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# THE KORÂN

# THE KORÂN

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH  
FROM THE ORIGINAL ARABIC

BY  
GEORGE SALE

WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES  
FROM THE MOST APPROVED COMMENTATORS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY  
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LONDON  
FREDERICK WARNE AND Co. Ltd.  
AND NEW YORK

Q7:21

F7

55-37

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN**

## INTRODUCTION

THERE is surely no need to-day to insist on the importance of a close study of the Korân for all who would comprehend the many vital problems connected with the Islamic World ; and yet few of us, I imagine, among the many who possess translations of this book have been at pains to read it through. It must, however, be borne in mind that the Korân plays a far greater rôle among the Muhammadans than does the Bible in Christianity in that it provides not only the canon of their faith, but also the text-book of their ritual and the principles of their Civil Law.

It was the Great Crusades that first brought the West into close touch with Islam, but between the years 1096 and 1270 we only hear of one attempt to make known to Europe the Sacred Book of the Moslems, namely, the Latin version made in 1143, by Robert of Retina (who, Sale tells us, was an Englishman), and Hermann of Dalmatia, on the initiative of Petrus Venerabilis, the Abbot of Clugny, which version was ultimately printed by T. Bibliander in Basel in 1543, nearly a hundred years after the fall of Constantinople.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, several translations appeared both in Latin and in French, and one of the latter, by André du Ryer, was translated into English by Alexander Ross in 1649. But by far the most important work on the Korân was that of Luigi Marracci which was published in Padua in 1698.

George Sale's translation first appeared in November, 1734, in a quarto volume ; in 1764 it was first printed in medium octavo, and the reprint of 1825 contained the sketch of Sale's life by Richard Alfred Davenport which has been utilized in the article on Sale in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The Chandos Classics edition in crown octavo was first issued in 1877.

Soon after the death of the Prophet, early Muhammadan theologians began to discuss, not only the correct reading

of the text itself, but also to work out on the basis of first-hand reports the story connected with the revelation of each chapter. As the book at present stands in its original form the chapters are arranged more or less according to their respective length, beginning with the longest ; except in the case of the opening chapter, which holds a place by itself, not only in the sacred book of Islam, corresponding as it does in a manner to our Pater Noster, but also in its important ceremonial usages. The presumed order in which the various chapters were revealed is given in the tabular list of Contents, but it may be mentioned that neither Muhammadan theologians, nor, in more recent times, European scholars, are in entire agreement upon the exact chronological position of all the chapters.

It is well for all who study the Korân to realize that the actual text is never the composition of the Prophet, but is the word of God addressed to the Prophet ; and that in quoting the Korân the formula is " He (may he be exalted) said " or some such phrase. The Prophet himself is of course quoted by Muhammadan theologians, but such quotations refer to his traditional sayings known as " Hadis," which have been handed down from mouth to mouth with the strictest regard to genealogical continuity.

It would probably be impossible for any Arabic scholar to produce a translation of the Korân which would defy criticism, but this much may be said of Sale's version : just as, when it first appeared, it had no rival in the field, it may be fairly claimed to-day that it has been superseded by no subsequent translations. Equally remarkable with his translation is the famous *Preliminary Discourse* which constitutes a *tour de force* when we consider how little critical work had been done in his day in the field of Islamic research. Practically the only works of first-class importance were Dr. Pocock's *Specimen Historiæ Arabum*, to which, in his original Address to the Reader, Sale acknowledges his great indebtedness, and Marracci's Korân.

In spite of the vast number of eminent scholars who have worked in the same field since the days of George Sale, his *Preliminary Discourse* still remains the best Introduction in any European language to the study of the religion promulgated by the Prophet of Arabia ; but as Wherry says : " Whilst regarding the *Preliminary Discourse* as a most masterly, and on the whole reliable, presentation of the peculiar doctrines, rites, ceremonies, customs, and institutions



of Islam, we recognize the fact that modern research has brought to light many things concerning the history of the ancient Arabs which greatly modify the statements made in the early paragraphs."

For many centuries the acquaintance which the majority of Europeans possessed of Muhammadanism was based almost entirely on distorted reports of fanatical Christians which led to the dissemination of a multitude of gross calumnies. What was good in Muhammadanism was entirely ignored, and what was not good, in the eyes of Europe, was exaggerated or misinterpreted.

It must not, however, be forgotten that the central doctrine preached by Muhammad to his contemporaries in Arabia, who worshipped the Stars; to the Persians, who acknowledged Ormuz and Ahriman; the Indians, who worshipped idols; and the Turks, who had no particular worship, was the unity of God, and that the simplicity of his creed was probably a more potent factor in the spread of Islam than the sword of the Ghazis.

Islam, although seriously affecting the Christian world, brought a spiritual religion to one half of Asia, and it is an amazing circumstance that the Turks, who on several occasions let loose their Central Asian hordes over India, and the Middle East, though irresistible in the onslaught of their arms, were all conquered in their turn by the Faith of Islam, and founded Muhammadan dynasties.

The Mongols of the thirteenth century did their best to wipe out all traces of Islam when they sacked Baghdad, but though the Caliphate was relegated to obscurity in Egypt the newly founded Empires quickly became Muhammadan states, until, finally it was a Turk who took the title of Caliph which has been held by the house of Othman ever since.

Thus through all the vicissitudes of thirteen hundred years the Koran has remained the sacred book of all the Turks and Persians and of nearly a quarter of the population of India. Surely such a book as this deserves to be widely read in the West, more especially in these days when space and time have been almost annihilated by modern invention, and when public interest embraces the whole world.

It is difficult to decide to what extent Sale's citations in the notes represent first-hand use of the Arabic commentators, but I fear that the result of a close inquiry only points to very little original research on his part. He says himself in his Address to the Reader: "As I have had no oppor-

tunity of consulting public libraries, the manuscripts of which I have made use throughout the whole work have been such as I had in my own study, except only the Commentary of Al Baidhâwi . . . which "belongs to the library of the Dutch Church in Austin Friars."

Now with regard to these manuscripts which Sale had in his "own study" we happen to possess first-hand information, for a list of them was printed by the executor of his will under the following title: "A choice collection of most curious and inestimable manuscripts in the Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages from the library of the late learned and ingenious Mr. George Sale. Which books are now in the possession of Mr. William Hammerton Merchant in Lothbury where they may be seen on Wednesdays and Fridays till either they are sold or sent abroad. N.B. These MSS. are to be sold together and not separately." They were purchased in the first instance by the Rev. Thomas Hunt of Oxford for the Radcliffe Library, and they are now permanently housed in the Bodleian Library.

The British Museum possesses a copy of this list which is drawn up in English and French on opposite pages and comprises eighty-six works in all. The list contains very few Arabic works of first-rate importance, but is rich in Turkish and Persian Histories. What is most significant, however, is the fact that it contains hardly any of the Arabic works and *none* of the Commentaries which are referred to on every page of Sale's translation of the Korân.

I have therefore been forced to the conclusion that with the exception of Al-Baidhâwi, Sale's sources were all consulted at second hand; and an examination of Marracci's great work makes the whole matter perfectly clear. Sale says of Marracci's translation that it is "generally speaking very exact; but adheres to the Arabic idiom too literally to be easily understood . . . by those who are not versed in the Muhammadan learning. The notes he has added are indeed of great use; but his refutations, which swell the work to a large volume, are of little or none at all, being often unsatisfactory, and sometimes impertinent. The work, however, with all its faults is very valuable, and I should be guilty of ingratitude, did I not acknowledge myself much obliged thereto; but still being in Latin it can be of no use to those who understand not that tongue."

Such is Sale's own confession of his obligation to Marracci—but it does not go nearly far enough. A comparison of

the two versions shows that so much had been achieved by Marracci that Sale's work might almost have been performed with a knowledge of Latin alone, as far as regards the quotations from Arabic authors. I do not wish to imply that Sale did not know Arabic, but I do maintain that his work as it stands gives a misleading estimate of his original researches, and that his tribute to Marracci falls far short of his actual indebtedness.

It must be mentioned that Marracci not only reproduced the whole of the Arabic text of the Korân but furthermore gives the original text and the translation of all his quotations from Arabic writers. It is indeed a profoundly learned work and has never received the recognition it deserves. Marracci had at his disposal rich collections of MSS. belonging to the Libraries of Italy. How he learnt his Arabic we do not know. Voltaire says he was never in the East. He was confessor to Pope Innocent XI, and his work which appeared in Padua in 1698 is dedicated to the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I. By way of Introduction to his Korân Marracci published a companion folio volume called *Prodromus* which contains practically all that was known in his day regarding Muhammad and the Religion of Islam.

It may in any case be claimed that the present work presents to the Western student all the essentials of a preliminary study of Islam: for Sale's translation and foot-notes will give him as clear an idea as can be obtained, without laborious years of study in Arabic, of what is regarded by so many millions of men from Fez to the Far East as the revealed word of God and the unshakable basis of their faith.

George Sale was born about 1697 and died in 1736. Every biography calls attention to the statement made by Voltaire in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* to the effect that Sale spent over twenty years among the Arabs. I think this must have been a *lapsus calami* on Voltaire's part, because it is unlikely that he would have invented such a story. Sale must also have been well versed in Hebrew, both biblical and post-biblical, as his numerous allusions to Rabbinical writings testify.

Two years after the publication of his great work Sale died in Surrey Street, Strand, his age being then under forty. In 1720 he had been admitted a student of the Inner Temple—son of Samuel Sale, citizen and merchant of London—and the same year the Patriarch of Antioch had sent Solo-

mon Negri (Suleiman Alsadi) to London from Damascus to urge the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, then established in the Middle Temple, to issue an Arabic New Testament for the Syrian Christians. It is surmised that Negri was Sale's first instructor in Arabic, though Dadichi, the King's Interpreter, a learned Greek of Aleppo, guided him, we are told, "through the labyrinth of oriental dialects."

Whatever Sale may have known before—and he certainly had the gift of languages—it is on the Society's records that on August 30, 1726, he offered his services as one of the correctors of the Arabic New Testament and soon became the chief worker on it, besides being the Society's solicitor and holding other honorary offices. That translation of the New Testament into Arabic was followed by the translation of the Korân into English.

In this edition the proper names have been left for the most part as in the original, but the reader must understand that in Sale's day there was a freedom in regard to oriental orthography that allowed of many variations. In spite, however, of the want of a scientific system, Sale's transcription is on the whole clear, and far less confusing than those adopted by contemporary Anglo-Indian scholars, who utterly distorted Muhammadan names—including place names in India—by rendering the short *a* by *u* and so forth. As a few examples of names spelled in more than one way, the correct modern way being given first, we have Al-Qor'ân, Coran, Korân, etc.; Muhammad, Mohammed, Mahomet, etc.; Al-Baidhâwi, Al-Beidâwi; Muttalib, Motalleb, Motaleb, etc.; Jalâl ud-Dîn, Jallâlo'ddîn; Anas, Ans; Khalîfa, Caliph, Khalif, etc.

It is only within quite recent times that scholars have troubled to render each letter of the Arabic alphabet by an equivalent and distinct letter of the Roman alphabet—and although no particular system has been universally adopted by European orientalists, every writer has some system by which any reader with a knowledge of Arabic is able to turn back every name into the original script. The chief advantage of any such system is that a distinction is made between the two varieties of *s*, *k*, and *t*, and the presence of the illusive Arabic letter 'ayn is always indicated.

E. DENISON ROSS.

A TABLE OF THE CHAPTERS OF  
THE KORÂN  
ACCORDING TO THE ARABIC TEXT  
WITH THEIR ORDER OF DATE AND NUMBER OF VERSES

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