
Şaban Kurt has rendered a tremendous service to the German readers interested in Islam by entrusting Dr Murad Wilfried Hofmann the task to 'modernize' Henning's German translation of the Qurʾān. For about a century Henning's translation has been widely recognized as by far the most beautiful, precise and best translation of the Qurʾān available in German language.

In a very interesting introduction to this work of about 650 pages Dr Hofmann explains the merits of the Henning's translation and points out at the same time why it needed a revision. The reasons for revision seemingly are the following: (1) The language and style of the translation needed to be changed. The work bears the date 1901. It was therefore obvious that the text should be presented in free-flowing contemporary German that would be adequate for the coming 21st century. (2) The numbering of the verses also needed to be modified according to the current academic usage. (3) All pronouns referring to Allah (He, His, Whose, etc.) needed to be capitalized, making it clear to the reader who was being referred to, God or any of His creatures. (4) The work needed to be purged of the Jewish and Christian material, consisting either of historical information or theological notions drawn from traditional Judaico-Christian sources which had occasionally found their way into this work owing to the European cultural background of Henning. (5) It also was necessary to bring out some of the deeper meanings of such Arab words as ʾāyah (verse, sign, message, proof) or the plural substantive al-mala' (chiefs, leaders, notables). The word mala' thus had to be translated in a variety of ways according to the context rather than consistently one expression as Henning had done. (6) Above all, revision was also necessary in order to add short but informative and up-to-date comments.

No doubt Dr Murad Hofmann could have prepared his "own" translation of the Qurʾān. That he was content to improve an existing translation instead was because improvement was indeed needed. At the same time, it was also felt that Henning's translation was an effective one which directly addressed the heart of the reader. Hence, Dr Hofmann's decision has enabled the retention of a good work along with adding to it useful features.

One of the improvements introduced in the work concerns the index
which has been much enlarged and to which even a number of modern terms and expressions have been added. Some examples are: "atom theory" (34:3), "diplomacy" (4:114), "embryo" (39:6; 59:39; 96:2), "mental ethics" (29:2; 33:5; 53:39: "breach of domestic peace" (2:189; 24:27-29), "metaphysics" (22:3,8; 27:66; 30:60; 31:6; 51:10; 52:36,41), "nationalism" (28:15; 29:24; 49:13), "sour rain" (56:68-70), "environment/ecology" (2:11f, 30; 7:56,85; 10:5; 13:25; 22:18; 26:15f.; 30:41f.; 31:20; 38:28; 64:3), and "value agnostic" (5:100; 32:18; 41:34). I think this is very useful for those who try to acquaint themselves with Qur'anic teachings on specific issues. Another improvement consists of providing a thorough list of the surahs along with mentioning whether they were revealed during the Makkah or Madinan period of the life of the Prophet (peace be on him). An alphabetical list of the surahs has also been published along with a mention of the pages on which each surah is located. All this makes the work much easier to consult by those who are not too well acquainted with the Qur'an — and I guess that would be true of the majority of German readers.

To give a few practical examples of how Dr Murad Hofmann handled the task of conveying the authentic Islamic concepts: he saw to it that a fine but very important distinction is made when it comes to believing: He always writes: "to believe in Allah", but "to believe the prophet". In regard to what others call "the covenant" between Allah and man, he uses the expression "Allah's acceptance of a promise", in order to avoid bringing down Allah to the level a partner in a covenant with reciprocal obligations with man. Concerning the hotly discussed term qawwāmūn defining the position of men vis-à-vis women, (4:34), Dr Hofmann abstains from rendering it, in the manner it has usually been done: "men are the maintainers of women". Instead he says: "Men stand in (or carry) responsibility for women", a really beautiful solution! And instead of the "clot of congealed blood" (96:2), he translates the word mudghah in accordance with the contemporary scientific findings as "that which clings to..." (in German: "das sich Anklammerende"), which is exactly in line with what happens in the uterus when insemination takes place.

To round off the overall impression, I would like to cite some of the very interesting footnotes added by Dr Murad Hofmann. In regard to the verse 2:25 nearly all German translators write "wives" instead of companions/partners, and accordingly we come across the question by non-Muslims again and again: "Is the paradise in Islam only meant for men"? Hofmann's footnote says: "The Arabic word used here is zawj, pl. azwāj, which is not tied to any particular sex. Accordingly, like men, women will have their partners of the other sex in paradise". In 55:72 the problem is rather similar and here the footnote reads: "The Arabic word 'al-ḥār applies to both male and female companions since 'ḥār is the plural of
ahwar (male) as well as of 'ḥawrāʾ' (female). In regard to the "most beautiful names of Allah", as mentioned for example in 20:8, he writes as explanation for the word "names": "characteristics, attributes of perfection". Again and again Dr Murad Hofmann points out — as for example in 3:19 — that "Islam" is to be understood as "submission to Allah", just as a Muslim is, in the first instance, "one who submits to his Creator and Sustainer".

The work is also characterized by intellectual humility. Instead of indulging in endless speculations, Hofmann has the courage to admit — as for instance in the note to 2:73 — that in certain cases "the interpretation still remains not quite clear". Hofmann translates the verse 2:287 as the following: "And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, obvious signs and strengthened him with divine inspiration" — contrary to Henning who writes "with the Holy Spirit". In the footnote to this verse he says: "Literally, holy spirit, that is with God's spirit. By no means may this be understood as a divine person in the sense of the — trinity", which is a typical example of a 'Nasarene' (Christian allusions) as mentioned above. In regard to 2:94 Dr Hofmann writes: "The Qurʾān refutes the Jewish idea that they are exclusively the people chosen by God". To take another instance, in order to avoid unnecessary disputations, he says in his footnote to 2:106: "Whatever verses We abrogate...", that the statement does not refer to verses of the Qurʾān, but to pre-Qurʾānic revelations. (See also 87:6, 16:30). In regard to verse 2:144, as at several other places where the word 'sacred' is found in almost all other translations, Hofmann does not use the expression "the sacred mosque". He rather translates it as "the inviolable mosque" and the short footnote reads: From the Islamic point of view, it is God alone Who is 'sacred'. Accordingly, the mosque in Makkah is not called 'sacred' but 'inviolable'.

We also have several instances in which Hofmann enriches our understanding of Qurʾānic terms. Explaining the word "shirk" (see for example 2:165) we find the following footnote: "The sin of 'deification' (shirk) is also committed by those who get addicted to alcohol, cigarettes, television and other drugs, as well as those who make themselves dependent on other people". After the verse 2:179: "There is life for you in (the law of) retaliation, 0 men of understanding, that you may guard yourselves", we find the footnote: "Because the deterrent effect of retaliation may save human lives". In the footnote to 9:19 we read regarding jihād, "Arabic: Jāhada fi sabīl Allāh (to struggle in the way of Allah), has very often been translated by 'fighting a holy war', a phrase absolutely foreign to Islam". In the footnote to 34:41 Hofmann writes: "It is superstition in 'supernatural forces', including fortune-telling, ('spiritual') mediums, constellations and Gurus of any kind which is implied here". And to 35:18: "And a burdened
soul cannot bear the burden of another", the footnote states: "Rejection of the doctrine of original sin; at the same time, rejection of the idea of salvation or an expiatory death".

These few examples should suffice to show how so many misconceptions about Islam found among non-Muslims can be removed most effectively by a happy choice of just a few appropriate words. And who has the time and the patience nowadays to read long and complicated commentaries?

As Dr Hofmann states, he has remained true to the Henning translation as long as he found at least one contemporary translation by a Muslim who understands the Qur'an on any particular point in the same way. If this was not the case, he kept to the Islamic consensus. Where there was no consensus, he mostly (though not always) was guided by Muhammad Asad's translation and comments on the Qur'an.

At a time when books tend to become increasingly expensive, it is delightful to be able to recommend a handy, not at all costly, and very true to the original translation of the Qur'an in the German language

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In an article entitled "Asian Calligraphy" in The World's Writing Systems (1999) eds. P. T. Daniels and W. Bright, John Stevens describes calligraphy as the 'principal art motif in the Muslim world'. And, indeed, one finds monumental pieces of calligraphy on huge buildings — such as the great mosques and the Taj Mahal — as well as works of art on grains of rice. Since the representation of the human figure was prohibited in Islam, the artistic impulse probably expressed itself more through calligraphy than in other ways.

The book under review introduces the reader to some of the most representative pieces of calligraphy and individual calligraphers of Ottoman Turkey. The Ottoman Turks came from Central Asia to Anatolia and founded a principality in 1299. By 1453, with the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottoman empire became a power of which European rulers lived in awe. The Ottomans, like other Muslim rulers, also appreciated calligraphy and there are stories in this book of princes holding

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