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## THE EVOLUTION OF QURANIC TRANSLATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF QURAN TRANSLATIONS FOR MUSLIMS IN NON-MUSLIM COUNTRIES

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### ABSTRACT

*This research delves into the tradition of Quranic translation within Islam, seeking to trace its origin to determine whether it occurred at the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his companions. It aims to refute the misunderstanding that such translation was generally prohibited by Muslim scholars. The research highlights the essential role of Quranic translation in spreading the faith. To address the confusion regarding Quranic translation, it is necessary to emphasize such translation's importance by proving it to be a crucial tool for people to understand Islam. Historical roots, challenges, and contemporary relevance of Quranic translations are investigated to make Muslims aware of the lack of knowledge concerning such translation traditions in Islam and to remove confusion about Muslim scholars' consensus about the discussed topic. For a comprehensive understanding, a range of literature was explored, and both present and previous Islamic literature was compared to find a connection between the historical events and scholarly consensus. This research contributes to the vast field of Quranic translation, highlighting its timeless need and impact in conveying the Islamic message on a universal level. In conclusion, this study affirms Quranic translation as a Prophetic tradition and an approved tool for Muslims to use to invite others to their faith.*

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**Keywords:** *Quran translation, language, origin of the method, different forms of translation.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Quranic translation has been a part of Islam since the very beginning of the religion. The practice was founded by the Prophet ﷺ and his companions. Muslims depended on translating the Quran in the first era of Islam, and they still do.

In 1980, Universitetsforlaget launched the first complete Norwegian translation of the Quran, translated by Einar Berg. Berg stated that the Muslim belief is that the Quran cannot be translated into any language, but it is possible to explain its intended meaning (Berg, 1980). During an interview with the national Norwegian television station Nrk, Berg addressed the misconception that Quranic translation was forbidden among Muslims for a long time (Nrk, 1982, 02:43). This research aims to demonstrate that translating the Quran has always been an Islamic tradition, and it dates to the method at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

The above-mentioned misconception clearly indicates a knowledge gap that needs to be discussed. This gap can be filled by making Muslims understand that it is important to translate

Quranic meanings because they build a relationship between people and the Lord, and that this has always been the method for Muslims to invite others to the faith.

Without the Quranic translations, it would not be possible for believers and people who are curious about the Islamic teachings to understand Islam's message (Awj, 2007). The diverse languages and cultures among Muslim communities rely on translations of the Quran to access the Quran's message. Thus, it becomes necessary to explore the origin of Quranic translation and whether it is something newly developed in modern times or whether its origin is in Prophetic practice. Understanding this phenomenon will bring believers closer to a tradition that has always been the greatest tool for conveying the message of the Quran.

The role of translation is to convey the essence of a message, in order to awaken curiosity within the minds of listeners and readers. The topic (the need and origin of Quranic translations) discussed in this research is an important part of Islam. The global spread of Islam demands Quranic translation. The roots of this tradition lay with the Prophet ﷺ and his companions early on in Islam's history (Al-Wādī'ī, 2006). However, it is the responsibility of a translator to adhere to the principles of Quranic interpretation based on authentic sources (Al-Dhahabī, 2010).

The primary challenge lies in navigating the details of Quranic translation, regarding both historical and contemporary challenges. While scholars have prioritized preserving the sanctity of the divine text, they should also recognize need to make it available to people from different communities. This

research investigates how the first generation set a trend regarding this challenge of communicating the message of Islam in non-Arab lands. Identifying this problem offers Muslims insights into the complexities surrounding the need for Quranic translation.

People often criticize the science of Quranic translation without having sufficient knowledge of its origin and evolution. To examine the discussed topic, the following research questions were carefully constructed:

- (1) What is the role and importance of language in Islam?
- (2) What was the origin of Quranic translation? Who founded this tradition?
- (3) Was Quranic translation a necessary tradition, and is it still needed?

This research investigates and explains the role of Quranic translation in Islam by providing insights into how it originated, why it was important, and why it remains relevant. These aims were achieved via the following objectives:

- (1) Analyze the role and significance of language within the context of Islam, with a focus on the need for translation to communicate the divine message.
- (2) Investigate historical sources to detect the roots of Quranic translation by identifying the first people to translate the Quran and what their motivations were.
- (3) Examine whether it was necessary to translate the Quran and whether it will always be necessary.

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This research investigates the tradition of Quranic translation within Islam, identifying its origin and emphasizing its constant practice by early Muslims. The ambiguity of whether Quranic translation is permitted highlights the study's fundamental role in inviting people to the faith. Scholars have always faced the challenge of balancing the sacredness of the Quran with ease of access in translating the divine text. However, the necessity for understanding the Quran's message among non-Arabic speakers underscores the indispensability of translation.

To explore the discussed topic, the research examines the role of language in Islam, the origin of Quranic translation, and its ongoing importance in diverse global communities. Drawing on historical sources, the research identifies the role of language in Islam and how the motivations behind Quranic translation originated, while also evaluating the practice of Quranic translation.

The significance of this research is in making Muslims aware of the greatest tool for conveying the message of the Quran. By concentrating on the points above, the research endeavors to bridge the knowledge gap regarding whether Quranic translation is a Prophetic, lawful, and necessary tradition.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This review helps to understand the sacredness of the Quran in the eyes of scholars. The review also provides insights into the issues of not reciting the Quran in any language other than Arabic and how translating the Quran is not the same phenomenon as reciting the words of the Quran.

## 2.1 The Sacredness of the Quranic Text

Some scholars have criticized writing the Quran in any language other than Arabic. This point may concern transcribing the Quran into another language and claiming it to be the words of God, emphasizing the importance of preserving the original Arabic text, to prevent and mixing with other languages. The companion Zayd wrote revelations in front of the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ dictated them. When the companion Zayd finished writing, the Prophet ﷺ told him to read it; if there was something missing, the Prophet ﷺ would correct it. Then, these words were presented to the people. Mālik ibn Anas was asked if it was permitted to write the Quran in a contemporary language people were used to, be it in Arabia or outside. He refused and said that it should only be in the original language. This was also the opinion of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and al-Bayhaqī. Al-Zamakhsharī added that the script of the Quran was based on Prophetic traditions. Al-Rūmī (2005, p. 370) concluded these scholarly sayings by stating these narrations reveal that Quranic script is a matter of divine guidance and should not be violated.

The above-mentioned Islamic scholars also debated the recitation of the Quran in another language (i.e., not Arabic) during the daily obligatory prayer or outside of it. Al-Nawawī (1928, vol. 3, p. 379) was clear about that it does not matter if a person understands Arabic or not, or is able to recite beautifully or not, this action invalidates his prayer. Al-Zarqānī (1943, vol. 2, p. 163) supports this view, confirming it was the consensus of the scholars of Islam to not recite the Quran in any other language. However, a famous debated opinion is that Abū Ḥanīfah stated it is permitted to recite the Quran in

Persian, which was deemed lawful by some scholars from the Ḥanafī school of law, but Abū Ḥanīfah later withdrew from this standpoint and followed the majority opinion, according to Ibn ʿĀbidīn al-Dīmashqī (1992, vol. 1, p. 484).

## 2.2 The Origin of Quranic Translation

The opinions discussed primarily pertain to the recitation and preservation of the Quranic text in Arabic. However, throughout history, scholars have translated the Quran into other languages, either orally or written. For instance, the Prophet ﷺ sent letters to rulers of different parts of the world to invite them to Islam through the message of the Quran (Al-Nadwī, 2004, p. 396). Such interaction between messengers and rulers inherently relied on translation. However, the text of early sources of Prophetic traditions tends to omit the translators; when the Prophet ﷺ sent a letter to the ruler of Persia, it is narrated that “...when the ruler of Persia read it, he tore it into pieces” (Al-Bukhārī, 2001, vol. 9, p. 90, narration #7264). The same phenomenon of omitting translators is also sometimes found in the commentaries of the *ḥadīth* literature (Al-ʿAsqalānī, 1959, vol. 1, p. 44). Therefore, the *ḥadīth* literature does not emphasize translators being a part of these interactions. Nevertheless, the books of *ḥadīth* extractions and authentications mention the letter was read [by a translator] to the ruler of Persia, revealing the role of translators in communicating the message of the Quran (Al-Zaylaʿī, 1997, vol. 4, p. 421; Al-ʿAsqalānī, n.d., vol. 2, p. 296, narration #1063).

The companions of the Prophet ﷺ sent to Axum (Ethiopia/*Ḥabashah*) in Africa also orally translated the Quran to convey its meaning to the king of that land. The companions

also translated the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ to the king, leaving a profound impression on the king that led to his acceptance of the truth (Ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī, 2001, vol. 37, pp. 170–175, narration #22498, al-Arnā'ūṭ: acceptable chain).

Based on the method of the Prophet ﷺ and the companions and the understanding of scholars, the Quran has always been translated into different languages by scholars of Islam. According to some scholars, the companion Salmān al-Fārisī translated the first chapter of the Quran for the Persians when they wrote to him and requested it, and they used to recite the translation in their prayers until they were able to do it in Arabic (Al-Sarakhsī, 1993, vol. 1, p. 37). Al-Rāzī (1999, vol. 1, pp. 184–186) discusses the issue of reciting the Quran in Arabic, disagreeing with the notion in the above-mentioned narration. He presents several arguments by clarifying that it is not permitted to recite the Quran in any language other than Arabic; if it were, the Prophet ﷺ would have commanded the companion Salmān al-Fārisī to do so.

### 2.3 The Need to Translate the Quran

Khālid (2016, p. 14) explains that the need for Quranic translations became even more pressing when Islam spread to foreign countries outside the Arab world. People depended on the Quranic message in their own language. Khālid (ibid, p. 15) continues that, if one considers the argument above, it was not necessary to translate the Quran more than once in a language, but the Quran was often translated several times. The reason for these various translations was the changing nature of the language and the development of societies, technology, and science. Muslim (1994, p. 41) agrees with this theory and



emphasizes that Muslim scholars dedicated their lives to the task of translating the Quran.

#### **2.4 Summary of Review of Literature**

Scholars have consistently upheld the Quran as a sacred text and unanimously agreed that its words in another language cannot replace the original (Al-Rūmī, 2005, p. 370). Evidence suggests that some words of the Quran were translated orally in the time of the Prophet ﷺ (Al-'Asqalānī, 1959, vol. 1, p. 44). The role of translating the Quran is to spread the religion, so people can strengthen their relationship with God (Al-Zayla'ī, 1997, vol. 4, p. 421). Learning that translating the Quran was the method of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions fills the knowledge gap, providing Muslims with an understanding that Quranic translations are necessary and permitted according to Islamic tradition. This review clarifies that translating the Quran has always been an Islamic tradition, and it differs from reciting it. Translating the Quran was also a method of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions. Consequently, this research underlines the significance of translating the Quran and identifies its origin. The findings of the research reveal beneficial facts for Muslims in general.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section explains the methodological framework used to research the elements of Quranic translation, focusing on the role of translation and language in Islam and the historical background of this necessary practice.

### **3.1 Research Approach**

The chosen literature was investigated using content analysis by employing a qualitative methodology. Krippendorff (2004, p. 81) explains that content analysis is a method that utilizes many specific techniques to manage textual data. These techniques are tools for creating suitable analyses. Krippendorff (ibid, p. 87) further adds that grouping similar parts of texts is the easiest technique for measuring or organizing information from the sources; this process helps to break down texts into manageable portions for investigation. The objective of this research is to raise awareness among Muslims regarding the primary tool employed by the first generation of Muslims to convey the meaning of the Quran. The selected method helped to identify patterns and consensus systematically within Islamic tradition and uncover the origin of the tradition of Quranic translation.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Neuendorf (2002) declares it a myth that content analysis is an easy task and that it does not require any special preparation. Therefore, it was important to be well prepared and select relevant literature to employ qualitative content analysis by thoroughly exploring the chosen data. The data collection was conducted manually by selecting books and articles by Islamic scholars on the discussed topic. Some articles by orientalist were also investigated. To trace a connection between the present and past tradition of Quranic translation, it was necessary to examine the role of language and translation in the first period of Islam. It was important to detect early incidents of Quranic translation in Islamic history through reliable and

authentic sources. Hence, non-reliable information was rejected and not used in the research.

### **3.3 Sample Selection and Coding**

The selected method required an understanding of the discussed topic via a literature review to establish the consensus of Muslim scholars concerning the tradition of Quranic translation. Therefore, scholarly literature discussing the topic from the present and past, connecting traditional and modern standpoints, was chosen. The sample contained literature from different parts of the world. An interesting observation during the sample selection was that people from various backgrounds claimed their country to be the first where the Quran was translated.

The selected method made it possible to identify patterns, theories, and tendencies related to my research questions. This systematic approach ensured a comprehensive analysis via categorizing and coding meaningful data, which resulted in a valuable understanding of Quranic translation.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The approach adopted in this study provided valuable insights into the complicated tradition of translating the Quran. Key points regarding the topic were understood through investigating literature concerning Quranic translation, its history, and its need. A potential misunderstanding may evolve among Muslims when they see some scholars have criticized writing the Quran in any language other than Arabic. However, examining the topic helped to identify that this point relates to transcribing and calling the result the Quran rather than

translating the meanings. By conducting a comparison of the selected literature and a thorough analysis, this study effectively clarified this misunderstanding by investigating the links and associations within the data.

#### 4. ANALYSIS

Interpretation is an essential stage in drawing significant conclusions from the investigated data. Findings need to be understood by emphasizing the importance of detected patterns and themes, providing context to the research questions and integrating the literature's collective wisdom. This process aims to offer deeper knowledge of the topic.

The goal of the research is to identify for Muslims the need for Quranic translation and its historical origin via literature from past and present scholars. The research questions were answered systematically by employing content analysis of the selected data. A comparison of different sources was conducted to check whether the Quran was ever translated by the first generation of Muslims.

Relying on historical facts from the *ḥadīth* literature proving that the first generation of Muslims did translate the Quran, the *ḥadīth* literature played a vital role in this research. The *ḥadīth* literature was then compared with the research by scholars on these Prophetic narrations to identify a connection between the origin and development of the tradition (Quranic translation). All the Muslim scholars agreed that some parts of the Quran were translated at the time of the Prophet ﷺ (Al-Dhahabī, 1985; Muslim al-Nīsābūrī, n.d.; Ṭawīlah and Ḥalwānī, n.d.; Ibn Ṭulūn, 1987).

However, a disagreement was found during the research. Once such instance involves a weak narration gaining traction in Islamic literature suggesting that the companion Salmān was the first to translate the Quran. How this claim is not from a reliable source (Al-Zarqānī, 1943). Another element that can cause disagreement among Muslim scholars is the omission of the word “translator” from some Prophetic narrations, giving the impression that the person receiving the message knew Arabic and that the Quran was not translated (Al-Bukhārī, 2001); however, this was not the actual situation, as the tradition at the time was always to make people read the letters and translate them or to converse in the presence of a translator (Al-Zayla‘ī, 1997). This point underscores the importance of translation in Islam, but it is more important that Muslims themselves translate their own works due to the demanded understanding and respect.

Arab Muslims depend on Quranic translations in the form of interpretation when they have not studied traditional Arabic, enabling them to understand the words of the Quran, and non-Arab Muslims who do not speak Arabic at all depend on translations of the Quran in their local language. This research was undertaken to prove to Muslims that Quranic translation is a Prophetic tradition, and Muslims should appreciate these translations and read them to understand their own religion better and to teach it to other people. This research highly focuses on Quranic translation’s history and present need, making it clear to readers that this tradition will always be necessary.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the research, revealing the insights gained.

### 5.1 Importance of Language

Whenever people want to communicate a message in one language from another language, translation plays a vital role. The Quran highlights the importance of language:

- (1) The Quran was revealed in Arabic for the people to use their intellects (Quran, 12:2, 43:3).
- (2) The Quran was revealed as an Arabic scripture, and people were given warnings in it, so they may become Godfearing or it may produce a lesson for them (Quran, 20:1113).
- (3) People were given all kinds of examples in the Quran, so they may pay heed, and this was done via an Arabic book with no crookedness, so people may become Godfearing (Quran, 39:27–28).
- (4) The Quran's verses are made distinct in Arabic for people who understand (Quran, 41:3).
- (5) The Quran was revealed in Arabic, so people in Mecca could be warned (Quran, 42:7).
- (6) The language in the Quran is clear Arabic (Quran, 26:195); therefore, no non-Arab could have taught this to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ (Quran, 16:103), nor any

Arab, because nobody knew this high level of eloquence.

- (7) The Quran confirms the divine scriptures before it with its Arabic language to warn the evil people and give glad news to the good doers (Quran, 46:12).
- (8) The Quran had to be in Arabic because the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was an Arab, or else people would have complained that an Arab Prophet was preaching in a foreign language (Quran, 41:44).
- (9) The Quran was revealed as a judgment of authority in Arabic (Quran, 13:37).
- (10) Whenever God sent a messenger, he was sent with the language of his people to make it clear for them (Quran, 14:4).

## 5.2 The Written Form of the Arabic Language

Scholars have engaged in an ongoing debate regarding the literacy of Arabs before the advent of Islam. The most likely situation is there were Arabs who could read and write before Islam, but there was no culture of literacy. God mentioned the pen, the book, and the tablet in the Quran, indicating the Arabs knew about these tools, and some were even using them (Shuraym, 2013).

Al-Mubārakfūrī (n.d., p. 97) highlights an instance where the Arab tribe Quraysh drafted a pact that they hung in the Kaaba during the boycott of the Banū Hāshim tribe, suggesting a degree of literacy within certain Arab tribes.

The written form of Arabic grew popular and spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula, especially following the battle of Badr (624 CE) because the Prophet ﷺ ordered that the captives be released on the condition that they teach the children of Medina to read and write (Bayān al-Islām, n.d.).

Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī (1986, vol. 5, pp. 339–355) mentions several of the Prophet’s ﷺ companions who transcribed the words of the Quran proving that people knew the art of reading and writing before Islam came to Arabia. Therefore, it seems the Arabic written form existed before Islam, but the role of those who wrote down the revelations of the Quran and the Prophetic traditions was to transmit the Islamic message. Hence, their contributions gained more popularity and may have led to an impression that Islam created the written form of the Arabic language.

### 5.3 The Role of Translation in the Prophet’s ﷺ Invitation

When the Meccan disbelievers tortured and punished the Muslims because they started to believe in the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ instructed the companions to immigrate to the Kingdom of Axum (Ethiopia/*Ḥabashah*). Here, the companions had the opportunity to live and to practice their faith freely. The Meccan disbelievers sent two diplomats to bring back the Muslims from Axum, but the king was a just man, so he asked the companions to recite something from their holy scripture. The companion Ja‘far recited some verses from Chapter *Maryam* in the Quran. This made the king and his advisors cry. The king said that this message and the message that the king and his people believed in were from the same



light (Al-Dhababī, 1985, vol. 1, pp. 215–216, al-Arnā'ūt: authentic).

It is important to understand that the main reason behind sending the companions to Axum was so they could be safe and practice their faith, but it cannot be overlooked that they also had another goal there: to spread the message of Islam. The discussion between the companion and the king is mentioned in the Prophetic narrations, but they lack information about whether a translator was there. However, the conversation was probably either translated by an interpreter or directly into the local language of the people of Axum; maybe the companion Ja'far knew their language. In a sense, this was the first translation of Quranic verses in a foreign country and the first translation of the Prophetic traditions (teachings) into a foreign language; a new science was born in Islam.

Ṭawīlah and Ḥalwānī (n.d., p. 87) call the truce of al-Ḥudaybiyyah a great victory for spreading the Quranic message. This incident provided the Muslims with a break from fighting for the cause of God and focused on inviting people to the faith. This was an opportunity to spread the words of the Quran beyond the borders, to Persia and the Roman Empire. The Prophet ﷺ sent letters to rulers of different lands, calling them to Islam (Muslim al-Nīsābūrī, n.d., vol. 3, p. 1397, narration #1774). The companions wrote the letters, and the Prophet ﷺ told them what to write. The letters sent to the rulers were delivered by messengers, and they were translated for the receiver so the receiver could understand what the Prophet ﷺ wrote. The letters contained words from the Quran and some general guidance (Ibn Ṭulūn, 1987, p. 25). This was the method

of the Prophet ﷺ to send letters to people in Arabia and beyond (Al-Wādī'ī, 2006, pp. 25, 77). The letters were in Arabic, but they were translated orally into the local language when they were read to the recipient.

#### **5.4 In the Court of Heraclius, Emperor of the Byzantine Empire**

There is a famous narration about the companion Abū Sufyān being in the Levant for business before he became a Muslim, and Emperor Heraclius called him to his court. Heraclius called his interpreter to translate the dialogue between him and the Arabs, and the letter of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was read to him. Heraclius asked about what the Prophet ﷺ invited the Arabs to and what his message was, whether he was a just man, and other details about him. Abū Sufyān informed him, and the interpreter translated. Abū Sufyān admitted that he was not able to say anything bad about the Prophet ﷺ during this dialogue. Heraclius had heard about this awaited Prophet ﷺ, and, in his heart, he knew it was the truth, but he did not declare his belief for fear of losing power (Al-Bukhārī, 2001, vol. 1, p. 8, narration #7). This incident occurred during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, proving that Islamic guidance was translated, as well as giving information about the character of the Prophet ﷺ. Two main sciences of Islam, (1) the Quranic knowledge (message) and (2) the biography of the Prophet ﷺ, were a part of this dialogue with Heraclius, and both sciences were translated.

#### **5.5 The Need for Quranic Translation**

Muslim (1994, p. 17) argues the Quran was revealed in Arabic as guidance, humans were sent as messengers to the people

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(Quran, 17:94–95), and these messengers spoke their language to communicate and clarify the message (Quran, 14:4). Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was sent to warn all mankind (Quran, 34:28), but this makes it either obligatory for all humans to learn Arabic or for scholars of Islam to convert the meanings and understandings to other languages. The obvious answer is that it is the role of the scholars to convert the message of Islam to other languages, so more people may understand. Muslim (1994, p. 41) further adds that as the population of Muslims grew, and people from foreign countries converted to Islam, Muslim scholars increasingly depended on translation and interpreting the Islamic teachings. Several challenges, such as language, culture, and previous religious beliefs and practices, demanded Islamic knowledge in the local language. In this manner, the science of translation developed among Muslims, and scholars played a vital role in this.

Awj (2007, p. 15), agrees with the scholars that the main reason behind the need for translating the Quran is that not everybody speaks Arabic, nor is the Quranic Arabic something everybody understands. The argument for translating the Quran becomes even stronger when even Arabs depend on the Prophet ﷺ for understanding Quranic. Awj (ibid, p. 18) adds that translation is the first phase of conveying or interpreting the Quranic words because, without translation, nobody can understand the Quran. For Arabs, this process means providing an easier language or offering an explanation. For non-Arabs, it is done in their local language.

### **5.6 Conveying and Converting the Words of the Quran**

As previously discussed, in the earliest phase of Islam, the Muslims depended on the translation of the Quran, and even more so when Islam was spreading to other countries. Whenever the Quran arrived in a new place, people required translation to understand it. A critical question, both in the past and today, is whether the Quran can be translated. Sharafuddin (n.d., pp. 69–70) acknowledges that the Quran’s words in themselves are impossible to translate. People face terminological and linguistic problems during the process. However, the translator’s role is to communicate the text as honestly as possible and to provide the nearest equivalent meanings of the Quran. This is what translations are defined as: the nearest meaning.

Al-Dhahabī (2010, vol. 1, pp. 23–24) explains that conveying and converting the words of the Quran happens in two forms: (1) word for word, and (2) the meaning of the words. “Word for word” means to transmit completely the original words. “The meanings of the words” means to place greater emphasis on the meaning than the words themselves. A translator must apply both methods to retain the original meanings but also convey them in such a manner that they make sense in the target language. If the translator begins to add meanings without adhering to the methods employed by the companions, their disciples, and the scholars of Islam, the translator may fail to convey or convert the true and authentic meanings.

Al-Dhahabī (ibid, p. 31) recounts a disagreement among scholars regarding the interpretation of the Quran as being deductions or conclusions based on Quranic words or

interpretations based on proofs. *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* (interpreting the Quran using authentic sources) assigned higher rank to proofs than conclusions, demanding the interpreter draw conclusions based on principles.

### 5.7 A Brief History of the Quran Translations

Al-Nawawī (1928, vol. 3, p. 380) mentions the famous theory about the companion Salmān al-Fārisī translating the first chapter of the Quran for Persians, so they could recite it in their daily obligatory prayers. Al-Nawawī (ibid) disputes this theory, stating the Quran is only the miraculous Arabic text revealed to the Prophet ﷺ and nothing else; therefore, reciting the Quran in any other language is forbidden. Al-Zarqānī (1943, vol. 2, p. 159) states this narration is unknown, its chain unidentified, and it is not permitted to act according to it. It is also not documented that the companion Salmān al-Fārisī translated the entire first chapter; it is only one sentence. In contrast, the narration about the companions when they emigrated to Axum is authentic (Al-Dhahabī, 1985, vol. 1, pp. 215–216, al-Arnā'ūt: authentic) and included in almost all biographies of the Prophet ﷺ. This was probably the first oral translation of the Quran into another language. Al-Balūshī (n.d., p. 4) highlights that the letter sent to Heraclius included verse 3:64 of the Quran, and it was translated for Heraclius, as well as an oral translation. This was also the case with the letter sent to the Persian ruler. Therefore, the letter to the Persian ruler may have been one of the first translations of Quranic words into Persian.

Having identified that the narration about the translation of the Quran into Persian by the companion Salmān al-Fārisī is unreliable, it is important to investigate when Quranic

translations began to emerge both within and outside the Muslim world.

Høgel (2010, p. 66) argues that a not-so-popular Greek Quranic translation existed before 870 CE. He claims one of the main reasons for this translation going unrecognized by Muslims is that it was used to refute the Quran, which proves its aim was anti-Islamic. Høgel (ibid, p. 67) adds that this translation has not been assigned a specific date, but it was used as a main source by Nicetas in his refutation of the Islamic belief. Many dates have been assigned to the document of Nicetas in which this translation was used to refute the Quran; the specific period of this refutation is claimed to be 866–870 CE.

Ulbricht (2023, p. 222) also discusses an anonymous Quranic translation used by Nicetas in his refutation of the Quran and its creed. Ulbricht claims earlier Christian writers used some Quranic passages in their polemics against Islam. He mentions Christian writers doing this as early as approximately 50–70 years after the passing of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, which corresponds to around 700s CE. Ulbricht states there is no doubt that Nicetas, who refuted the Quran, had a Greek Quranic translation at his disposal, but the author of the translation is unknown. Ulbricht states that Nicetas' refutation of the Quran is preserved in a single Greek manuscript in the Vatican library (Vat. gr. 681).

Al-Jarf (2014, p. 4) claims that a Sindhi translation was requested by a Hindu ruler named Mahrūk, who supposedly sent a request to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, ruler of Mansura, Sindh (modern Pakistan). This translation is claimed to have been produced in 883 CE by a Muslim Arab poet who

knew the Sindhi language. This theory is supported by Nadwī (2010, p. 160) in his research on the historical relations between Arabs and Indians. He presented this research in 1929 CE during his lectures and claimed that a Hindi or Sindhi translation was requested by an Indian ruler, Mahrūk, in Alwarā in Sindh. He wrote to the ruler of Mansura, requesting a text. The ruler of Mansura had an Iraqi poet fluent in Sindhi. The poet wrote a poem and sent it to the Hindu ruler of Alwarā, who appreciated it and invited the poet to court. The poet then translated the Quran, and the Hindu ruler would listen to the translation every day. Sarafuddīn (n.d., pp. 79–80) highlights that the first Urdu/Hindi Quranic translation in India was by Shāh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Dihlawī in 1790 CE. Sarafuddīn (ibid, p. 81) adds that although this is the most famous first version of Urdu/Hindi in India, the struggle of translating the Quran had begun approximately 1,000 years earlier and was a developing and continuous effort of Muslim scholars on the Indian subcontinent.

Al-Balūshī (n.d., pp. 12–13) makes the interesting claim that Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, who, according to al-Balūshī, died in 945 CE, reported that he read a Quranic commentary written by his teacher, al-Jubbā‘ī, whom he later renounced. Al-Jubba‘ī, who died in 915 CE, wrote a Quranic commentary in his Persian language. Al-Ash‘arī claimed this commentary contained nothing other than the words and philosophies of al-Jubbā‘ī, that is, nothing from the Quran. Al-Balūshī (ibid, p. 18) adds that this commentary has not been seen in modern times and is only mentioned in a few sources. However, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, the major Quranic commentary by al-Ṭabarī was translated into Persian on the order of the ruler of the Samanids, Maṅṣūr I.

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Thus, there were complete Persian translations of the Quran with commentaries at the end of the 800s CE and the beginning or middle of the 900s CE.

Furthermore, on 7 May 1649, Alexander Ross translated the Quran from French into English with the title *The Alcoran of Mahomet*. This was the first English translation of the Quran (Qudwāī, n.d., p. 107). Also, concerning the Norwegian language, the Quran has five published translations, and another is in production. The first complete translation into Norwegian was published in 1980.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Language is the key to all forms of knowledge; if you do not understand the language, you cannot understand the message. The language of the Quran has a clear goal: to make people Godfearing and give them guidance. The Quran's language is Arabic, but not all believers understand Arabic; therefore, it has always been a part of Muslim tradition to translate the words of the Quran. The companions were sent to a new land in Africa for their security. They aimed to spread the religion in a new part of the world, using the local language of that land. The letters sent to kings and rulers in other countries were also translated. This demonstrates that translation played a vital role in the growth of Islam. The Quran must be translated because messengers communicate with their communities in their own language, and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the final messenger; hence, his message must be conveyed through translations for all humankind to understand.



The method of translating the Quran and the Prophetic traditions existed in oral form at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Approximately 200 years after the passing of the Prophet ﷺ, a Greek Quran translation existed, and, in 883 CE, a Muslim translated the probable first Quranic translation into Sindhi. The need for Quranic translation also existed among the companions; they used to ask the Prophet ﷺ for the meanings of words. This was a form of translation through interpretation, proving that both Arabs and non-Arabs depend on Quranic translation. From the time of the Prophet ﷺ until today, it has been an Islamic tradition to translate the Quran to convey its meanings.

This research acknowledges the fundamental challenge of fully capturing the depth of Quranic translations within one single research project. The research may not cover all the topics related to Quranic translations and their vast field.

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