

BOOK REVIEWS

The Quran Beheld: An English Translation from the Arabic: The Book of Allah in Arabic with English Text and Appendices by Nuh Ha Mim Keller. NP: Stanchion Press, MMXXII; lvi + 731; ISBN 978-1-909460-97-3

Any Muslim embarking on the impossible task of translating the Speech of Allah (kalām Allāh) Most High begins the journey with trepidation and ends with acknowledgment of failure. Some leave their effort unfinished; others persevere for years and finally produce a work that, regardless of its failures, can still potentially benefit millions of human beings by opening paths to the message of the Qurʾān which have become inaccessible to them due to linguistic and other inabilities. There is verifiable evidence of the efficacy of certain translations: many have come to the Qurʾān and Islam by reading Yusuf Ali's translation, regardless of its shortcomings. Such is the force of the inherent truth of the last revelation to humankind. Even so, translating the Qurʾān is a high-stakes, hazardous undertaking: just as one can help millions, one can also become a conduit to misguidance and potentially face retributions of unimaginable kind.

Nuh Ha Mim Keller's 15-year journey of the impossible task is documented in the 22-page introduction ("The once and future hermeneutic"), wherein he provides hints of his travail: seven years during which he "went over every word, letter, preposition, inflection, and case-ending in the Quran from beginning to end" with the Amman-based "Sheikh 'Ali Hani Yusuf, a scholar trained in Quranic exegesis and the lexicology, grammar, rhetoric, and other sciences of Arabic" (p. xii)-only to discover that his newly acquired "facility and Sheikh 'Ali's knowledge and skill had increased to the point that repeating the whole procedure might well improve the result. This was effected in another eight years" during which "Sheikh 'Ali worked full-time, as before, in preparation and research without his previous notes. His thirst for exhaustive detail, tenacity for the research required, and even the tone of his delivery of the text and commentary, evoked in the translator something of what it evoked in him, and materially helped. The translator retranslated from scratch everything he heard a second time on the other margin of his Quran's pages" (p. xii-xiii).

From this self-description, it appears that *The Quran Beheld* is, in fact,

the English version of what Nuh Ha Mim Keller understood from the orally delivered Arabic commentary and explanations of the Qurʾān by Sheikh ‘Ali Hani, through “talaqqi or personal word-by-word instruction” (p. xii). Hence, there is a triple operative framework: (i) explanations of the Qurʾānic verses as understood by ‘Ali Hani; (ii) the oral transmission of this understanding to Keller in Arabic; and (iii) Keller’s rendering of his understanding of the Arabic transmission in English.

Given that the original explanations of the Qurʾānic text are by ‘Ali Hani, one would expect his name to be included in the title, but his massive contribution to *The Quran Beheld* is merely acknowledged in the small print of the Introduction (“The Once and Future Hermeneutic”, pp. xi-xxxiii), which further grounds the authority of the English text by declaring that Keller’s wife compared the final version of *The Quran Beheld* with six previous translations (none of which is identified, although we are told they were “among the best”) but all were deemed to be inferior to it because “she found little to take from them, and all six had missed a number of key areas of the Arabic essential to its meaning” (p. xiii).

The claim of superiority of this translation does not stop here. Keller next tells us that, “wanting to know how general such gaps in meaning were in previous translations of the Quran,” he contacted “professor of Islamic Studies and history Ahmad Khan at the American University of Cairo,” who was “preparing an article for journal publication covering the whole sweep of previous English translations, from George Sale’s in 1734 through the end of 2021, and had acquired copies of all of them from various lands, numbering some 135 works, excluding only partial translations, and translations from languages other than Arabic, such as Urdu to English.” Keller informed him what his wife had concluded and the said Professor extended her conclusion to the “entire collection of previous translations... if true, this means the present volume’s interpretive methodology has uncovered matters of Arabic meaning in the Quran that no previous English translation has seriously incorporated” (p. xiv).

This is a rather tendentious claim, not least because there are multiple ways of judging a translation of the untranslatable Qurʾān. The claim that this translation surpasses every one of the existing 135 translations is based on the authority of the translator’s wife and Professor Ahmad; it is unlikely to pass the test of objectivity, especially when-unlike the well-grounded oral Arabic explanations of ‘Ali Hani’s, some of which have been uploaded to the project website-there is no documented evidence of the scholarly accomplishments of the translator’s wife and Professor Ahmad does not seem to have published his article, nor is he known as a scholar of Qurʾān or its translations.¹

1. As per the faculty description of Khan at AUC website, “Ahmad Khan’s research focuses on four fields of inquiry: heresy and orthodoxy in

Substantively, Keller's claim of his translation's superiority rests on the volume's interpretive methodology, which, he says, has "uncovered matters of Arabic meaning in the Quran that no previous English translation has seriously incorporated" (p. xiv). Seven of these are then expounded in the Introduction.

The first "matters of Arabic meaning that no previous English translation has seriously incorporated" is the six distinct ways in which *thumma* is used in the Qur'ān. Keller claims that *thumma* "invariably appears in the past translations as and or then, indicating the simple succession in time between what it conjoins, or the lengthiness of the disparity between their respective times" (p. xiv), whereas "traditional scholars of the Quran...identify a number of different meanings of *thumma*."

He then enumerates six different types of *thumma* in the Qur'ān using an inaccurate translation ("disparity") for *tarākhī*—the term used in the classical sources to indicate a sequential delay with respect to time (*tarākhī zamānī*) or rank (*tarākhī rutbī*), or both. A vast majority of the 342 occurrences of *thumma* in the Qur'ān indicate chronological sequence for which "then or thereafter" suffice, but the point Keller is raising about the usage of *thumma* pertains to the conditions of this delay and its nature: does *thumma* mean a short, long or permanent delay? For example, he translates Q 4:110 as "whoever commits an ill-deed or wrongs himself, then even at length (*thumma*) asks forgiveness of Allah while there is still time, shall find Allah all-forgiving, all compassionate" (emphasis in the original). (p. xiv)

There are only three, not six types of *thumma* in the Qur'ān, because the other three are subsets of the primary types, as indicated by al-Suyūṭī in Type 40 of his *Itqān*. Notwithstanding Keller's somewhat ingenious numbering and his inaccurate translation and transliteration of *tarākhī*, this attention to the nuanced usage of *thumma* in the Qur'ān is important, well-known and fully explicated and documented in many early *tafsīrs*. The term *tarākhī* (from the root *t-r-kh*, indicates a delay not disparity (cf. Azharī, *Tāj al-Urūs*) and it is used to indicate delay which can be (i) with respect to time (*tarākhī zamānī*); (ii) rank (*tarākhī rutbī*); or (iii), both time and rank (*tarākhī zamānī wa rutbī*). All three have one subtype. Keller correctly mentions that "this information can be found "in the greatest of the classical exegeses in situ at the verses," but instead of a classical work on the subject, he cites a short article in Arabic ("the excellent Min asrar huruf al-'atf fi al-dhikr al-Hakim: al-fa'wa *thumma* by Muhammad al-Amin al-Khudari of Azhar", pp. xv), which does not help non-Arabic speaking readers of *The Quran Beheld*.

medieval Islam (8th-11th C.E.); the early Islamic empire (8th-10th C.E.); classical Islamic sciences (hadith, tafsir, sufism, and Islamic law); and print in the Islamic world, (19th-21st C.E.). <https://www.aucegypt.edu/fac/ahmadkhan>, accessed March 28, 2023.

The claim Keller makes is factually incorrect as well. Even a random set of examples would suffice: Keller translates Q 20: 82 as *And verily I am ever-forgiving to whoever repents and believes and works righteousness, then ever after remains [thumma] firmly guided*. The adverb *thumma* here does not convey chronological sequence, as already explained by Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (745-794/ca.1344-1392) in his *Burhān*, because guidance is prior to belief and righteous deeds, not after them. Thus *thumma* here means they perpetually remain on guidance (*dāma* ‘*ala-l-hidāya*).² Keller’s translation (*then ever after remains firmly guided*) conveys something of this meaning, but so do several other translations, some arguably more elegantly: *thereafter keeps to the right path* (Asad); *then continues to follow the right guidance* (Shakir); *then persists on true guidance*” (Mustafa Khattab); *then remains guided (till death)* (Abdul Hay); *then stays steadfast* (Munir Munshey); *and thereafter letteth himself remain guided* (Daryabadi). Thus, the declarative assertion-all past translators “invariably” mistranslate *thumma*, thereby impoverishing their translations and needing a new one to set it right-seems to have been overstated, to say the least.

His claim about the other six “matters of Arabic meaning that no previous English translation has seriously incorporated” is equally without merit. These six “matters” are: (i) the emphatic indefinite; (ii) reversed masculine and feminine forms; (iii) demonstrative pronouns for respect or contempt; (iv) adverbs of chronology *qabl*, *min qabl*, *ba’d*, and others; (v) plurals of paucity and plenitude; and (vi) Arabic lexicology and etymology.

This is an ad hoc list. Al-Suyūṭī actually devotes a whole *Type* (number 40) to a discussion of the *adwāt*, wherein he lists 80 such “meanings, which every *mufasssīr* must know.

It is beyond the scope of this review to examine each claim, but it is important to comment on two.

The emphatic indefinite, according to Keller, has been “uniformly rendered in previous translations in the same way it is normally denoted in English: by the decidedly unemphatic indefinite article *a* or *an* before them. (p. xv; emphasis in the original). He cites the example of Q 5:31, “And Allah sent a crow (ghuraban) probing the earth (fī al-ard), to show him how to hide the shameful remains of his brother”, and comments: “the word ‘crow’ is indefinite, that is, any sort of crow; while the earth is definite, namely the earth beneath our feet, which we all know.” (p. xv, emphasis in the original). The point Keller is raising here is explained by him as: “Now, the primary meaning of the *nakira* (indefinite) in Arabic is ‘not known’, it is the opposite of the grammatical term *ma’rifa* (definite) or known, marked by *al-* or ‘the.’ But in Quranic Arabic, the indefinite’s signifying ‘not known’ often means its subject

2. Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1404/1984), *Type* 49.

is in some way unheard-of. Put simply, such an indefinite noun is not unemphatic, as it is in English, but emphatic to the utmost”.

Keller then claims that this kind of emphatic meaning is “found 6,100 times in the Qur’ān in 3,520 of its verse, or 56 percent of them: that is, in most of the Quran. It is remarked upon by the tafsirs of Alusi, Ibn ‘Ashur, Abu Su‘ud, and others, indeed hardly possible for them not to notice”. (p. xv, emphasis in the original).

After citing seven characteristics of what nakirah in the Qur’ān emphasizes (plentitude, fewness, might or exaltedness, contempt, being lost to all knowledge, horror, and rarity), Keller states: “Missing this emphatic indefinite is probably the greatest single leak (sic) of meaning an nuance in prior English translations. All seem to have made a false analogy between modern written Arabic, which no longer uses the indefinite for such purposes; and the Arabic of the Quran, which everywhere does. A stronger hermeneutic could have made a difference, or stronger appreciation of the achievements of tafsir.” (p. xii)

One struggles to understand Keller’s English here and elsewhere (see below) as it degenerates into colloquial with Arabic syntax, but his claim is, once again unverifiable. In fact, his translation of Q 5:31 is unfaithful to the original; his choice of words is poor, and he shows no respect for the semantic fields of the Qur’ānic Arabic. He translates

fā as “And”, which eliminates the sequential characteristic of the Qur’ānic narrative; most previous translators have indicated this important feature by translating fā as “then”, thereupon”;

ba‘atha as “sent”, just as most other translators, whereas he could have distinguished his translation by using the more specific “appointed”;

yabḥathu fī l-arḍ as “probing the earth”, which is meaningless as crows do not probe, they scratch the earth as other translators have written (“scratching the earth”, Study Quran, Daryabadi, and several others);

“shameful remains of his brother” is not in the original text, which simply has sawata akhīhi (“brother’s nakedness”) as used by most previous translators.

Arabic lexicology and etymology suddenly shifts terrain without indicating to the reader that Keller is no more discussing “matters of Arabic meaning”; rather, he is now making another grandiose claim: all previous translations have an “over-reliance on English-Arabic dictionaries, previous translators, or even biblical renderings. The original Arabic derivation (isthitqaq) and lexical usage (luḡha) of words play a key part in grasping the intent of the Quran, both for individual verses, and for the forward movement of the themes of the various suras they appear in.” (pp. xxvi).

He then gives ten examples and claims that all previous translations have failed in conveying the Qur'ānic meanings. Once again, the scope of this review does not allow examination of all ten claims, but the first may serve as a sample for the rest: Janna, Keller says, cannot be translated as 'garden' because "a garden, the invariable (and biblical) rendering, unless it is more neglected than most, seldom reaches above chest-level, so does not bear the Quranic implication very well" (p. xxvi).

One would have to be gracious here to avoid sarcasm, but most readers already know that "Garden" means different things to different users of the word in different cultures; in North America, it often refers to the place in the backyard where one grows vegetables, in England, it often means a backyard containing flowers, in the Indian subcontinent it is associated with fruit trees, which can be as tall as twenty feet. More importantly, Keller's rendering of Q 2: 35 ("O Adam dwell in peace, you and your wife, in the lush-shaded grove of paradise (janna), and eat of it in abundant ease wherever you wish, but come not even near to this tree, lest you be of the grave wrongdoers") does not respect the original text (and this is not an isolated case); the translator takes liberties with the text of the Qur'ān and inserts his own exegetical remarks without indicating where the boundary lies between translation and exegesis; almost all previous translators have chosen to remain faithful to the text and when they do insert their own explanations in the text, they do so parenthetically, respecting the original. Janna primarily inheres the meaning of hiding, as pointed out by Al-Rāghib al-Aṣṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) in his concept-rich *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān* (sub j-n-n), but it would be a huge stretch to consider all 147 usages of the nominal janna in the Qur'ān to mean "lush-shaded grove" - not to mention the over-stressed construct "lush-shaded," because "lush suggests rich, soft luxuriance" (as per Mariam Webster dictionary).

Themes of the Suras

Toward the end of "The Once and Future Hermeneutic", Keller says: "A table of the Quranic suras follows next here with a brief word after the name of each sura outlining its main themes." (p. xxxii)

There is no table and "a brief word" is actually one paragraph for each sura purportedly providing "Themes of Suras". Thus we have:

Opening 1

Sums up the meaning of the Quran, which is to realize that Allah is entitled to total devotion to Him in pure slavehood that turns to no one else for help... Allah Most High deserves the consummate worship of all worlds of beings... He teaches servants to plead meekly for the incomparable favor of wholeheartedly following the path of endless happiness and being saved from the path of endless woe. Its

words are a Muslim's solemn covenant with his Lord to show heart-felt humble worship, and perpetually return to Him from every error with love and repentance to the depths of this soul." (p.xxxiv)

Problems with this "Arabish" English aside, Keller's caricature of the themes of the "Mother of the Book" (*umm al-Kitāb*)—the most well-known of the twelve names of this monumental Sura, as per the Andalusian exegete Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273)³—fails to convey its exalted station or even what it contains in its seven short verses which have "eight of the ten the valuables" as al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) had so eloquently pointed out.⁴

Poorly written text of the other themes of the suras fairs no better and often does not provide their themes. These so-called "themes" begin with what the first few verses of the sura state and then degenerate into random thoughts, presented through disorganized language which merely resembles English: "The Cow sets forth, in the first eighth of the Quran, the greatest benefits of divine revelation to Man: that it is the Truth and a sovereign guidance to the godfearing, who believe in the next life and the unseen, and in the divine oneness that differs not between one prophetic messenger and another." (p. xxxiv). After this initial incoherent introduction, the text becomes an incomprehensible babel bordering on absurdity:

Allah has pleased that this path be the way of His noble reigning deputy on earth; namely Man, in particular those Allah loves and who love Him, fully and faithfully, in all they take and all they leave, in their convictions and personal code of behavior, in their calling others to embrace the faith, and in their own wholehearted commitment respond to everything in it. It also warns those who swerve from the message by lack of submission to their prophets; as did deniers, prevaricators, and unbelievers of the children of Israel in the story of the Cow and other passages, which proved to be their downfall, from being chosen by Allah to bear His message, to being detested by Him for their obstinacy. (p. xxxiv)

This description is not only unintelligible, it is deceptive because the dominant subject matter in Sūrat al-Baqara is Children of Isrā'īl and how Allah Most High has dealt with them, even as it has that inimitable quality of the Qur'ān that makes its every part somehow contain all of it. This totum simul (simultaneous totality) quality makes it difficult to reduce the themes of the Qur'ānic Suras to a few lines of text, but nevertheless, one would expect that a work claiming to be based on primary sources would at least tell the readers that this sura gives details of the Divine dealings with the Children of Isrā'īl, His blessings upon them, their transgressions, their interactions with

3. See also Tafsīrs of Ṭabarī, Bayḍāwī, Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr (all sub Q 1).

4. Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamid.... Jawāhir...

Prophet Mūsā, upon him peace, their oppression by the Fir‘awn and Divine succor that came to them. In addition, any thematic summary of this Sura would mention that it contains verses which legislated some of the most important acts of worship (Ramadan, qibla direction, Hajj) as well as verses dealing with legal rulings pertaining to marriage, usury, economic contracts, inheritance, divorce, orphans, prohibition of alcohol, gambling, and punishments for capital crimes. Most of all, one would expect ‘Ali Hani to have insisted that the summary Keller is going to put in *The Quran Beheld* must include what the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said about this sura: “Everything has a summit and the summit of the Qur’ān is Sūrat al-Baqarah. It has a verse which is the Leader of the Qur’ān-the Verse of the Throne.”⁵

All thematic summaries of the 114 suras of the Qur’ān are defective; even the shortest sura has not been given its due: The convoluted text describing the theme of Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ states: “Sincerity: Discloses the reality of the Supreme Being of the Divine and what true sincerity to Him means; and that He alone comprises all perfections and godhood, and is wholly exalted above any lack.” (p.lv)

The syntax, vocabulary, and the conceptual flaws of this Manichaeen-Christological text do not deserve a comment, suffice it to say that this Sura-whose exalted station the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, described as being “one-third of the Qur’ān” in a sound ḥadīth to be found in both Sāḥiḥs, Muwaṭṭa’, and most other collections-enjoins the Prophet to proclaim, Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah, the Eternally Self-Sufficient (al-Ṣamad). He begets not, nor is begotten. And none is like Him, thereby it expounds, in a highly condensed form and chiefly via negativia, the transcendent Unicity of Allah Most High by “refuting in its four verses all [forms of] disbelief (kufr) and fancies (ahwā’),” as the Sufi sage Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) said. “It is named Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (“the Sura of Sincerity”) because it sweeps away all impurities foreign to the transcendence (tanzīh) of Allah, Exalted is He, above all that is not fitting for Him” (Tustarī, Tafsīr, sub Q 112). Keller’s translation of this condensed Sura is also not even faithful to the original as he adds many words not present in the original and without any point: “Say: He is Allah: the Wholly One Divine Reality Alone” (pp. 604). One wonders what “Wholly One Divine Reality Alone” means and from which standpoint such convoluted phrasing arises.

TRANSLATION

When one finally starts to read the translation in *The Quran Beheld*, one realizes that the text is actually a mini-tafsīr and not a translation, a tafsīr, moreover, that is random, incoherent, and utterly devoid of beauty and serenity of the original. Its convoluted English often fails to convey even the basic meaning of the Qur’ānic text.

Examples:

5. Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān, 2878.

- Q 1:2 is translated as “All praise is Allah’s, Lord of all Worlds of Beings.” The passive All praise is Allah’s and mistranslation of *‘Ālamīn* stand out immediately. In almost every tafsīr, *‘Ālamīn* is defined as everything other than Allah Most High (see Tafsīrs of Ṭabarī, Samarqandī, Rāzī, Bayḍawī, sub Q 1:2). The meaning of the verse is conveyed by simply saying, “Lord of all the Worlds”; the addition of “Beings” is redundant.
- Q 1:5 is translated in plain gibberish: “You alone we humbly adore and in You alone we seek help. Semantic fields of *na‘budu* (from the root ‘-b-d) and “adore” are irreconcilably different.
- Q 1:6, “Guide us the Straight Way”, is a verbatim replication of Muhammad Asad’s equally flawed translation.
- Q 1:7, The way of those You have divinely blessed, who have not then incurred wrath, or utterly lost the way, unnecessarily adds “divinely”; “then” is not in the original, “utterly lost the way” is a poor rendering of *ḍālīm*.
- Q 11:27: “Whereupon the nobles who disbelieved of his people said: ‘We see none following you but our despicable poor; At their first unthinking whim; Nor see we in any of you the slightest merit over us; But, rather, we deem you liars.’” Problems with the syntax of “the nobles who disbelieved of his people” is obvious; meaningless verbosity (“unthinking whim”), and inaccuracy of “slightest merit” for *min faḍl*, and the loss of kinetic force of the original are too obvious to comment.

By comparison, Muhammad Asad translates it as:

But the great ones among his people, who refused to acknowledge the truth, answered: “We do not see in thee anything but a mortal man like ourselves; and we do not see that any follow thee save those who are quite obviously the most abject among us; and we do not see that you could be in any way superior to us: on the contrary, we think that you are liars!”

And the Study Qur’ān as:

But the notables among his people who disbelieved said, “We see you as naught but a human being like us, and we see none who follow you, save the lowliest among us, as is clear to see. Nor do we see that you have any merit over us; nay, we think that you are liars.”

Both have their own problems, but at least they are closer to the original and intelligible.

The language of the Qur’ān is impossible to translate. It took its first listeners by surprise because they had pride in their own eloquence, yet, here was

a text that surpassed everything they had ever composed or heard. Whence comes this mighty text, they wondered. Neither poetry nor prose, the Arabic of the Qurʾān made full use of the resources of the Arabic language but was not confined to them. Its eloquence, grandeur, and sublime beauty inspired awe and reverence of an order unmatched by anything they possessed. They called the Prophet a poet, but knew he was not reciting poetry. When they could not classify what they were hearing, they called him a *kāhin*, a man possessed and bewitched, but that did not solve their problem: The revelation kept coming and in it they found vivid imagery, powerful oaths, parables, arguments employing both dialectical and syllogistic formulations, elements which all contributed to its inimitability (*iʿjāz*).

The early suras were short and their power to shake slumberous hearts was so intense that they cleaved the entire order of Makkan society and ushered a new era in human history. The shorter suras of the Qurʾān, are, therefore, a good measure to judge the quality of any translation. Just a few examples would suffice.

- Q 91: *ḍuḥāhā* (morning brightness of the sun”) is translated as “morning blaze of glory”;
- According to most classical tafsīrs, *mā* in Q 91: 4, 5 stands for man, referring to Allah Most High, but it has been translated as “what”;
- Q 91:12; has “most luckless of them” for *ashqāha*, which is utterly un-Qurʾānic, because there is no such thing as “luck” in the Qurʾān (others translated it as “the most wretched of them”);
- Q 91:14: “So their Lord plastered them totally down” is a miserable imagery for the powerful Qurʾānic imagery of burying them deep down into the earth;
- Q 93:6: “And find you wayless then guide” is not an English sentence;
- Q 93:11; “As for the prophetic blessings of your Lord, speak liberally of them in thanks” limits the blessings to lower-case prophetic and “speak liberally of them in thanks” is convoluted; one could have easily said more directly “And as for the blessing of your Lord, proclaim!”;
- The title of Q 94 (*al-Sharḥ*) is mistranslated as “Open Breast”;
- Q 94: 1: “Did we not open your breast wide in relief” brings out the physicality, rather the spirituality and *sharḥ* is not merely relief;
- Q 94:7: “So when you finish day’s toil, worship till tired” is not only inelegant, it brings to mind a day laborer; this is particularly concerning because there is no “day’s toil” in the exalted mission of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace; and *fanṣab* is definitely “till tired”; it commands the Prophet to exert himself;
- Q 96: *al-ʿalaq* is mistranslated as “Cell-Masses Clinging” rather than

“The Blood Clot”

- Q 96:9, “Can you have considered him” is an inaccurate rendering of *ara-ayta alladhī yanha* on several counts: “can you have” is gibberish, not English and “considered him” in the past tense loses force; one could have simply rendered the verse as “Have you seen him who prohibits” as many previous translators do;
- The title of *Suratul Qadr* (Q 97) is mistranslated as “Destiny”;
- Q 97: 4 (The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the leave of their Lord, with every command), translated as “Therein the angels and the supreme angelic Spirit of life-giving revelation descend in throng after throng by leave of their Lord; To set every matter that shall happen that year” is not the translation of the verse; it is interpolation in inelegant prose; “supreme angelic Spirit of life-giving revelation” for *al-rūḥ* is not only inelegant; it is not even a proper descriptive for *Jibrīl*, upon him peace, who is unanimously understood to be the referent here; so even the interpolation is faulty;
- Q 103, *al-ʿṣr*, is called “End of the Day”, whereas it refers to Time and End of Time, not to the Day or its end, according to many *tafsīrs* (see *Tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī, Samarqandī, Rāzī, Bayḍāwī);
- Q 105, *al-fil*, translates the title as “The War Elephant” and Q 105:1 calls the elephant in question to be “the mighty War Elephant” whereas all recorded accounts of the event indicate that the elephant in question actually refused to move forward to attack the House of Allah Most High;
- Q 113:3 translates *ghāsiqin idha waqab* as “outpoured blackest night”; one wonders what to make of “*outpoured night*”; *the verse refers to a darkness when it enshrouds*.

These examples—and what has been said about other aspects of this translation in this short review—merely provide a sampling of what is wrong with this 136th translation of the Sublime Qurʾān, whose terse prose and rhymed passages, ellipses and parallelisms, and other features impose upon the intelligence an irresistible imperative to discover Truth, while making it impossible to be properly rendered into any other language. Those who first heard it and believe in it—the Companions of the Prophet, Allah be pleased with them all—discovered subtle shades of meaning in its language, transmitted this knowledge to the Successors, who, in turn, further expanded and systematized it. One expects that a “translation” based on this transmitted knowledge, as is claimed would have something in it of that grand linguistic synthesis which was produced by scholars like Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Ziyād al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (467-538/1074-1143), al-Rāzī (1149–1209) and al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1280).

The last section of *The Quran Beheld* contains elementary-level biographical notes on nineteen “Imams of Introduction”—a meaningless phrase, which indicates a lack of true appreciation of their stature and contributions.

If the purpose of translating the untranslatable Qur’ān is to provide a conduit to its message to those who do not have direct access to the Book that is held to be the actual Divine speech by one fourth of humanity, then *The Quran Beheld* fails miserably. The most obvious features of this “translation” are its convoluted syntax, unfaithfulness to the original, and misunderstood interpretations of the classical scholars inserted into the “translation” without indicating that these are not part of the text of the Qur’ān.

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Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: *On Justice and the Nature of Man* Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015. ix+67 pp. ISBN 978 967 0149 721.

This slim book of about 60 tightly argued pages by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas makes a clear case for the new and special creation of man (both as spiritual *insān* and physical *bashar*) on the basis of what has been revealed in the Holy Qur’ān (especially verses 4:58 and 23:12-14) pertaining to the nature of man and his primal ethico-moral, axio-teleological vocation or overriding calling as Allah’s vicegerent (*khalifa*) on earth. In doing so, al-Attas says that he is responding to, “the greatest challenge to our true identity as man, i.e. as *insān*, posed by the evolutionist and positivist theory of man, i.e. as *Homo sapiens*, set within the framework of anthropology and the worldview of naturalism—a theory taught as if it were a fact in the schools and universities of the world.” (p v).

He refutes the claim of evolutionists that man is merely a physical being by nature belonging to the animal kingdom and thus not a special creation but simply a new biological species that is genetically and genealogically continuous with earlier anthropoids, emerging from some vague, ill-defined common ancestor through a process of natural selection and random mutation. In contrast, he argues for man as “a new and special creation” and that, “man is created as a merging of the physical and the spiritual natures into a single being at once as *bashar* and *insān*...that man’s true and real nature is spiritual, an articulate soul, to which state of being he will be returned on the Day of Judgement after his determined term of probation on earth.” (p v).