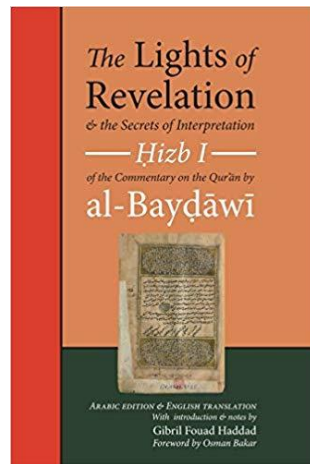


Book Reviews

Gibril Fouad Haddad. *The Lights of Revelation & the Secrets of Interpretation: Hizb 1 of the Commentary on the Qur'ān by al-Bayḍāwī*. Arabic edition & English translation with introduction & notes. Manchester: Beacon Books, 2016. Pp. xlv+854. Hardbound. ISBN: 978-0992633578.

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The Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation is a 5-in-1 work, presenting a critical edition of *ḥizb* 1 of al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, its English translation, English translation of selected comments from one dozen *ḥāshiyahs* on al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr*, notes and commentary on *Anwār* and quoted passages from its *ḥāshiyahs*, and the English rendering of the Qur'ānic verses comprising the first *ḥizb* (Q. 1, Q. 2:1–74). In addition, Gibril Fouad Haddad provides an Introduction, which places al-Bayḍāwī and his *tafsīr* in the larger historical and scholarly context, an Arabic-English glossary of technical terms, and a glossary of persons and sects cited by al-Bayḍāwī. The last seventy-five pages consist of a bibliography and four indices. The end result is a tour de force of scholarship, setting new standards for critical editions of premodern *tafsīrs*.



The critical edition is based on chronologically arranged 33 complete or partial manuscripts and previously printed editions of *Anwār* (pp. 82–92), all of which receive Haddad's pithy evaluations: “The edition, however, suffers from the avalanche of typos, paginal reshuffling and other editorial blunders typically associated with its publisher, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya”; “This meticulous work in Arabic by a scholar of the Indian Subcontinent . . . [is] mostly mistake-free and best typeset text to date” (pp. 90–91). Haddad has “collated his work” based on the oldest manuscript (Berlin 758/1357), “written in a small *naskh* hand with copious

vowelization and rubrication of the Quranic text by Qawwām b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, who completed it on a Thursday morning in Ṣafar 758/February 1357 in the Khānqāh al-Khātūniyya in Damascus per its colophon on folio 414a” (p. 83). The meticulous care with which Haddad has corrected, compared, and documented the text of al-Bayḍāwī’s life work sets a standard for critical editions of classical *tafsīrs*. The Arabic font is clear and care is taken to keep the Arabic text together with the English translation below it, with footnotes following the English translation, making every page of the *Lights* a visual delight.

The translation of the *Anwār* tends to be faithful to the original Arabic, even at the expense of fluency of the English rendering. This choice imparts a literalness and Arabic flavour to the English that is sometimes jarring: “The Opening of the Book! Truly it is the Seven Oft-Repeated and the magnificent Qur’ān that I was brought” (p. 212, emphasis added); “The charity tax is the archway of Islam,” where “charity tax translates *zakāt* and archway *qaṇṭara*” (p. 257). In describing the descent of the Qur’ān al-Bayḍāwī defines *al-inzāl* as *naql al-shay’ min al-a’alā ilā ’l-asfal*; Haddad’s literal rendering—“*Inzāl* (sending down) is the moving of something from top to bottom” (p. 275)—reduces the lofty descent of *inzāl* to “top to bottom” spatial imagery or an ordinary building. There are occasional typos: “As for the opening of the account, its narrative context is the (*sic*) show their posture and introduce their hypocrisy, so there is no repetition” (p. 337).

One of the difficulties a translator faces in translating the *Anwār* is with regard to finding precise terminology for al-Bayḍāwī’s rich grammatical explanations. His precise Arabic terms are sometimes difficult to render. Haddad does an admirable job in this regard, but the English terminology he uses or coins would be difficult for readers who do not know Arabic equivalents. Terms like “plosiveness” (*al-qalqalah*, p. 220), “tipped phonemes” (*al-ḥurūf al-dhalqiyyah*, p. 223) and “thick-snouted” (*jaḥanfal*, p. 227) do not make much sense for those who do not know the Arabic terms and those who know these Arabic terms do not need the jarring English renderings.

Haddad’s most valuable contribution is the translation of selected passages from one dozen *ḥāshiyahs* on al-Bayḍāwī’s *tafsīr* and his own notes and commentary on both the *Anwār* and the quoted passages from its *ḥāshiyahs* in 1453 footnotes. These footnotes are a testimony to his unique scholarly achievement in *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and Arabic language. In the course of writing these footnotes, he engages with the giants of *tafsīr* and lexical tradition, reaches deep into the riches of *ḥāshiyahs*, and brings to the fore discussions on fundamental legal and creedal issues. Reading

these footnotes is an intellectual joy of the first order; it brings one face-to-face with the extraordinary depth of Islamic scholarly tradition. The footnotes also include scholarly discussions on *ḥadīths* as found in the commentary tradition, intricacies of grammatical discussions among scholars, and arguments and counterarguments on subtle aspects of al-Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr*.

The English rendering of the Qur'ānic verses, dubbed "A Bayḍāwian Rendering," is printed as a continuous text (pp. 123-39) before the translation of the *Anwār* wherein it also appears along with transliteration of the verses, just before the translation of the relevant passages of the *Anwār*. It is perhaps the least admirable part of the book, especially when compared to other existing renderings of the Qur'ān.

There is no explanation for calling the rendering "Bayḍāwian"; perhaps it indicates acceptance of al-Bayḍāwī's preferred choices where multiple renderings are possible, but it could also simply mean that it was inspired by al-Bayḍāwī. In either case, "rendering" instead of "translation" is indicative of Haddad's careful approach to the Divine text, which is universally acknowledged to be untranslatable, even though there exist some 125 attempts to render it into English and this number is increasing.¹

Choices

Right at the outset of any rendering of the Qur'ān into English, one faces the *basmalah*, which demands that choices be made for the Divine Name and His attributes. Would the rendering retain Allah or use God? How would one render the two names of mercy: *al-rahīmān*, *al-rahīm*, especially in the presence of previous attempts? Would the urge to be different force the choice or would the new rendering simply repeat what already exists? What are the factors which influence such decisions as one comes to numerous polysemous Qur'ānic terms?

With regard to Allah, both choices have their defenders. Those who prefer to use God primarily do so to avoid alienating readers unfamiliar with Allah or those who may have a negative predisposition to the Arabic original due to the prevailing Islamophobia.² Those who wish to use Allah insist that this is a proper name and it cannot be rendered in any other

¹ Bruce Lawrence, *Koran in English: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017) lists 60 Qur'ān translations from the twentieth century alone and 45 from the twenty-first so far.

² For instance, see Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, "One God Many Names" (n.p.: Nawawi Foundation, 2004). Also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51a21dMaDGk&ab_channel=SeekersGuidance%3ATheGlobalIslamicSeminary.

way. Furthermore, “God” can carry connotations not consonant with the Qur’ānic concept of Allah. In a note about previous English renderings which might have been useful for his work, Haddad states that he has “appreciated—archaisms aside and despite rare inaccuracies and slips into interpretation—the scrupulous choices of Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936) and the Deobandi Baydawist Abdul Majid Daryabadi (1892-1977). Muhammad Taqi Usmani (b. 1943), Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969), and John Penrice (1818-1892) also deserve mention among top Qur’ān Arabists with an eye to precision, even if the latter only produced a glossary rather than a translation” (p. 75). Of the two previous scholars whose scrupulous choices Haddad has appreciated, Daryabadi is emphatic about retaining Allah, Pickthall uses God. From among the three “top Qur’ān Arabists” mentioned by him, Taqi Usmani retains Allah, Arberry and Penrice use God.

Haddad does not follow either; he comes up with something new: “One God.” Perhaps it is an attempt to remove non-Qur’ānic associations from the word God, but it produces an uncanny burden of iteration: “In the Name of the One God. . . . The One God has sealed over their hearts. . . . We believe in the One God. . . . They deceive the One God. . . . So the One God increases their sickness. . . . The One God scoffs. . . . The One God took away their light. . . . The One God surrounds the unbelievers. . . . The One God is over all things almighty. . . .” (pp. 123-27).

“Oneness” of Allah in the Qur’ān is not numerical; it is in the sense of *there is nothing whatever like Him* (Q. 42:11). “One God” may be helpful to dissociate certain trinitarian connotations of the word “God,” but it does not increase its Qur’ānic resemblance.

Rabb is rendered as “Nurturer”; most other renderings use Lord or Sustainer. Nurturer is certainly one meaning of *Rabb*, but it is a subset of its primary meaning—which is to have possession of, and command or authority, over something, as per *al-‘Ayn* of al-Farāhīdī (100-175/718-791) and other major lexicons. Furthermore, the English word “nurturing” has a strong association with the act of upbringing and taking responsibility for rearing a child,³ but lacks the meaning of ownership.

The most pronounced aspect of Haddad’s rendering is its literalism. This is practised to such an extent that the English rendering sometimes carries anthropomorphic shades and at others becomes inelegant or even devoid of meaning. He may have been following what—according to him—“Shah Waliyyullah famously advocated, at the end of his book on Quranic exegesis, *al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, that the text of the Qur’an must be,

³ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=nurturer>.

on the one hand, rendered as word-for-word and literally as possible—*verbatim et literatim*—yet, at the same time, intelligibly and clearly, *ad sensum*, even if the word count rises in the target language.”⁴ This, however, is a misreading of Shāh Walī Allāh’s text; Walī Allāh did not advocate *verbatim et literatim* for all renderings of the Qur’ān in all languages for all times to come. What Haddad is construing as advocacy *omnis tempus* is actually a casual remark inserted in the concluding section of *al-Fawz al-Kabīr* where—after mentioning his own treatise *Ta’wīl al-Aḥādīth*—he simply says, “furthermore, we have done a Persian translation of the Qur’ān in a manner that it has equivalence to the Arabic text with regard to “number of words, their specificity and generality, and the like, although at certain places, we have not followed this condition, fearing misunderstanding by the readers and we have not indicated this [non-compliance]”.⁵

Furthermore, since there exists a far greater word-to-word correspondence between Arabic and Persian than is offered by any European language, Walī Allāh could employ word equivalency without literalism. In the case of an English rendering, however, such an attempt can lead to the incomprehensibility of the English text. A few examples follow (emphasis added):

- Q. 2:7: The One God has *sealed over their hearts and over their hearing; and over their sights there is a pall; and theirs is an immense punishment.*

The Qur’ānic text uses *‘alā* three times; Shāh Walī Allāh uses the equivalent *bar* in Persian three times, which enhances the intensity and elegance of his rendering, but in English the use of *over* is overdone.

- Q. 2:14: Truly we are with you, *we only make scoff.* “Make scoff” makes no sense in English; *we only scoff* would have been enough as *scoff* is a verb, as used in the next verse.
- Q. 2:15: The One God scoffs at them and keeps reinforcing them in *their rebellion all bewilderment!*

⁴ See his review of *God’s Word, Man’s Interpretations: A Critical Study of the 21st Century English Translations of the Quran*, by Abdur Raheem Kidwai, https://www.academia.edu/38745691/Haddad_Review_of_Kidwai_21st_Century_English_Translations_of_Quran, p. 3.

⁵ Shāh Walī Allāh, *al-Fawz al-Kabīr ma’ Fath al-Khabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Dehli: Maṭba‘ ‘Alīmī, n.d.), 40.

- Q. 2:22: Who has made for you *the earth a bed and the sky a building* and sent down, out of the sky, water whereby *He produces some fruits* as sustenance for you. . . .

“the earth a bed and the sky a building” is not only an unappealing imagery, but it also conveys no meaningful message. In addition, most translators have avoided the use of the pronoun “He” immediately before “produces,” to avoid anthropomorphism, and also to make a connection between rainwater and the growth of fruits more apparent to the reader.

- Q. 2:25: and they have therein *spouses immaculate*. . . .
- Q. 2:29: He it is Who created for you what is in the earth—all of it; further, He *proceeded to the sky* and He *levelled them as seven skies*, and He is most knowing of all things.

“He proceeded to the sky” carries anthropomorphism and it is hard to imagine what “levelling of the seven skies” means, when we have them layered (*ṭibāqa*) in Q 67:3 and 71:15 as well as in Hadiths (e.g. in the Hadiths recounting the events of the *mi’rāj*).

- Q. 2:31: And He taught Adam the names—all of them. Then He *displayed them before the angels* and He said, “Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.

Rendering *‘araḍahum* as “displayed them” creates the image of a PowerPoint presentation on a screen.

- Q. 2:40: . . . and Me do dread!
- Q. 2:41: . . . and of Me do beware!
- Q. 2:49: and when We saved you from the *house of pharaoh*...
- Q. 2:50: We saved you and drowned the *house of pharaoh* as you looked on. “*āl fir‘awn*” can be better rendered as “household of pharaoh”.
- Q. 2:68: . . . it is a cow neither cull nor yearling, middling between that. . . .

In a footnote to his appreciation of the scrupulous choices of Pickthall and Daryabadi, Haddad judges “the rest of the 50-odd English renderings in circulation as of 2016 [as being] marred by inaccuracy, (over)interpretation, translatese (ungrammaticalness, neologism, bathos,

gibberish), archaism, untranslationese (transcribing instead of translating), bias and replication. Their marginalia vary from historico-glossarial to ideological and from minimalist to oversized” (p. 75). Sadly, some of these overstated qualifiers also apply to Haddad’s own rendering.

These observations about the English rendering notwithstanding, the *Lights* is a useful addition to the ever-increasing repository of translations of classical *tafsīrs*, although because of al-Bayḍāwī’s rich emphasis on the Arabic of the Qur’ān, philology, and grammar, its readership will most likely be limited to the *madrāsah* students whose first language is English and who have not yet attained sufficient proficiency in Arabic, provided they know—or learn—Latin-based technical grammatical terms.

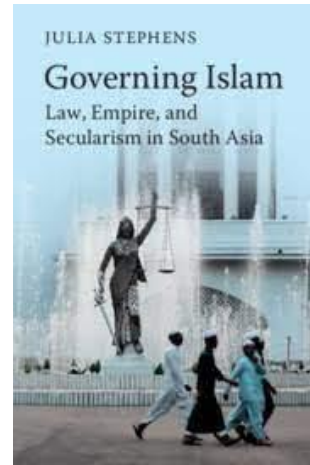
Muzaffar Iqbal*

Julia Stephens. *Governing Islam: Law, Empire, and Secularism in Modern South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Online. ISBN: 9781316795477.

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Julia Stephens interestingly brings colonial, secular legal governance into conversation with Islam in ways that inform us about the dynamic nature of Islamic law and how Islamic scholars in India contested various secular ordinances. To her, women were the most marginalized in the way colonial, secular legal governance perpetuated patriarchal roles. For instance, the colonial authorities made the *purdah*-clad (veiled) women not work as independent economic agents (p. 17). Stephens argues that women could not inherit their land from their families (which is obligated in Islamic law) because the colonial courts perpetuated local patriarchal customs by putting them above Islamic law. She mentions instances of women’s resistance when they put pressure on secular governance as they approached religious scholars rather than secular courts.

The intersection, or rather the binary, of family and economy, remains the core of Stephens’ book, where labour laws and family laws



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