

Certain Terms Relating to Islamic Observances

**Their Meanings with Reference to Three Translations of the Qur'an
and a Translation of Hadith**

Bakri H. S. Al-Azzam

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Translations of the Qur'an and a Translation of Hadith*

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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

**Certain Terms Relating to Islamic Observances: Their Meanings
with reference to three translations of the Qur'ān and a translation
of Hadith**

By

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in
Translation**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, wife and children.

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TRANSLITERATION

1. Consonants:

Arabic Script	English Symbol
ء	'
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	'
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y

2. The vowels: The three long vowels are symbolized as u, i, and a as respectively illustrated in the following examples: *ṣūrah*, *picture*, *dīn*, *religion* and *kitāb*, *book*.

ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates the possibility of translating certain Islamic religious terms confined to *‘Ibādāt* with a special reference to terms pertaining to the five pillars of Islam, namely the two testimonies, prayer, *zakāt*, fasting and pilgrimage. The study shows the different problematic areas which translators may encounter, when conveying the meaning of these lexical items in English. The terms chosen for the analysis represent different cultural and linguistic problems.

The significance of the work lies in the following. First, it deals with issues that have not received enough attention such as emotiveness, onomatopoeia and ecology. Second, the study shows the influence of time and location on the meaning of lexical items; this complicates the issue of translating these lexical items to a target language that enjoys clear and different variations, such as English. Third, the study includes terms that are cultural, and terms that are culturally shared; this makes it necessary for the translators to opt for different translation procedures according to the type of difficulty and the priorities in their translations.

The methodology of the study is based on three different translations of the Qur’ān and a translation of Ḥadīth. The choice shows the cultural and linguistic differences of the translators which might affect the quality of the translation into the target language. The analysis is intended to find out whether cultural, linguistic and psychological factors relating to man’s way of feeling and thinking are considered in translation, and to what extent one translation is considered more reliable than another from the audience’s point of view. A short questionnaire of some examples of the study is also conducted on subjects representing the same cultural and linguistic subjects of the sample and the translators. This aims at showing the concordance between the subjects of the sample and the translators on the one hand, and the source language text and the text of the receptor language, on the other. The questionnaire results demonstrate that the target language audience should be taken into account before translators start the translation task, and also provide significant insights of the target readers.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSLATION OF SOME TERMS RELATED TO RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES IN ISLAM

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to discuss a number of terms dealing with '*ibādāt*, 'religious observances' in Islam as represented in the Five Pillars of Islam, and other related deeds, from a translational perspective. The study will also include some terms denoting the times, places and persons required to perform these deeds and rituals. These terms have not previously been discussed and analysed for their own specific purposes. Rather, they have been discussed in the context of translations of either the Qur'ān or Ḥadīth and thus have not given rise to much interest or explanation.

The study is restricted to certain lexical items relating to these religious obeisances with particular focus on some terms related to the Five Pillars of Islam for the following reasons: first, the total number of terms denoting these deeds is too large to be covered in a study of this type; second, the lexical items chosen for the study represent different types of problems covering various problematic areas which consequently require resort to different translational procedures; third, these terms require translators to have good knowledge of both the source and the target cultures with a deep understanding of language and religion.

As these Pillars constitute the core of Islam, it is expected that readers of this work will have some knowledge about them. In addition, there are certain linguistic and cultural features found in the terms related to these Pillars, which manifest the difficulties that translators may encounter when they attempt to convey their meanings in the target language. The study will investigate ecological and environmental influences in forming the terms describing these '*ibādāt* and how these features play a major role in hindering translators from achieving the appropriate rendition of these terms in a target language where these features are not found. Based on this, the study will demonstrate that the meaning of '*ibādāt* terms is clearly linked to the time and place of their creation, a fact which should not be ignored in translation. More importantly, some features of '*ibādāt* acts

are common to all the divine religions. Readers of this work will appreciate the close relationship and realise that differences are mainly confined to the way of practising the deed rather than the deed itself. Another major issue related to the terms chosen for the study concerns differences in the ways of thinking and feeling of the earliest Muslims who were first involved in practising the deeds and those of the current time who do not have the same living and thinking conditions. This difference gives rise to a change in understanding the deeds denotatively, connotatively and emotively, and in a change in readiness to do the deeds themselves. The problem becomes more complicated when the terms are translated between cultures that have clear spatio-temporal differences like Classical Arabic and modern English-speaking cultures.

Arabic is the language of the acts and terms relating to *'ibādāt*. It has an intimate relationship with the region in which Islam came into being. This makes it difficult to divorce the terms themselves from the more general cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies of Arabic. This study will also show that some terms of the Five Pillars do not carry the same connotations throughout the Muslim world. This connotative gap becomes larger when religious and linguistic cultures expand and is also increased by the passage of time and the difference of place between the source culture and the target culture as is the case of Islam and Christianity, and Arabic and English.

This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, background issues regarding the Qur'ān and its interpretations are discussed, as is the significance of the Prophet Muḥammad's deeds and words in explaining religious terms, especially those which have not been dealt with in the Qur'ān. In the second section, the main problems that translators encounter when they attempt to convey the meaning of Islamic religious terms in the target language are reviewed. Section three concentrates on the provision of answers to questions that may be raised by the translators of such terms into English, and states the main purposes of the study. These purposes can be summarised in the following questions:

1. What are the main problems that translators face when they try to convey Arabic-Islamic religious terms into another language?
2. What are the best procedures to follow?

3. Which procedures are most suitable and reliable for translation of these terms, and why?

Section four is concerned with the methodology which has been followed in investigating and analysing the issues considered in this work. Finally, section five gives an overview of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth and their Translations

The revelation of the Qur'ān has been a fertile source for studies related to Islam as the last religion of Allah for all generations at all times. Many aspects of the Qur'ān have been deeply analysed by scholars and researchers at different times. Nevertheless, some Qur'ānic features are still to be discussed, for example in relation to translation. More generally, translation has recently aroused a great deal of general interest in a number of different areas of study including economics, political science, linguistics and religious studies.

The Qur'ān was recited to the Prophet Muḥammad many centuries ago and addressed and still addresses all nations in its original Arabic form regardless of differences in time, place, language, religion, etc. A number of works have been produced by native speakers of Arabic, non-native speaking, Muslims and non-Muslims in an attempt to convey even the least of its meanings in many languages, one of which is English.

Ḥadīth is a main source of Islamic culture. The fact that it is divine makes also it difficult to translate to other languages. Moreover, Ḥadīths usually have terms taken basically from the Qur'ān, which is inimitable in nature. Translators may opt for different procedures to convey as much of the meaning of Ḥadīth as possible.

It is arguably impossible to translate the Qur'ān or Ḥadīth. The proposed impossibility of translating the Qur'ān lies in the following aspects: first, the Qur'ānic style is said to be unique, and thus any attempt to translate it inevitably results in great loss; second, imitation of the Qur'ān through translation is subject to loss at many if not all levels extending from phonic to textual constituents; third the Qur'ān is the Word of Allah. This word cannot be reproduced equivalently in the target language because it is supremely well structured and

thus has a unique effect on the source text reader. In addition, Qur'ānic terminology is closely related to Arabic culture, which gives it an Arabic cultural specificity. Finally, some terms in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth are compressed in meaning such that a long target language paraphrase is sometimes required to give even a rough denotative equivalent of the source language term. To illustrate, the lexical item *zakāt* has many sense components which go to make up its specific meaning as a central '*ibādāt*' term.

These difficulties notwithstanding, it is important to attempt to translate the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth into other languages, given that the Qur'ān is the central Islamic text, and the Ḥadīth have vital secondary importance. Translation of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth has in fact been ongoing for years and even centuries on the part of both native speakers of Arabic and non-native speakers, and Muslims and non-Muslims. These translations convey some of the breadth of meaning found in Qur'ānic terminology. Success or failure in certain areas is based on the competence of the translator himself, his mother tongue, his religion, the real intention behind his task and the translation priorities, as well as the closeness or distance of relationship between the source and target languages and cultures. Because of the differences between Arabic-Islamic culture on the one hand, and the cultures of the target languages on the other, translators have opted for different procedures according to the type of difficulty they encountered. Exegetic efforts are also clearly noticeable in some works because the mere translation of religious works like this is not always enough to clarify the meaning. This procedure can, however, be disadvantageous for such works because it produces target texts that are significantly longer than the source text, and diverts the reader's attention from the continuity of the translated text.

1.3 The Central Problem

This study aims to investigate one of the major problematic issues in the field of translation of the meanings of Islamic expressions. This problem is in the translation of terms related to '*Arkān al-Islām al-khamsah*', 'The Five Pillars of Islam' and other terms having a similar significance as aspects of the '*ibādāt*' rituals in the Qur'ān and Sunna. The study includes consideration of other related terms, such as '*Ṣalāt al-Khawf*', 'the fear prayer'. This has many aspects of the five daily prayers such as '*rukū'*' and '*sujūd*' but is not one of them.

Translators frequently come across translational problems regarding the different rituals of Islam whether in the Qur'ān or Ḥadīth. These Five Pillars and their subsidiary deeds require translators to stop and think about their appropriate equivalents in the target language. The Five Pillars of Islam and associated rituals are one of the issues that have not been given a great deal of attention. In fact, there are no specific studies focusing on this aspect, to the best of the knowledge of the author. They have been discussed as parts of certain Chapters of the Qur'ān or as parts of Ḥadīth.¹

As these Five Pillars constitute the core of Islam from which other deeds flow, and as they represent a link with previous religions from Adam to the Day of Judgement, they are worth analysing and discussing from a translational point of view.

In one of his Ḥadīths, the Prophet Muḥammad summarised the five Pillars of Islam. He says: *بني الإسلام على خمسة أركان: الشهادتان ، شهادة ألا إله إلا الله وأن محمداً رسول الله ، وإقامة الصلاة، وإيتاء الزكاة ، وصوم* .رمضان وحج البيت لمن استطاع إليه سبيلا. This Ḥadīth can be translated into English as: “Islam has been built on five Pillars: the two testimonies, the testimony that there is no god but Allah, and Muḥammad is his messenger; performance of prayer; paying of *zakāt*; the fast of *Ramaḍān*; and the performance of pilgrimage to the *Bait (Ka'ba)* for those who are able” (my translation).

There are different priorities in the different interpretations of the Qur'ān, resulting in a loss of differing elements of the Qur'ānic text. For instance, some translators have sacrificed form for content while others have done the opposite. Some translators have been specifically interested in rendering the prosodic features such as the rhyme and rhythm of the Qur'ān, at the expense in practice of its denotative and connotative meanings. Moreover, the comments that are provided as footnotes to explain some verses of the Qur'ān are typically insufficient and sometimes far from giving the precise denotative and connotative meaning found in the Qur'ān. Either the translator is not fully competent in both languages, for example, as he might be a native speaker of a language other than the target language and therefore cannot express the original meaning in the target language; or the target language does not have exact equivalents for the expressions in the source

¹ For further details of Ḥadīth and Sunna, see chapter two, pp 13-15.

language.

1.4 Limitations of the Scope of Study

The scope of this study is limited to some *'ibādāt* terms as represented in the Five Pillars of Islam and their rituals in the Qur'ān and Sunna for the following reasons:

1. There appear to have been no specific studies devoted to the expressions describing the Five Pillars of Islam; all the attempts that have been made to examine these expressions have been incomplete and insufficient.
2. The Five Pillars of Islam are essentially interdependent and thus form an integrated whole. Disbelief in any one of them implies disbelief in all the others.
3. The translations of the meanings of the Qur'ān provide no profound understanding of these rituals. In other words, they typically do no more than adopt a superficial semantic approach to the translation of these terms without explaining many other layered meanings implied in the terms denoting these rituals.
4. In their translations of the meanings of the Qur'ān, translators have not spent sufficient time and effort in explaining these terms especially with regard to the cultural, connotative, emotive, sound-symbolic and other layered differences between the source language and the target language. This approach can be partially justified because preservation of rough equality of text length is vital in translation.
5. These Islamic rituals have a close link with the pre-Islamic religions. Therefore, readers of translations which pay close attention to these terms can learn about religions and prophets from the time of Adam to the Prophet Muḥammad.
6. Some Islamic rituals, which form part of these Five Pillars, are not mentioned in the Qur'ān and therefore they are not discussed or analysed in the different Qur'ānic interpretations. One needs therefore to consult the Ḥadīth in order to gain a proper understanding of these rituals.

1.5 Methodology of the Study

In order to appropriately limit the scope of this work, the study is confined to three English translations of the Qur'ān and one translation of Ḥadīth. The translations of the Qur'ān are produced by Ali (1946), Arberry (1955) and Al-Hilali and Khan (1997), while the translation of Ḥadīth is produced by Khan (1979)².

The Qur'ānic translations that are going to be considered have been produced by native speakers of different languages. One was done by a native Arabic speaker in cooperation with a non-Arab Muslim, another by a native English speaker, and the third by a native speaker of neither Arabic nor English. The translation of Ḥadīth which is going to be considered in the study has been done by Khan, whose translation of the Qur'ān has also been taken as a sample for the study. The researcher chose this translation of Ḥadīth in particular to see if the translator opts for the same procedures he followed in his translation of the Qur'ān. Therefore, the choice of these translations can show the influence of culture and language on the translations achieved by these different translators. Moreover, the translators have different goals behind their work and therefore have different priorities to achieve in the target language. These priorities are based on the personal preferences of the translator himself, the purpose of the translation and the expected audience. In addition to this, a small questionnaire has been made and distributed among some students having different languages and cultures; these students have similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds to the three translators. This helps in the fair assessment of the three translations considered in this study. This work also aims at showing the priorities of these translations which are highly compatible with the sample.

In studying and analysing terms relating to the Five Pillars of Islam in the Qur'ān and the Sunna, these rituals and their sub-deeds will be explained through a consideration of the three translations. This will allow the main problems to be identified and tackled, reliable commentary material to be provided, and recommendations for future studies suggested.

² The translation is done by Muhammad Muḥsin Khan (1979). The title is: *The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ l-Bukhārī*.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

In addition to this introductory chapter, this thesis consists of eight chapters which will discuss the following issues:

1. Chapter two is a survey of major works produced on the translations of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. In this chapter, a review will be made of the different translations of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth by translators having different languages and religions.

2. Chapter three is a discussion of three topics related to the study. The first is the issue of equivalence; different viewpoints regarding this issue are illustrated. The second is related to the role played by the translator, while the third illustrates some aspects of the Qur'ān which make it inimitable in other languages.

3. Chapters four and five are a discussion of the various problems that translators of the terms chosen for study may encounter. These problems are of different types. The review is therefore not only based upon the terms, but also upon the time and the place that these terms were created. The study will show the main reasons behind the choice of this topic according to these problems.

4. Chapter six is an analysis of a questionnaire produced to test the concordance between the translations taken for the study and the subjects of the samples belonging to similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds as the translators referred to in the work. This chapter explains the relationship between translators having these backgrounds and the expected reader having similar ones in the production of reliable translations.

5. Chapters seven and eight provide the practical analysis. Reference is made to all the features considered in the study. These two chapters deal with the problems that translators typically face when trying to render the above-mentioned terms into the target language. These problems will be discussed with reference to the three translations of the Qur'ān and one translation of the Ḥadīth. In addition, efforts will be made to analyse some terms that do not exist in these sources. The analysis is divided in terms of the daily and the seasonal practice of the deeds, on the one hand, and the difficulty of doing these deeds, on the other.

5. Chapter nine is the conclusion. This chapter summarises the discussion and analysis. Suggestions and recommendations will be presented regarding other areas of research in the light of the results obtained.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF MAJOR WORKS PRODUCED ON THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'ĀN AND ḤADĪTH

2.1 Introduction

The main topic of this chapter is a review of some translations and interpretations produced on the meanings of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, which constitute a major part of this study. Reference will also be made to some concepts which render it difficult to translate religious texts in general and the Qur'ān in particular, and to some Muslim scholars' views of the controversial issue of Qur'ān translatability and inimitability.

2.2 General Issues in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth from a Translational Perspective

All nations all over the world have their particular religions and their own way of thinking about them. It is an instinct among human beings to find out that there is a Creator of this universe. Therefore, some nations worshipped universal concepts like the moon, the sun and the stars; others worshipped fire, such as the Ancient Persians, whereas others worshipped natural phenomena which brought them life and fertility like the Ancient Egyptians, who worshipped the Nile.

Amongst these religious beliefs, there were also other nations that worshipped the Creator of mankind through whose Books and prophets they were guided to Him. Examples of these were the followers of Abraham and Ishmael, Jews and Christians and later on Muslims. Unlike other Holy Books of Allah, the Qur'ān seems to be the only Book which has been preserved, perfectly transmitted and preserved from any change in words as well as in structure. This is clear in the verse: 46: آية: 4: سورة النساء (من الذين هادوا يحرفون الكلم عن مواضعه)³ (ويقولون سمعنا وعصينا) which Ali (1946:194) translates as: "Of the Jews there are those who displace words from their (right) places, And say: "We hear And we disobey"". ⁴This verse shows that Jews and Christians changed the words in their Scriptures from their original

³ For more examples, cf Chapter 5 of the Qur'ān, verses 13 and 41.

⁴ In the footnote, Ali adds saying: "A trick of the Jews was to twist words and expressions, so as to ridicule the most solemn teachings of Faith. Where they should have said, "We hear and obey," they said aloud, "We hear," and whispered, "we disobey".

positions (cf. al-Zamakhsharī 1987: v. 1, 516).

The Qur’ān was and still is unchanged even at the smallest level; it is the will and the wisdom of Allah to maintain this book unchanged throughout this long period of time, which is not the case with other books (cf. al-Zamakhsharī 1987: v. 1, 572). The following discussion draws on the entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*⁵. The verse below proves Allah’s responsibility and commitment for keeping the Qur’ān from any change. سورة الحجر: ٩. “It is We who revealed the *dhikr* (the Qur’ān), and We are surely the preservers of it” (my translation).

This short verse maintains that Allah has committed Himself to preserving this Book from even the smallest change. This is clearly seen in *ḥāfiẓūn*, ‘the Preservers’ which refers to all times with the initial emphatic particle, (لِ) emphasising this point. Moreover, (نَا) includes the affirmative article (نِ) and also indicates the plurality of the doer. A third sign of commitment on Allah’s part for the preservation of His Book is the use of (نَحْنُ), ‘we’ which implies plurality and shows the real and the certain capability of the Creator instead of (أَنَا), ‘I’ as a pronoun standing for the singular.

The Qur’ān was recited to the Prophet Muhammad, the illiterate and the unlettered, in the barren desert which was overflowing with poets and eloquent speakers, writers and readers of Arabic. Therefore, it is not strange that the Qur’ān came to challenge those people by its language which excelled the language of human beings. Even more than all his companions, the Prophet, although illiterate, was gifted with full mastery of the Arabic language, which he acquired when he was sent to live in the Bedouin areas as an infant in order to learn pure Arabic.

Characterised by honesty and truthfulness, Muhammad was chosen to be the last Prophet of Allah to the whole universe, preaching what is revealed to him from Allah (cf. al-Zamakhsharī 1987: v. 4, 418). In the Holy Qur’ān, Allah guarantees this truthfulness in the

⁵ For more details about the revelation of the Qur’ān and its meaning, cf. the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol.5, 400-403.

verse:3: سورة النجم 53: آية: 3: (و ما ينطق عن الهوى إن هو إلا وحي يوحى) Ali (1946:1443) translates this verse as:

“Nor does he say (naught)

Of (his own) Desire

It is no less than

Inspiration sent down to him.”

It is important to define both the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth from the semantic and technical points of view, and to consider various names and attributions of the Qur’ān denoting its various features. The word *Qur’ān* has been regarded as having various derivations. The majority view among Muslim authorities has been that the Qur’ān is simply the verbal noun from *qara’a* meaning ‘he read’ or ‘he recited’ (cf. al-Rāzī 2000: vols. 27 and 28, 245; al-Zamakhsharī 1987: v. 4, 661). The verb *qara’a* occurs more than three hundred times in the Qur’ān meaning ‘to read’, but having the connotations of ‘recite’, ‘proclaim’ and occasionally ‘read aloud’ (Robinson 1996:9). This is clearly seen in the verse which says:

سورة القيامة: 75: آية: 3: (فإذا قرأناه فاتبع قرآنه) سورة القيامة 75: آية: 3: “When we recite it, follow its recitation”.⁶ Among the earliest meanings of the Qur’ān is the ‘act of reciting’, seen twice where God addresses Muhammad. These two occasions are illustrated in the following verses سورة القيامة: 75: آية: 3: (فإذا قرأناه فاتبع قرآنه) 18: “Ours is it to put it together and ours is its Qur’ān. When we recite it, follow its Qur’ān”.

In some verses, *Qur’ān* means an individual passage recited by Muhammad. This is illustrated in the following verse talking about a group of *jinn* (a creation, created by Allah from fire) who were listening to the Prophet Muhammad reading in the Qur’ān (cf. al-Zamakhsharī 1987: v. 4, 90). The verse says: سورة الجن: 72: آية: 1: (إنا سمعنا قرآنا عجبا يهدي إلى الرشدا فآمنا) سورة الجن: 72: آية: 1: “Verily, we have heard a Qur’ān, a wonder, which guides to rectitude, so we have believed in it”.

The fact that the *Jinn* were created from fire (cf. al-Rāzī 2000: vols. 13 and 14, 28) is

⁶ For more details and translation of the verses, refer to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, volume 5, pp. 400-401.