʾān was sent in Arabic; [consequently, the translated verses must not be considered Qurʾānic verses]."
> The answer to it will be in two parts: First, the fact that the

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[26] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī, *Kitāb al-Aṣl*, ed. Abū l-Wafāʾ al-Afghānī (Karachi: Idārat al-Qurʾān wa-l-ʿUlūm al-Islāmiyyah, 1966), 1/15.

[27] Abū l-Maʿālī Burhān al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Māzah al-Bukhārī, *al-Muḥīṭ al-burhānī fī l-fiqh al-Nuʿmānī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm Sāmī al-Jundī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004), 1/307; ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn Masʿūd al-Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ fī tartīb al-sharāʾiʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1986), 1/112.

[28] ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Aḥmad al-Bukhārī, *Kashf al-asrār sharḥ Uṣūl al-Bazdawī* (İstanbul: Sharikat al-Ṣiḥāfah al-ʿUthmāniyyah, 1308/1890), 1/25.

[29] Abū l-Ḥasan Burhān al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Bakr al-Marghīnānī, *al-Hidāyah fī sharḥ Bidāyat al-mubtadī*, ed. Ṭalāl Yūsuf (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 1/49.

[30] Muṣṭafá Ṣabrī, *Masʾalat tarjamat al-Qurʾān*, 5.

Arabic text is the Qurʾān itself does not negate the possibility that other versions could also be the Qurʾān. Because the verse "We have made it an Arabic Qurʾān" [Q 43/3] does not exclude that possibility. In fact, the Arabic text has been called the Qurʾān for the very reason that it guides to the Qurʾān, which is, in essence, the attribute of speech [of God]. Therefore, when we say, "The Qurʾān is not created", we mean by this that the attribute of speech was not created, but we do not mean the Arabic words and expressions [written in the *muṣḥaf*]. As a result, the Persian [translation] may have also guided to the Qurʾān, the attribute of speech. The verse "Had We sent this as a Qurʾān in a language other than Arabic…" [Q 41/44], likewise, indicates that if the Qurʾān had been uttered in a non-Arabic language, it would have been a Qurʾān too.[31]

This position of Abū Ḥanīfah does not align well with Sunnī theology on a great scale, which sees the Qurʾān as a combination of its stylistic structure (*al-naẓm* or *al-lafẓ*) and meaning (*al-maʿnā*). To him, the *naẓm* was not a required component of the Qurʾān when it was recited in prayers and other rituals, at least before he allegedly changed his opinion.[32] Muḥammad ibn Abī Sahl al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090) deduced from Abū Ḥanīfah's endorsement of prayer in Persian that he must have believed that non-Arabic speakers could understand the Qurʾān's *iʿjāz* from its meanings.[33] Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Nujaym (d. 970/1563) explained in further detail how Abū Ḥanīfah did not consider Arabic to be a necessary component of the Qurʾān in terms of prayer.[34] The Shāfiʿī, Mālikī, Ḥanbalī, and Shīʿī schools, on the other hand, strictly prohibited performing prayers with translated verses.[35] Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), a Shāfiʿī jurist,

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[31] Al-Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ*, 1/112–113.

[32] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bukhārī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1/24.

[33] Abū Bakr Shams al-aʾimmah Muḥammad ibn Abī Sahl al-Sarakhsī, *Uṣūl al-Sarakhsī*, ed. Abū l-Wafāʾ al-Afghānī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, n.d.), 1/282.

[34] وكان أبو حنيفة أولا يقول بالصحة نظراً إلى عدم أخذ العربية في مفهوم القرآن Zayn al-Dīn ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad Ibn Nujaym al-Miṣrī, *al-Baḥr al-rāʾiq sharḥ Kanz al-daqāʾiq* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, n.d.), 1/324.

[35] Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyá ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *al-Majmūʿ sharḥ al-Muhadhdhab* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1344/1925), 3/379-380.

contended that reading such verses aloud outside of prayer is also improper.[36]

2.2. Interlinear Translation

Another way to access the meanings of the Qurʾān was through "interlinear translation", which appeared only in the 4th/10th century following the rise of New Persian as a literary expression.[37] This approach launched the entire process of Qurʾān translations that has lasted up to the present.

The first "translations" of the entire Qurʾān were most likely interlinear in which the meanings of the words and phrases were vertically located immediately under them and separated from each other by spaces. By utilizing such a style, it is clear that the composers of these works intentionally avoided giving the translated statements a text structure consisting of grammatically accurate, eloquent, and consecutive paragraphs. Despite being called translations, they were not exactly so in the modern sense. They were more "study books" intended for *ʿulamāʾ*[38] or at least for those who could read the original scripture with some basic knowledge of Arabic grammar and wanted to improve their Qurʾānic culture by seeing the correspondence between original words or phrases and their meanings. Contrary to what is generally imagined, these works, which did not include a finalized textual translation, rather revealed ongoing concerns. Actually, "the robust history of rendering the text into the vernacular languages used by Muslim communities"[39] does not prove that the widespread reservations were surmounted. Thus, I believe that the interlinear works are precursors of Qurʾān translations that would only be created after the compromises of Islamic law and the demands of the people jointly set the scene. I think that explains the rationale behind the fact, as noted by Brett Wilson, that the translations of the

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[36] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, 1957), 1/464.

[37] Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾān: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 264.

[38] M. Brett Wilson, *Translating the Qurʾān in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21.

[39] M. Brett Wilson, "Translations of the Qurʾān: Islamicate Languages", *The Oxford Handbook of Qurʾānic Studies* (552–564), ed. Mustafa Shah - Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 552.

Qurʾān have not usually been considered a separate category from *tafsīr* in Islamicate literary taxonomies[40] until recently.

The earliest interlinear Qurʾānic translation was prepared by a council appointed by the Samanid ruler Manṣūr ibn Nūḥ (d. 365/976). It was not an easy task. Manṣūr needed to first obtain a fatwá on the permissibility of Qurʾānic translation. Perhaps he had hoped to have a Persian translation of the Qurʾān in the form of a typical text; however, the book that came out was only interlinear. Abdülkadir İnan (1889-1976) thought that the fatwá was given based on Q 14/4, "We never sent a messenger who did not speak the tongue of his people."[41] He mentions no evidence in support of his view other than the fact that Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) said in his interpretation of the verse that "the Qurʾān does not need to be sent in all the languages. Its translations into other languages would serve as substitutes".[42] The translation was completed in 345/956.[43] Over the following century or two, Turkic peoples in Khurasan began to obtain bilingual interlinear Qurʾān translations into Persian and Turkic dialects, such as Turkmen,[44] Qarakhanid,[45] and Chagatay.[46] According to Zeki Velidi Togan (1890-1970), these translations were modeled on an early

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[40] Brett Wilson, "Translations of the Qurʾān: Islamicate Languages", 553.

[41] Abdülkadir İnan, *Kurʾân-ı Kerim'in Türkçe Tercemeleri Üzerinde Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1961), 7.

[42] Abū l-Qāsim Jār Allāh Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1407/1986), 2/539.

[43] İnan, *Kurʾân-ı Kerim'in Türkçe Tercemeleri*, 161; János Eckmann, "Eastern Turkic Translations of the Koran", *Studia Turcica* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1971), 149-157.

[44] For an analysis of the manuscript of an incomplete interlinear Qurʾān translation in Turkmen dialect (most likely belonging to the 5th-8th/11th-14th centuries) preserved in the Central Library of Astan Quds Razavi, Mashhad, Iran, see Emek Üşenmez, "Türkçe İlk Kurʾân Tercemelerinden Meşhed Nüshası Satır Arası Türkçe-Farsça Tercümeı (No: 2229) (Orta Türkçe)", *Turkish Studies* 12/3 (2017), 717-772. Also, for a comparative assessment of five manuscripts of Qurʾān translation, all of which were produced in Khwārazm Turkish, see Mustafa Argunşah, "Harezm Türkçesiyle Yapılan Kurʾân Çevirisinin Beş Nüshası", *Uluslararası Türkçe Edebiyat Kültür Eğitim Dergisi (TEKE)* 8/2 (2019), 654-698.

[45] A detailed case has been made in support of the theory Abdülkadir İnan and Zeki Velidi Togan put forward in 1952 and 1960, respectively, that the language of the Rylands manuscript of the Qurʾān translation is Qarakhanid Turkish. For this, see Aysu Ata, *Karahanlı Türkçesinde İlk Kurʾân Tercümesi (Rylands Nüshası - Giriş, Metin, Notlar, Dizin)* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2013).

[46] Eckmann, "Eastern Turkic Translations", 156.

Turkic translation produced by Turkish council members, contemporaneously with the Persian one.[47] Later, these interlinear translations were taken to Anatolia by scholars who fled Khurasan and Khwārazm because of the Mongol invasion, paving the way for new translations in western dialects of Turkish to come out after the 8th/14th century.[48]

2.3. Exegetical "Translation"

One final approach to the issue of translation was that of the exegetical/explanatory translation of the Qurʾān. This approach, which involves a concise commentary on the Qurʾān in a language other than Arabic, was never legally forbidden,[49] despite the lack of early attested examples. This genre has three categories in Turkish: The first category, which first appeared in Anatolia around the 8th/14th century,[50] includes literal translations of well-known Arabic *tafsīr* books. The second category consists of loose translations of these *tafsīr* works adapted for particular audiences, often with some added commentary by the translator and additional material from other sources. Ottoman examples in this category date back to the 11th/17th century. Most of these works were produced by translators who were also Qurʾānic scholars. One such work, and one this article addresses at some length below, is *Tibyān*, which was translated by a *mufassir*. Although rarer, a few such works were created by non-*mufassir* authors who possessed some particular linguistic expertise rather than a background in the Qurʾānic sciences. *Mawākib*, the other work discussed below, is of this kind since it was translated into Turkish from a Persian *tafsīr* by a man not considered an Islamic scholar. The final category, which came into existence only in the early 14th/20th century, covers short exegetical books written in Turkish as original works. Although none of these categories was created as an explicit translation of the Qurʾān, they all contained translations of Qurʾānic verses that were found in the texts of the translated or originally written

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47 Zeki Velidi Togan, "Londra ve Tahran'daki İslami Yazmalardan Bazılarına Dair", *İslam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi* 3/1-2 (1959-1960), 135.

48 For a study on this kind of Qurʾānic translation, see Ahmet Topaloğlu, *Muḥammed b. Hamza XV. Yüzyıl Başlarında Yapılmış Satırarası Kur'an Tercümesi* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1976).

49 Muḥammad al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1389/1969), 1/22.

50 İnan, *Kur'ân-ı Kerim'in Türkçe Tercemeleri*, 15.

commentaries. A discerning reader could pick out those verse translations from the text, and these works thus represented a de facto form of Qurʾānic translation.

The first state-run printing press under the Ottomans was established in 1139/1727, more than two centuries after the first, with the permission of Sultan Aḥmed III (d. 1149/1736) and, more significantly, the approval of the *sheikh al-Islām*.[51] Both Sheikh al-Islām ʿAbd Allāh Efendī's (d. 1156/1743) fatwá and the Sultan's edict (*farmān*) explicitly stated that establishing such a press company was permissible as long as religious books were not published.[52]

In the absence of a translation, an Ottoman reader could learn about the meaning of the Qurʾān through study circles for the general public organized in mosques by scholars and imams. Those who were luckier studied the Qurʾān in a madrasah. The rural population had the opportunity to encounter traveling preachers, in particular during the three holy months. Literate people, meanwhile, could read scattered translations of certain Qurʾānic verses or passages cited in various genres of Turkish-Islamic literature, or in one of the few *tafsīr* books translated from Arabic. The best-known of these books was the *Tafsīr* of Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983).[53] However, given their length and complexity, these works were not intended for a general audience. Because of the early ban on Islamic publishing, which was first broken by the Bulaq Press in 1820 in Cairo, publishing various religious books in Turkish, which was only lifted at the end of the thirteenth/nineteenth century in Istanbul, ordinary people found it difficult to obtain a copy of these massive volumes, which were produced by hired calligraphers. Additionally, there were some fragmentary *tafsīr* books in Turkish dating back to the 4th/10th century, interpreting certain chapters of the Qurʾān, such as *al-Fātiḥah*, *al-Yā-sīn*, and *al-Mulk*.[54]

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[51] Osman Ersoy, *Türkiye'ye Matbaanın Girişi ve İlk Basılan Eserler* (Ankara: Güven Basımevi, 1959), 33.

[52] Şeyhülislam Yenişehirli Abdullah Efendi, *Behcetü'l-Fetâvâ*, ed. Süleyman Kaya et al. (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2011), 557-58; Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2022), 57; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 51.

[53] İnan, *Kur'ân-ı Kerîm'in Türkçe Tercemeleri*, 15.

[54] İnan, *Kur'ân-ı Kerîm'in Türkçe Tercemeleri*, 14.

3. The Emergence of Hybrid Qurʾān Translations: *Tibyān* and *Mawākib*

In terms of Qurʾān translations, this state of affairs began to change in the late 11ᵗʰ/17ᵗʰ century. Initially, not the Qurʾān itself, but certain short commentaries on the Qurʾān were translated into Turkish and adapted for an Ottoman readership. These sorts of adapted works were often based on contributions from multiple authors and were fairly common in different fields of Ottoman Islamic literature. A scholar could pick an original book in any field and add to it his own contributions along with quotes he acquired from various sources, or he could merge the original text and his own commentary under what was often a hybrid title. In doing so, he did not feel obliged to mention his references precisely.

Two widely accepted *tafsīr* books used as Qurʾān translations were *Tafsīr-i Tibyān* and *Mawākib*. The first was composed by ʿAyntābī Meḥmed Efendī as a translation of an Arabic *tafsīr* called *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, written by Khaḍr ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Azdī (d. 773/1371).[55] However, ʿAyntābī's translation was highly composite, drawing on certain *tafsīr* books such as the *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* of al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), *Maʿālim al-tanzīl* of al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), *al-Durr al-manthūr* of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and *Anwār al-tanzīl* of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), as well as some other Islamic masterworks like Ibn al-ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* and al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Iḥyāʾ*. In his translation, ʿAyntābī edited out the original author's particular interpretations, as well as certain details concerning Arabic grammar and readings of the Qurʾān (*qirāʾāt*). He also tried to create a popular discourse full of parables, reports, and anecdotes (*al-manāqib*, *al-aḥādīth*, and *al-āthār*).

A good illustration of ʿAyntābī's style is his Turkish translation of Āl ʿImrān 3/7. In the text below, the italicized parts in brackets serve as a veiled, literal translation of the verse. The other parts are mostly based on al-Azdī's original text with a few modifications.

However, (وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ اِلَّا اللّٰهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ اٰمَنَّا بِهٖ) [Allah knows the interpretation of the ambiguous verses (mutashābihāt), and so do those who are firmly grounded in

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55   The manuscript is preserved in the Süleymaniye Library, Nuruosmaniye Collection (34 NK 244: 2a-363b.).

knowledge. They] additionally [say, "We believe in it."] What supports this explanation is a report from Ibn ʿAbbās, who said, "I am the first to be among those who are firmly grounded in knowledge", implying that he knew the interpretation of those verses. Mujāhid also stated that he was one of the people who understood the meanings of the mutashābihāt. Notwithstanding that, according to the majority, the meaning of this verse is that no one knows the true interpretation of the mutashābihāt except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say, "We believe in it".[56]

In this passage, ʿAyntābī appears to have taken the initiative to translate a highly contested verse based on a specific interpretation, according to which not only God but also some individuals with deep knowledge would have the authority to know the ultimate meanings of the Qurʾān's ambiguous passages. In the second part, he refers to the majority view, which is also shared by al-Azdī,[57] the author of the original text, that only God knows the true meaning of the Qurʾānic allegories. However, by positioning this view only after his own reading, ʿAyntābī critically alters the source book's point of view, thereby privileging an interpretation that would have been more welcome in *taṣawwuf*-friendly Ottoman culture.

Another aspect ʿAyntābī ignores is that al-Azdī's reference in the text to "those individuals with profound knowledge" in this context are none other than Jewish scholars.[58] Accordingly, the broad meaning of the verse, according to al-Azdī, is as follows: "Allah knows the true meaning of the ambiguous verses. And those who have sound knowledge about the Torah would say, 'We believe in it.'". Given the vast gulf between this and his own translation, ʿAyntābī was not a typical translator.

Because of the unique contributions of its translator, some researchers consider ʿAyntābī's *Tibyān* a stand-alone work. Even the library indexes are ambivalent about whether to list ʿAyntābī as the

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[56] ʿAyntābī Meḥmed Efendī, *Tafsīr-i Tibyān* (İstanbul: Maṭbaʿah-ʾi ʿĀmirah, 1306/1889), 1/235. (English translation, emphasis, and punctuation by the author.)

[57] Khaḍr ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Azdī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, Süleymaniye Library, Nuruosmaniye (34 NK 244: 2a-363b), 46b.

[58] Al-Azdī, *al-Tibyān*, 46b.

book's author or just a translator. This question, "Is ʿAyntābī an author or a translator?"[59] raises a series of others about the text's hybrid character. Is his work an original composition or a translation? If it is a translation, is it a translation of the Qurʾān itself or a translation of a *tafsīr* book written on the Qurʾān? Or is it simply an all-in-one work?

In the introduction of his work, ʿAyntābī wrote that he was introduced to Sultan Meḥmed IV (d. 1004/1693) by Sheikh al-Islām Minqārīzādah Yaḥyá Efendī (d. 1088/1678) and that the Sultan asked him to prepare a Qurʾān translation with due care for all the features of the original text. He also stated that the Sultan gifted him four volumes of *tafsīr* books and ten volumes of works on the Arabic language, apparently to assist him in his task. After finishing his work in 1109/1698, ʿAyntābī prepared two handwritten copies, one for Sultan Meḥmed IV and another for the benefit of the general public.[60] *Tibyān*'s popularity grew as a Qurʾānic quasi-translation, especially after it was published in 1889 by Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-ʿĀmirah, the Ottoman State Printing House. In the preface of the 1906 edition, the book is said to have been such a well-esteemed book that everyone desired to obtain a copy of it as a wonderful treasure, owing to the translation's clear Turkish and the translator's sincerity. *Tibyān* inspired scholars and publishers to create several similar works in the future.[61]

The Sultan played a significant part in this translation. He desired a translation that would truly represent the Qurʾān's linguistic characteristics, which was something that did not align well with the viewpoint of traditional Islamic law. Meḥmed IV was very interested in translation issues. He saw translation as a means of cultural breakthrough during that period. The Hebrew Bible was also translated into Turkish in 1666 by ʿAlī Ufqī Beg, his chief translator.[62]

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[59] İsmail Çalışkan, "Tefsîrî Mehmed Efendi'nin *Tefsîr-i Tibyân* Adlı Eserinin Osmanlı Dönemi Tefsir Faaliyetindeki Yeri ve Dönemin Siyasi-Sosyal Yapısı İçin Anlamı", *Osmanlı Toplumunda Kurʾân Kültürü ve Tefsir Çalışmaları I*, ed. Bilal Gökkır et al. (İstanbul: İlim Yayma Vakfı, 2011), 226.

[60] ʿAyntābī, *Tibyān*, 1/3-4.

[61] Hidayet Aydar, *Kurʾân-ı Kerim'in Tercümesi Meselesi* (İstanbul: Kurʾân Okulu Yayıncılık, 1996), 142.

[62] The original manuscript is preserved in the Leiden University Library (Cod. Or. 1101a-f.)

Mawākib, the other commentary-translation I address here, is primarily a Turkish translation of *al-Mawāhib al-ʿaliyyah*, which was originally authored in Persian by Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Wāʿiẓ al-Kāshifī al-Harawī (d. 910/1505). The book's translator, Ismāʿīl Farrūkh Efendī, did not belong to the class of the *ʿulamāʾ*. As a retired ambassador, he was fond of Persian-Islamic literature and authored a Turkish commentary on Rūmī's *Mathnawī*.[63] That might be why he chose a Persian book to translate rather than an Arabic one. In fact, the Ottoman legacy has always been attracted to Persian literature as well as Arabic Islamic literature. Thus, the interest in *al-Mawāhib* might be seen as a sign of the Ottoman affinity with the Persian-speaking cultural hinterland because of the work's Persian character and Khurasan origin.

Al-Wāʿiẓ al-Kāshifī, the author of the original work, was also an interesting figure. As implied by his famous title, al-Wāʿiẓ, he was a preacher who actively participated in *daʿwah* in Khurasan, especially in Herat and Nishapur.[64] His books, most notably *al-Mawāhib*, spread through India under the name of *Tafsīr-i Ḥusaynī* and were translated into the languages of neighboring regions, including Urdu, Pashtu,[65] and some Turkic dialects such as Chagatay.[66] Since the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry had not yet culminated in bloody wars during his lifetime, al-Wāʿiẓ al-Kāshifī managed to address Sunnī and Shīʿī Muslims at the same time. That is why both Sunnī and Shīʿī biographers list him among the scholars of their respective *madhhab*s. He adopted an inclusive approach that he learned from Sufi masters and mystics in the region, such as Mullā Jāmī (Mawlānā Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān) (d. 897/1492) and ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī (d. 907/1501), to whom he reputedly dedicated his work, as the word *al-ʿaliyya* in the title implies.[67]

Like ʿAyntābī, Ismāʿīl Farrūkh Efendī enriched his translation with quotations from popular *tafsīr* books such as al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-*

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[63] Bursalı Meḥmed Ṭāhir, *ʿUthmānlī Muʾalliflarī* (İstanbul: Maṭbaʿah-ʾi ʿĀmirah, 1333/1915), 1/394-395.

[64] Adnan Karaismailoğlu, "Hüseyin Vâiz-i Kâşifî", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1999), 19/16-19.

[65] Karaismailoğlu, "Hüseyin Vâiz-i Kâşifî", 19/17.

[66] A manuscript of the Chagatay translation of *al-Mawāhib* is preserved in Topkapı Museum, the Library of Ahmed III, collection no. 16.

[67] Abdulhamit Birışık, "Osmanlıca Tefsir Tercümeleri ve Hüseyin Vâiz-i Kâşifî'nin *Mevâhib-i Aliyye*'si", *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi* 17/1 (2004), 67.

tanzīl, al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*, and *al-Khāzin's Lubāb al-taʾwīl*. He also greatly benefited from *Tafsīr-i Tibyān*.

Ismāʿīl Farrūkh translates al-Baqarah 2/249 as follows:

> [When Ṭālūt and his troops set out] from Holy Jerusalem, because of what he was informed about by the prophet or inspiration, [he said, "Indeed, Allah has tested] and tried [you with a river. So, whoever drinks from it is not of me] or my followers; [and whoever does not drink from it is of me! Only those who drink one sip with their hands are exempt!" Upon that, they all drank from it; just a few of them drank once with their hands.] Accordingly, [Ṭālūt crossed the river along with those who believed.] Since they were very few in number, while Jālūt's army was so large, [they said, "Today, we have no power against them] since we are in such a situation". [Those who were certain that] by performing this jihād, [they would meet Allah] and be closer to him, [said, "How many a small group has defeated a large group by Allah's permission] and demand[?] [Allah]'s support [is with the patient ones!"][68]

Following this passage, Ismāʿīl Farrūkh gives additional information about the river's location, the number of the soldiers of Ṭālūt, and the difficulties they faced crossing it. One very intriguing point about *Mawākib* is that it was very generous about narratives of foreign origin (*isrāʾīliyyāt*) in line with its aforementioned sources. It sometimes narrates stories that are not included in *al-Mawāhib* as in the interpretation of Q 2/59.[69]

This has rendered it partly unsuitable for modern readers because the opinion of *isrāʾīliyyāt* in *tafsīr* has ideologically changed in Turkey over the last century, due to modernist readings that tend to consider the Qurʾān as a guideline speaking to today, rather than a narrative about ancient times,[70] the concept of scientific *tafsīr*, the political atmosphere after the establishment of Israel in 1949, or neo-Salafist

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[68] Ismāʿīl Farrūkh Efendī, *Tafsīr-i Mawākib* (İstanbul: Maṭbaʿah-ʾi Baḥriyyah, 1323/1905), 40. (English translation, emphasis, and punctuation by the author.)

[69] Ismāʿīl Farrūkh, *Mawākib*, 8.

[70] İsmail Kara, "Türkiye'de Din ve Modernleşme (Modernleşme Teşebbüslerinin Dinîleşmesi) -Metodolojik Temel Problemler-", *Modernleşme, İslâm Dünyası ve Türkiye: Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmî Toplantı*, ed. Sabri Orman (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2001), 193-194.

perspectives that limit the religious authority to the Qurʾān and hadith.[71] Elmalılı's approach may provide insights into the change in attitudes toward *isrāʾīliyyāt* in *tafsīr* literature; he uses *isrāʾīliyyāt* limitedly, mostly under the name of *asāṭīr al-awwalīn* (stories of the ancients).[72] Despite the length of his *Hak Dini Kur'ân Dili*, Elmalılı has not given as many details about the origin of *isrāʾīliyyāt* as Ismāʿīl Farrūkh did about Q 2/249. In his interpretation of Q 5/27-28, "And recite to them the story of Adam's two sons, in truth, when they both offered a sacrifice …" too, he does not go into details about Adam's sons, which came up in the traditional *tafsīr* books; instead, he openly states that the benefitting from these verses does not depend on the determination of their identities.[73]

Tâhirü'l-Mevlevî (1877-1951), a litterateur of Persian who later undertook translating *al-Mawāhib* but could not finish it, criticized Ismāʿīl Farrūkh's translation on the grounds that he did not adhere to the original text's framework by excluding some parables full of wisdom and morals.[74] Tâhirü'l-Mevlevî's criticism is based on al-Wāʿiż al-Kāshifī having drawn on a wide range of Persian material, including poetry and mystic insights, that he gathered from Sufi figures such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1329), Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 627/1230), and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273)[75]; however, Ismāʿīl Farrūkh excluded many of these quotes while organizing his work. This explains why *al-Mawāhib* was translated into Turkish many times by multiple translators. Other than Abū l-Faḍl Meḥmed Efendī (d. 982/1574), who translated *al-Mawāhib* into Turkish before Ismāʿīl Farrūkh, there were also Selanikli ʿAlī ibn Walī (d. 999/1590), Sheikh ʿUmar ʿAdūlī

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[71] Ronald Nettler, "A Post-Colonial Encounter of Traditions: Muhammad Saʿīd al-Ashmāwī on Islam and Judaism", *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations* (London: Routledge, 1995), 176-179; Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 176, 182.

[72] Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dîni Kur'ân Dili*, ed. Asım Cüneyd Köksal - Murat Kaya (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2021), 3/90.

[73] Yazır, *Hak Dîni Kur'ân Dili*, 610.

[74] Tâhirü'l-Mevlevî, "Mawlānā Ḥusayn Wāʿiz wa-Tafsīr-i Ḥusaynī", *Bayān al-Ḥaqq* (21 Shaʿbān 1327/24 August 1909), 916.

[75] Kristin Zahra Sands, "On the Popularity of Husayn Vaʿiz-i Kashifi's *Mavāhib-i ʿaliyya*: A Persian Commentary on the Qur'an", *Iranian Studies* 36/4 (December 2003), 470.

Nighdawī (d. 1044/1635), Ghurābzādah Aḥmad al-Nāsiḥ (d. 1099/1688), and Muḥammad Ṣādiq Īmānqulī (d. 1911). Except for Abū l-Faḍl's faithful translation, *Tarjamah-ʾi Tafsīr-i Mawāhib-i ʿAliyyah*,[76] these works differed from one another in their reconstruction of the entire material, including the translation of *al-Mawāhib*'s text and the additional explanations. Ismāʿīl Farrūkh seems to have used the freedom he had in his translation to favor *isrāʾīliyyāt* and to have transmitted literary quotations in a much more limited way.

Tibyān and *Mawākīb* may initially be categorized as short *tafsīr* translations since they featured some extra material going beyond an ordinary Qurʾān translation; however, they did not really fit into any of the categories of encyclopedic, madrasah-style, or *ḥāshiyah*-style Qurʾān commentaries, as outlined by Walid Saleh.[77] They were neither literal translations of the Qurʾān nor literal translations of short *tafsīr* volumes produced in other languages. They were, rather, a mixture of both or a kind of creative translation that reconstructs a scope of brief interpretation (*maʾāl*) beyond what the original text provided, functioning differently according to demand and local sensibilities. Thus, if a Qurʾān translation was needed, they could be used as one; but if there was an accusation of a literal translating of the Qurʾān –a potentially heretical act– they could also be downplayed as merely a translated *tafsīr*. In the late Ottoman context, they were ambiguous, polysemous works that could be read in many ways, much like the broader process of Ottoman modernization that was extended to modern Turkey.

Susan Gunasti speaks of how some translations of the Qurʾān commentaries emerged in the 19th-century non-Arabic reading context, tending to be a cross between an interpretive Qurʾān translation and a summary Qurʾān commentary. Written in a relatively easier vernacular, as she said, they do not fall under the abovementioned categories but deserve to be treated as a subgenre of *tafsīr* in their own right.[78] The

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[76] Ersin Çelik, "19. Yüzyılda Bir Tefsir Klasiğinin Farsçadan Türkçeye Tercümesi: İsmâil Ferrûh Efendi'nin Tefsîr-i Mevâkib Adlı Eseri", *Sahn-ı Semân'dan Dârülfünûn'a XIX. Yüzyıl Osmanlı'da İlim ve Fikir Dünyası*, ed. Ahmet Hamdi Furat (İstanbul: Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2021), 248.

[77] Walid Saleh, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of *tafsīr* in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach", *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 12 (2010), 20-21.

[78] Susan Gunasti, *The Qurʾān between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic: An Exegetical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2019), 39.

13th-14th/19th-20th centuries witnessed an increase in the number of these kinds of works. The distinction between translation and exegesis, however, was not always evident.[79] Apparently, both *Tibyān* and *Mawākib* represent two typical examples of this genre. Therefore, just like the interlinear ones, these books might be seen as Qurʾān translations within the understanding of translation (*tarjamah*) at the time. With reference to the Qurʾān, as Travis Zadeh stresses, translations in the medieval period were different from those in modern times, since there were discrepancies, amendments, and adaptations between a vernacular Qurʾān commentary translation and its original. Such differences were still understood as part of the practice of translation.[80]

4. Toward Modern Qurʾān Translations: Between Pan-Islamism and Secularism

The Qurʾān's translation into various languages was the subject of contention in the early 14th/20th century, notably in Egypt and Istanbul. The debate on Qurʾānic translation, which was sparked by a few articles published in magazines like *al-Manār* and *Majallat al-Azhar* and featured in several books and *risālah*s, was, despite seeming to be a theological issue, basically about whether Islam should embrace the concept of the modern nation-state with new political references.

The Ottoman mass-publishing industry blossomed in 1908 and 1909, the last two years of the reign of Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II (1842-1918), when he no longer exercised the firm authority of his earlier reign.[81] The articles published during this period presented new ideas about the constitution and citizenship. Who is an Ottoman citizen? Are Muslims the only true citizens of the caliphate, or must all Ottoman subjects, regardless of creed or ethnicity, be considered citizens with equal rights? At the turn of the 14th/20th century, some intellectual figures wanted to highlight the Turkish character of the Ottoman state, something it had not been identified with during its classical periods, and wanted the Turkish language to be more present and prevalent in

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[79]   Gunasti, *The Qurʾān between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, 39.
[80]   Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾān*, 314.
[81]   Server İskit, *Türkiye'de Matbuat İdareleri ve Politikaları* (Ankara: Başvekalet Basın Yayın Umum Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 1943), 142-152.

the state and public life. Like many others, Aḥmed Midḥat Efendī[82] (1844-1912) advocated for a Turkish translation of the Qurʾān as well as a new *tafsīr* that would be written directly in Turkish rather than translated from Arabic. The proposal was basically promoted by the secular groups classified as "Westernists" and by nationalist circles. They were more interested in decentralizing traditional political authority in the country than in making the meanings of the Qurʾān more accessible for pious reasons. The traditional Islamic faith was one of the most significant components of the sultanate regime. Some Islamic figures who were likely impressed by the Qurʾānist discourse of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-1897) and Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905) also supported the idea of translation. Mehmed Akif Ersoy (1873-1936) was probably one of the most prominent followers of the path of al-Afghānī and ʿAbduh. Meanwhile, Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), another follower of ʿAbduh, considered the translation of the Qurʾān a deviation from the consensus of the past thirteen centuries. To him, as opposed to the Seljuks and the Buwayhids, the Ottomans used Turkish instead of Arabic in their official records, which kept the nationalistic inclinations alive in the hearts of some people who eventually demanded the change of the Qurʾān's language.[83] Rashīd Riḍā also reported that he heard about the idea of Qurʾān translations from Meḥmed ʿUbayd Allāh Efendī (1858-1937),[84] who told him that the mission of the Prophet would come true if only the Qurʾān was translated into all languages.[85] Another person Rashīd Riḍā debated Qurʾān translations with was Ṭalʿat Pasha (1874-1921), the then Minister of the Interior.[86] However, the proposals did not resonate with the general public. Since Islamic law would not have objected to the proposal for a Turkish *tafsīr*, it might have had a better chance of being

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[82] For an assessment of Aḥmed Midḥat Efendī's role in the Ottoman intellectual transformation, see Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey,* 189-191.

[83] Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār,* 9/271.

[84] ʿUbayd Allāh Efendī was a member of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti). During his exile before 1914, the year he was chosen for the Ottoman parliament (*Majlis-i Mabʿūthān),* he stayed in Egypt for a short time in 1908. That is when he must have had the chance to meet with Rashīd Riḍā. For details, see Ahmet Turan Alkan, "Ubeydullah Efendi", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), 42/20-22.

[85] ʿUbayd Allāh Afghānī, *Qawm-i Jadīd* (İstanbul: Shams Maṭbaʿahsi, 1332/1914), 15-18.

[86] Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār,* 9/273.

realized than the other proposal for a direct Qurʾān translation. However, neither of these proposals was realized. The real power behind the denial or obstruction of the Turkish *tafsīr* project was Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II himself. Apparently, he thought the Turkification of the Qurʾān, one way or another, would undermine his pan-Islamist politics and his concept of citizenship. This kind of demand, in his eyes, would only lead to the division of the Ottoman state. A close friend of the sultan and well-known conservative figure, Muṣṭafá Ṣabrī, wrote three articles in opposition to the proposal in 1908. He started one of them by saying, "I am sure that I will be labeled as an obstructer of a benevolent deed, yet I oppose it".[87]

During this turbulent period, the Qurʾān was at the center of the debates over its contents and language. In a time when demands for a Turkish translation and *tafsīr* were not met by the state and *ʿulamāʾ*, the void was being filled predominantly by *Tibyān* and *Mawākib*. After its first publication by the Bulaq Press in 1840, among other religious books that were prohibited from being printed in Istanbul, *Tibyān* had reached vast masses. It was printed sixteen times in Ottoman-Arabic script, nine of them in Istanbul and seven in Egypt. Even after the modern Qurʾānic translations appeared on the market in the $14^{th}/20^{th}$ century, it maintained its reputation and has been printed three times in romanized script: a simplified version by Süleyman Fahir in 1956 and 1963 and an annotated one by Ahmed Davudoğlu (1912-1983). These editions were reprinted several times after 1980.[88] *Mawākib*, in turn, was published at least fifteen times in the late Ottoman period and was romanized and printed several times during the Republican era. *Tibyān* and *Mawākib* were also printed together in four editions issued between 1900 and 1906.[89] Two advertisements for these joint editions that appeared in *IIqdām* on 6 July 1900 and 24 December 1900[90] reveal the readership's interest in *Tibyān* and *Mawākib*. Arpa also cites two

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[87] Muṣṭafá Ṣabrī, "Kur'ân-ı Kerim İçin Türkçe Bir Tefsir Yazmak Meselesi", *Millet* (September 2, 1908), 29-30.

[88] Seyfettin Özege, *Eski Harflerle Basılmış Türkçe Eserler Kataloğu* (İstanbul: Fatih Yayınevi, 1977), 4/1785-1825.

[89] Muhammed Hamidullah, *Kur'ân'ı Kerim Tarihi*, trans. Salih Tuğ (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2000), 197.

[90] Recep Arpa, "Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Osmanlı Gazete ve Dergilerinde Yer Alan Tefsir İlanları", *Usul İslam Araştırmaları* 16/16 (December 2011), 29, 31.

other advertisements of *Mawākib* alone, which were published in *Taqwîm-i Waqāyi'* in 1865 and 1870.[91]

The political perspective on the translation of the Qurʾān, paradoxically, changed from the last ten years of the Ottomans to the first ten years of the Republic of Turkey. While Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd in the 1910s did all in his power to block translation attempts, Mustafa Kemal in the 1920s vigorously campaigned for a Turkish translation. The former opposed it to keep the Ottoman state as an Islamic nation (*ummah*). The latter, however, supported it to create a new political identity under the Turkish nation.

What is striking at this point is that the Turkish-speaking modern Islamists, who are mostly fans of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II, seemed perfectly happy to have a Qurʾānic translation in their tongue, even though, from ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's "Islamic" or "Islamist" perspective, it seemed a poor idea at the time. On the other hand, ten years later, from the secular perspective of Atatürk, the Qurʾān translation became a vital step to take, not for the benefit of an Islamic or Islamist agenda, but for the interest of a secular agenda.

Mehmed Akif, the eloquent author of Turkey's newly accepted national anthem, was formally tasked with translating the Qurʾān into Turkish. According to the contract made in 1925 between the Presidency of Religious Affairs and Mehmed Akif and his colleague Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (1878-1942), after the former completed his Qurʾān translation, the latter was to prepare a Turkish *tafsīr* based on his translation.[92] Akif traveled to Egypt in 1926, probably for a more comfortable study setting. While studying in Egypt, he unilaterally terminated the contract with the government in 1932,[93] possibly fearing that his translation might be used in the so-called Turkish prayer project.[94] This was the same year that it became mandatory to recite the call to prayer in Turkish instead of Arabic, and Muṣṭafá Ṣabrī Efendī, a

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[91] Arpa, "Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Osmanlı Gazete ve Dergilerinde Yer Alan Tefsir İlanları", 33.

[92] For a copy of the contract dated 26 November 1925, see Mehmet Ünal, "Bir Mukâvele'nin Serencâmı: Mehmed Akif'in Akîim Kalan Meâli Üzerine", *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* 44/1 (January-February-March 2008), 27-29.

[93] Eşref Edip, *Mehmed Akif: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Yetmiş Muharririn Yazıları* (İstanbul: Sebilürreşad Neşriyatı, 1962), 109.

[94] Dücane Cündioğlu, *Türkçe Kur'ân ve Cumhuriyet İdeolojisi* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 1998), 10-20.

former Ottoman *sheikh al-Islām* and a furious exiled dissident of the Republic, published a book in Egypt titled *Masʾalat tarjamat al-Qurʾān*, which adopted a position against translation. After Akif resigned, Hamdi Yazır prepared a Turkish translation of the Qurʾān and a *tafsīr*, which were published together in 1938, the same year that Atatürk passed away, under the title *Hak Dini Kur'ân Dili*.

After 1928, when the alphabet was changed from Arabic to Latin, *Tibyān* and *Mawākib* remained out of print because of their Arabic letters. This was a de facto ban on two books. When they were romanized and published in the 1950s, other translations and *tafsīr* books were in circulation. Due to their out-of-date styles and languages, they have lost their popularity to the point that, in today's Turkey, neither *Tibyān* nor *Mawākib* is well-known to the general public, among the many contemporary Qurʾān translations.

Conclusion

There is no attestation of any request or attempt to translate the whole Qurʾān into another language during the early centuries of Islam. The belief in the Qurʾān's *iʿjāz,* which stated that nothing can be produced like it in Arabic, led the theological discourse to suggest that translating it into other languages was also impossible. The reasons given by scholars for rejecting this endeavor make a long list.

Leaving aside Abū Ḥanīfah's controversial and still in many ways mysterious view that translations of the Qurʾānic verses can be recited in worship, the entire translation of the Qurʾān was met with resistance by Islamic law and theology for centuries before modernity. However, scholars found two intermediate formulas for those who want to access the meaning of the Qurʾān. First, in approximately the eleventh century, interlinear translations of the Qurʾān were prepared for Persian readers. These translations later extended to Turkish and numerous other languages. These books, commonly referred to as tarjamah, cannot be considered typical translations. Rather, they serve as study books for readers with some Arabic knowledge, enabling them to relate to the Quran. The second intermediate solution entails the adaptation of short Tafsir translations from Arabic and Persian into the target language, functioning as Qurʾānic translations.

Two of the most well-known works in this transitional genre among Ottoman readers are *Tibyān* and *Mawākib*. Some may still view these

volumes as exegetical works. However, because they include an "embedded translation" of the Qurʾān, they could also be viewed as Qurʾān translations that were intentionally designed to overcome the theological limitations of their era. These transitional genres made way for contemporary translations of the Qurʾān in the following century. The Qurʾānic text has been a topic of discussion during this entire process from various perspectives, including Islamic law, theology, politics, national and cultural identity, nationalism, and secularism.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

FUNDING

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