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**Translating and Interpreting: Some Reflections on the Italian *Translations* of the Qur'ân, Between the Classical Doctrinal Untranslatability of the Book, the Ancient Agenda of the Orientalists and the Exegesis of Muslim Translators**

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## بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful**

### INTRODUCTION

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, Who says:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

**They are those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Lo! In the remembrance of Allah hearts do find comfort (Ar-Ra'd, 13:28)**

And He says:

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَابًا يَتَفَشَّرُ مِنْهُ جُلُودٌ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ ذَلِكَ هُدَىٰ اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَن يُضَلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِن هَادٍ

**Allah has revealed the most excellent discourse, a Book consimilar, oft-repeated, at which trembles the skin; of those who fear their Lord; then their skin and heart soften to the remembrance of Allah. This is Allah's guidance to which He guides whom He will; and whom Allah sends astray, for him there is no guide (Suratu-z-Zumar, 39:23)**

We seek His Help and we seek His Forgiveness. We take refuge with Him from the evil of our souls and the evil of our actions. Whosoever Allah guides, there is none who can misguide him, and whosoever Allâh leaves astray, there is none who can guide him. We bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except for Allâh Alone Who has no partner, and we bear witness that Muhammad (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) is His servant and Messenger.

To proceed, the best Speech is the Speech of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam). And the worst of affairs are newly invented matters, and every innovation is a misguidance, and every misguidance is in the fire of Hell.

Jurists have defined the Qur'ân as “the Book revealed to the Messenger of Allâh, Muhammad (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) as written in the *masâhif* and transmitted to us from him through an authentic continuous narration (*tawâtur*) without doubt” (Nyazee, 1998, p. 163). The Arabic words of Allâh's Book as well as their meanings are both revealed. Therefore, the Arabic language in general is considered a superior language; for example, Imâm Shafî'î states: “Of all tongues, that of the Arabs is the richest and the most extensive in vocabulary. Do we know any man except a prophet who apprehended all of it?” (Shâfî'î and Khadduri, 1987, p. 88).

The Qur'ân is the Scripture most often translated not only by Muslims, but also by scholars who do not believe in it as a divine message, namely non-Muslims. The greatest problem related to translating the Qur'ân, as Qadhi argues (1999, p. 361) is ‘the fact that it transforms the Qur'ân as the *kalâm* of Allah in Arabic, to the speech of a human in another language. In this destructive process, the beauty and miraculous nature of the Qur'ân is almost completely lost’.

As Bilal Philips explains (1997, p. 78), a common pattern is observable in English translations of the Qur'ân. For example, the translation by Muhammad 'Ali ‘reflects the ideas of the Ahmadiyyah pseudo-Islamic sect’ and the translation of Muhammad Asad was ‘rejected by the Râbitah (Muslim World League) due to his marked leaning toward Mu'tazilî (Rationalist) views (Philips, 1997, p. 78). It is noteworthy that the Ahmadiyyah translation has been published even in the Italian language, by The London Mosque on 1986 (op. cit.). This discovery was surprising, as Italian is my mother tongue, so I was particularly intrigued, and I looked for – or it would be more accurate to say, I hunted for – a rare copy of the Italian Ahmadiyyah translation. This was the starting point from which my humble research originated. The first discovery I made was that in most of the Italian

translations of the Qur'ân, written by orientalists, the authors constantly chose the words more suitable to push towards their personal doctrines, whether Catholic, Mu'tazilî, Bâha'i or other. My aim for this thesis is to compare various Italian translations of the Qur'ân, to research which of them is acceptable from an Islamic point of view, and which of them should be completely or partially rejected, and why.

This humble work is dedicated to my children, who were patient, while I was passing my evenings and nights writing my thesis, using the time we were supposed to spend together. I am honoured to have studied at the *Islamic Online University*, and I pray Allah to reward shaykh Bilal Philips and all the shuyûkh, instructors and Tutorial Assistants who taught and supported me on this blessed journey. In particular, I thank Dr. Mukhtar Raban, our Tutorial Assistant for the Thesis. My thanks are also extended to Dr. Umm Yahyâ Francesca Bocca-Aldagre, for her precious linguistic support and to Umm Sara for her jurisprudential advice. I also thank my dear sisters Umm Maryam, Umm Saad and Umm Idris for their fraternal advices, and my son Abu Hurayra for helping me for keeping my notes organised. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Hamza Roberto Piccardo for his patience in giving me a lot of material about his translation and for supporting me in this project. Finally, may Allah reward my dear sister Khadijah Pighizzini, the best librarian ever, who found for me rare Italian books and journals for this research.

*Note: I entrusted the translation of shaykh 'Abdul Mâjid Daryâbâdî (2000) when citing the verses of the Qur'ân, except for the last Chapter, where I translated the most literally as possible from the different Italian translations, to underline the differences between them.*

## 1. IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO TRANSLATE THE QUR'ÂN?

The term Qur'ân means recitation, but the verbal root *Qa-Ra-'a* (قرأ) implies much more: 'to declaim; to read; to peruse; to study' (Wehr, 1979, p. 882). Another word used to indicate the Qur'ân is *Al-Kitâb*, the Book, the Scripture or the act of writing, as Allah says:

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

**This Book whereof there is no doubt, is a guidance to the God fearing**

(Sûratu-l-Baqara, 2:2)

The root *KaTaBa* (كتب), as Wehr explains (1979, p. 951), involves the following meanings: 'to write, to note down, to inscribe, to enter, to record, to compose, to give written orders, to prescribe, to foreordain, to destine'.

The Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) was on a spiritual retreat on Mount Hira near Mecca, when the Angel of Revelation, Jibril ('alayhi-s-salâm) came in front of him in a majestic, huge and luminous form, with wings that went from the East to the West, telling him: "Read / recite." Being the Messenger of Allah (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) an illiterate, he replied the angel of not being able to recite. The angel embraced the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) with its wings before letting him go, repeating it three times, then Prophet Muhammad (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) could finally recite the Revelation:

أَفْرَأُ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

أَفْرَأُ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

**Recite in the name of your Lord Who has created everything, has created man from a clot. Recite ad your Lord is the Most Bountiful (Sûratu-l-'Alaq, 96:1-3)**

Because he was illiterate, the Messenger of Allah (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) received the Revelation synthetically in perfect responsiveness, without altering, by human individual intervention, the divine Message he had heard (Gloton, 1999, p. 86).

Allah states this characteristic of His messenger in the following verse:

وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا ۗ مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِن جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِي  
بِهِ مَن نَّشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ۗ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

**In this manner We have revealed unto you a Spirit of Our command; you know not what the Book was, nor what the Faith. Yet We have made it a Light wherewith We guide whomsoever We will of Our bondsmen. And verily you guide to a straight path (Sûratu-sh-Shûrâ, 42:52)**

The Qur'an has been revealed over a period of twenty-three years. The revelation first took place on Mount Hira on 610, continuing with the public preaching, three years later, until the death of the Messenger (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam), in 632, ten years after the hijra, the migration from Mecca to Yathrib , what will become 'Medina', The City par excellence (Cardini, 2006, p. 13).

The believers memorized, wrote and copied the revelations. Upon the death of the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam), the responsibility passed to his faithful Zaid ibn Thabit (radiAllahu 'anhu), who attempted a systematic search for those words and verses; the rightly guided caliphs Abu Bakr and 'Uthman (radiAllahu 'anhumâ) took the initiative to organize this material. Approximately, by the first half of the seventh century, the Book was completely collected (Cardini, 2006, p. 13). As Amri (2010, p. 81) argues, 'Muslim's lives are directed by it and their actions are legitimized by it. Muslims can and do dispute over any given Islamic text, but not over the Qur'ân'.

Unlike the previous revelations, the Qur'ân does not have any relationship with an ethnic group or a nation: it is directed to the entire humanity. However, the Book has a direct and indispensable connection with an idiom: Arabic, the language of the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) and that which Allah chooses to communicate with him. As Cardini explains (2006, p. 14), since the revelation has been transmitted in a precise language, to claim to be able to translate it into other languages becomes arduous for a believer. Indeed, Tibawi (1962, p. 4) argues that 'the belief that the Qur'ân is a literal transcript of the Word of God from a safely preserved tablet (*lawh mahfûz*) in heaven revealed to Muhammad in Arabic must be squared with the other belief that Muhammad's mission is to mankind as a whole and not only to Arabs'.

Because Allah sent the Revelation to His Messenger (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam), through the angel Jibril ('alayhi-s-salâm), in clear Arabic language, it must and will always continue to be recited in this revealed language:

وَإِنَّهُ لَتَنْزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ

عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ

**Verily it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds. The trusted spirit has brought it down; upon your heart, that you may be of the warners. In plain Arabic speech** (Sûratu-sh-Shu'arâ', 26:192-195)

As Ibn Hazm explains, there are eleven verses in the Qur'ân, expressly stating the Arabic revelation of the Qur'ân (12:2, 13:37, 16:103, 20:113, 26:195, 39:28, 41:3, 41:44, 42:7, 43:3 and 46:12), and as 'non-Arabic is not Arabic, its translation is not the Qur'ân' (cited in Amri, 2010, p. 83). Indeed, the pagan Arabs at the time of Revelation, who were masters in Arabic poetry, are challenged in

the Qur'ân itself to produce something similar to it, but they were unable to bring anything comparable to even a part of the Book:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّمَّنْ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

**And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down upon Our bondman then bring a chapter like it, and call upon your witnesses, besides Allah, if you are truthful (Sûratu-l-Baqara, 2:23)**

And Allah Ta'âlâ says:

قُلْ لَّيِّنَ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنَّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا

**Say, "If the mankind and the jinn leagued together that they might produce the like of this Qur'ân, they could not produce its like, though one to the other were a backer." (Sûratu-l-Isrâ', 17:88)**

Karen Armstrong describes the effect of the Qur'ân on the first Muslims, former Arab pagans: "Many were converted on the spot, believing that God alone could account for the extraordinary beauty of the language. Frequently a convert would describe the experience as a divine invasion that tapped buried yearnings and released a flood of feelings" (cited in Amri, 2010, p. 85).

Al-Jâhiz (cited in Tibawi, 1962, p. 12) 'maintains that it is impossible to translate Arabic poetry, and that translating material dealing with religion and the Qur'ân had better not be attempted at all'. Nyazee asserts that simply 'translation of the Qur'ân is [...] not possible and what are termed translations are in fact translations of the *tafsîr* (interpretation) of the Qur'ân" (1998, p. 164). The divine nature of the Qur'ân, which is '*kalimatu'Llâh*, the very Word of Allâh, revealed verbatim [...] has weighty implications indeed for attempts at its translation' (Amri, 2010, p. 82).

However, during Islamic history and especially after the 'decline and breakup of the Muslim state and the rise of European colonialism [...] the vast majority of Muslims remained unable to understand Arabic, even though many of them continued to read and pronounce its script' (Philips, 1996, p. 76). In an attempt to provide non-Arabic speaker with a translation of the Qur'ân in their own language, the 'movement to translation began to gather momentum around the latter part of the eighteen century CE' (Philips, 1996, p. 77).

As a matter of fact, at the time of the Prophet (s), at least some parts of the Qur'ân had already been translated in other languages, for those who did not speak Arabic. For example, as Qadhi reminds us (1999, p. 355), Prophet Muhammad (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) sent letters to many rulers of his time, inviting them to accept Islam, including in these messages some verses of the Qur'ân. These verses were translated, together with the rest of the letter, in the various emperors' languages. For example, as Moreno (1925, p. 540) states, the letter sent to Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, contained the verse:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

**Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common to us and you, that we shall worship none save Allah, and that we shall not join anyone with Him, and that none of us shall take others as Lord beside Allah; then if they turn away; say, bear witness that we are Muslims (Âl-'Imrân, 3: 64)**

Similarly, some verses from Sûratu Maryam (19) were translated by the first *Muhâjirîn* in front of the Negus of Abyssinia (Denffer, 1994, p. 113), which led the Negus to convert to Islam (Qadhi, 1999, p. 355). Salmân al Farsî (radiAllahu 'anhu) translated in Persian *Sûratu-l-Fâtîha* for some new converted, who temporarily recited it in their own language, during the prayer, until they learnt it in Arabic (Hamidullah, cited in Denffer, 1994, p. 113). According to another version, Salmân 'submitted what he had done to the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi

waSallam), and he did not disapprove of it', even though the authenticity of this hadith has not been proved (cited in Tibawi, 1962, p. 5).

The intention of the first translations of the Qur'ân, by pious Muslims, was to make their non-Arabic speaking brothers learn and understand the meanings of the Book of Allah. Sefercioğlu and Ihsanoğlu, authors of the *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'ân*, state that 'the earliest translation of the Qur'ân is in Persian; it was done, along with the *tafsîr* of Tabarî, at the time of the Samânid Prince Abû Sâlih Mansûr ibn Nûh in 345 AH/956 AD' (cited in Amri, 2010, p. 101). After that, one can find the Turkish translation, completed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century of the hijrah, the Hindi translation in 270 A.H., all written by Muslim rulers and scholars (Qadhi, 1999, p. 356). More recently, we have Urdu, Punjabi, Gujurati and Malay translations (Qadhi, 1999, p. 356).

It has been said that there are three different types of Qur'ân translation, namely 'literal (*harfî*), meaning-centred (*ma'nawî*) and exegetical (*tafsîrî*)' (Amri, 2010, p. 89). Qadhi (1999, p. 349) argues that the translation of the meaning is not only allowed, rather it is a *fard kifâyah*, namely an obligation of the entire community 'such that, if part of the ummah does it, the rest are not accountable, but if none does it, then all are accountable'. As Abdur Rahim Kidwai suggests (cited in Amri, 2010, p. 92), 'the act of translation may logically be viewed as a natural part of the Muslim exegetical effort'. Indeed, as there is a danger that the Qur'ân would be misunderstood, and then denigrated, because of the many translated versions circulating among the people, written by non-Muslims, new translations, by Muslim scholars, become a necessity (Bakhîr, cited in Moreno, 1925, p. 541). Muhammad Bakhîr also argues in his fatwa that *tarjamah* (translation) is a synonym of *tafsîr* (explanation), and that for da'wah purposes a translation of the Book is indispensable (cited in Moreno, 1925, p. 540).

In modern times, however, some other scholars opposed the translation of the Qur'ân, fearing the possible effects of a distorted translation, after the distribution of Muhammad Ali's Qadyanî-supporting work, which was distributed through Islamic world, particularly in Egypt, on 1920s. For a similar reason, Bengali

scholars declared their opposition to any kind of translation, fearing a 'Hinduization' of Islam in their country (Amri, 2010, p. 91). It is important to remember that at the same time Kamâl Ata Turk (d. 1929 CE) order to replace the original Arabic Qur'ân with a Turkish translation, to be read even during the formal *salât* (cited in Qadhi, 1999, p. 351). In this context, in 1936, a *fatwa* from Al-Azhar University stated that 'the Qur'ân is only in Arabic, and any translation cannot be considered a substitute for the Qur'ân' (cited in Qadhi, 1999, p. 352).

Indeed, for precaution, some Sunni scholars 'have even stipulated that it is mandatory for the Arabic text to be written with the translation – either side by side or above it – so that it is mentally understood that the translation is not the actual Qur'ân' (Qadhi, 1999, p. 350). In any case, even though this seems to be more an encouragement rather than an obligation, it is imperative for the Muslim translator to state clearly that his or her work's intent is only to carry the meaning of the Book of Allah, for those who do not understand the Arabic language (yet) (Qadhi, 1999, p. 351). Indeed, a Muslim should realise the importance of the Arabic language, the only mean to understand the words of their Creator without any human interpreter (Qadhi, 1999, p. 353). However, one cannot forget that the majority of Muslims in the world, today, unfortunately do not understand Arabic (Eaton, cited in Asad, 2003, p. v), so translations of the meanings of the Qur'ân are essential.

## 2. THE FIRST QUR'ÂN TRANSLATIONS IN ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND THE ANCIENT AGENDA OF THE ORIENTALISTS

It will not be useless to start our journey by analyzing the Latin translations of the Qur'ân, because many of the later works in Italian language simply plagiarized them, particularly Marracci's edition.

The Qur'ân remained for a long time inaccessible to its detractors themselves, until the twelfth century when, under the command of Peter the Venerable, also known as Peter of Montboissier, abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny (1092-1156), Robert of Chester, an English Arabist, translated it into Latin (Branca, 2006, p. 54).

It seems that Peter the Venerable has been convinced of the need of this translation after visiting Spain, in 1141. There, he found a culturally and intellectually stimulating activity of translation from Arabic of philosophical and scientific works, by scholars of different religious creed, united by the same quest for knowledge (Branca, 2006, p. 54). In those places, the interest towards Islam was growing, and the same Pope Urban II, promoter of the Crusades, was a Cluny monk, and the area between France and the Iberian peninsula was the place where the famous *chansons de gestes* were set, in which the fight against the Saracens had great importance (Branca, 2006, p. 54). Although incomplete and containing a chapter sequence arbitrarily reformulated, that translation is historically relevant, as the first attempt to directly access the text that was the basis of the Islamic phenomenon; Catholics were no longer satisfied with the fragmentary and uncertain news circulating about Islam (Branca, 2006, p. 54).

The knowledge about this translation was however limited to a small circle and the classical absurd slanders against the Qur'ân, or a more general vision of 'apocalyptic' Islam as a sign of decay and the widespread corruption that was a prelude to the end of the world were still widespread in the European society (Branca, 2006, p. 55). This translation, as Qadhi explains (1999, p. 356) was

then 'approved by Martin Luther, and printed by Bibliander Press in Basle, Switzerland in 1543'.

One had to wait until the end of the seventeenth century for a new Latin translation of the Qu'rân, the *Alcorani textus universus*, academically precise, although it was still functional to the refutation of the sacred text of Islam (Pedani Fabris, 2000, p. 24). This monumental and historically valuable work was written by a Catholic priest, father-confessor of Pope Innocentus XI, Lewis (Ludovico) Marracci (d. 1700); most of the following well known translators of the Qur'ân in modern European languages based their works on Maracci's edition, as well as on other studies produced by the development of orientalism (Branca, 2006, p. 55). This work consists of two volumes and provides the reader not only the Arabic text, but also, in addition to the classical Christian refutation, a wide range of comments and notes taken from the classic works of many Muslim scholars (Pedani Fabris, 2000, p. 9). Actually, in the translation itself, as well as in the notes, he cited Arab sources, in particular *Al-Kashshaf*, a Mu'tazilite *Tafsîr*, by az-Zamahsharî, but also as-Suyûtî, Ibn Abî Zamanîn, ath-Tha'labî. He translated from *Sahîh al-Bukhârî*, shaykh al-Islâm Ibn Taymiyyah, and referred to the manual of Hanafi Fiqh *Al-Qudûrî* (Rizzi, 2007, p. 26). This is complemented by a long refutation of the Qur'ân and the doctrines of the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam), whom Marracci disparagingly calls 'Mahomet'. In this way, Marracci wanted to provide propaganda for the dispute between Islam and Christianity, and against the Turkish Empire that threatened Christian Europe (cited in Rizzardi, 2000, p. 83). Marracci's attempt to defeat Islamic faith was so excessive that George Sale, an Anglican, attacked him "for having so mean an opinion of the Christian faith that he spends too much time 'refuting' the Qur'ân" (Elmarsafy, 2009, p. 39).

As a matter of fact, Marracci translates the biography of the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) on the basis of Islamic sources, but then he states categorically that the Jewish and Christian scriptures have never announced his coming. In conclusion, he argues that Muhammad (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam)

was not a Prophet accredited by miracles and revelations, but rather he would represent the coming of the Antichrist (Renzi, 2007, p. 29). As for the pillars of Islam, Marracci believed that to follow these practices does not nourish a spiritual component in the heart of Muslims; on the contrary, it would merely be a sign of hypocrisy (Renzi, 2007, p. 30). On the other hand, the translator tried to insinuate doubt in Muslim readers, saying that such expressions as *kalimat Allâh* and *rûh Allâh* would be 'evidences of a not total opposition of the Qur'an to the Catholic dogma of divine filiation'. This is a process already known in the medieval tradition, namely the tentative of evangelization based on Islamic elements or principles, read back on the basis of Catholic prejudice (Renzi, 2007, p. 31).

The first volume, *Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani*, published in the first edition of its own in Rome in 1691 by *Propaganda Fide*, contained a long introduction on the life of Prophet Muhammad (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam), as conveyed by Muslims, and a summary of the fundamentals of Islam. However, Marracci, son of his time, did not approach the Qur'ân to understand it, but to fight it using its own statements. In the Preface of his *Refutatio*, Marracci writes: "In refuting opponents and especially the mistakes of Mahomet, I will seem to someone somewhat sour, indeed, polemic, without temperaments. I cannot deny it and I would not be content that the things I write are read by the Mahometans. I am aware that a Christian author, especially if he is an ecclesiastic, would agree to deal with people who do not believe in his religion using calm and modest words: in this way, they might be more easily guided to truth" (cited in Poggi, 2000, p. 51).

In Rome, however, they did not want to print the Qur'ân; that refusal was based on the decision taken by the Sacred Congregation for an Index of Forbidden Books, under Pope Alexander VI, to prohibit any publication of this sacred text in any form or language (Pedani Fabris, 2000, p. 25). Therefore, the second volume of Marracci's work, namely the Latin translation of the Qur'ân, was published only in 1698, in the Seminary of Padua, thanks to the bishop St. Gregory Barbarigo. After the defeat of the Venetian forces in Candia, Barbarigo opened in his

diocese a center of knowledge of oriental languages, with the intent to prepare new Christian missionaries for the evangelisation of Muslim lands. This was the ideal environment for the work of Marracci (Kleinhans, cited in Pedani Fabris, 2000, p. 25); in addition to the new edition of the *Prodromus*, the second volume was then printed, under the name of the *Refutatio Alcorani in qua ad Mahumeticarum superstitionibus radicem seculares arboribus apponitur* (Pedani Fabris, 2000, p. 25). As Yusuf Ali argues (cited in Qadhi, 1999, p. 357), the quotation from Arabic *tafasîr* included by Marracci were 'carefully selected and garbled, so as to give the worst possible impression of Islam to Europe'.

Among non-Muslims, only in the eighteenth century one could find a higher number of versions of the Qur'ân in many languages and it would be interesting to retrace the history of all these translations, because they accompanied the evolution of relations between East and West (Branca, 2006, p. 56). However, we are obliged to limit our analysis here, to provide an overview of the many translations of the Qur'ân available in Italian language.

The first Italian translation dates back to 1547 and was printed in Venice under the title of *L'Alcorano di Macometto (Mahomet's Koran)*, by Andrea Arrivabene. This is not a translation made directly from Arabic, however it was based on the Bibliander edition, the Latin version promoted by Peter of Cluny, arbitrarily summarized. In the *Introduction*, in addition, it presents Islam as a Christian heresy (Branca, 2006, p. 56). The author states in the *Preface* that the reason behind his decision to 'translate from Arabic', in reality from Latin, is 'to explain habits and customs of the Turks in these difficult times in which religion [...] is struggling more than ever in the past centuries' (cited in Branca, 2000b, p.117). Thus, on sixteenth century, Arrivabene still explains Islam as a 'Christian heresy', without giving any contribution to the knowledge of Islam, rather confirming ancient Catholic propaganda. For this reason, the book itself is nowadays academically considered only a bibliographic rarity (Malvezzi, cited in Branca, 2000b, p. 118).

However, Tommasino (2013, p. 19) argues that the real translator of *Alcorano* was not Andrea Arrivabene; on the contrary, Arrivabene entrusted his publishing project to a man who remained anonymous: Giovanni Battista Castrodardo, a famous commentator of Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*, the historian of the bishops of Belluno and the author of an *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Castrodardo would have inserted in the Introduction to his *Alcorano* a version of the *Mi'râj*, namely the Ascension of the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi wasallam), based on Moorish sources, in turn derived from the cosmology of Dante Alighieri. However, it was a *Mi'râj*'s version completely different from the traditional Islamic sources (Tommasino, 2013, p. 23).

Nevertheless, Allah Ta'âlâ says concerning the disbelievers:

وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ

**And they plotted, and Allah plotted and Allah is the Best of plotters** (Sûra Âl-'Imrân, 3:54),

As Tommasino explains (2013, p. 299), the translation of the Qur'ân by Arrivabene and Castrodardo was designed with the intent to evangelise Muslim readers. However, among its admirers, or aspiring readers, there were 'some renegade [...] half Turkish', which 'by force or for love' as Castrodardo mentioned, had become 'Turkish' for real, converting to Islam (Tommasino, 2013, p. 299). For example, around the year 1630, the French gentleman Thomas Osman d'Arcos wrote from Tunis to a his friend Peiresc (1580-1637) asking him to have a copy of the Qur'ân in Latin or Italian languages; which were the only translations available before the French translation, by Ryer (1647). Moreover, when the *Alcorano* was condemned and banished by the Sacred Congregation for an Index of Forbidden Books, in 1564, some copies of the manuscript began to circulate and it continued to be read (Tommasino, 2013, p. 303). Furthermore, one of the later commentators of the *Alcorano* was the Jew Rabbi Leon Modena (1571-1648); from his writings, a quite positive image of Islam emerges, to use against Christians polemically (Tommasino, 2013, p. 304).

### **3. TRANSLATING, INTERPRETING OR MISLEADING? BETWEEN THE MODERN ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS BY ORIENTALISTS AND THE EXEGESIS OF MUSLIM TRANSLATORS**

In modern times, Branca counts thirteen Italian translations of the Qur'ân (2000b, p. 145), to which we should add at least the translation by Ventura and Zilio-Grandi (2010). Most relevant (in order of publication) are the translations by Bonelli (1929), Bausani (1955), Moreno (1967), Peirone (1979), Piccardo (1994) and Mandel (2004).

For a second translation of the Qur'ân in Italian language, after *Alcorano*, one will have to wait until 1847, when it was published Vincenzo Calza's translation. Calza was the General Pontifical Consul in Algiers and he based his version on the French translation by Kasimirski, calling his work: *Il Corano, versione italiana con commento e una notizia biografica di Macometto (The Qur'ân, Italian translation and comment, followed by a brief biography of Mahomet)* (Branca, 2000b, p. 118). On the Preface, Calza states: "Those unfamiliar with the religion in which he was born, raised and educated, would never believe that there were other religions, and there would never have the hope and the possibility that any one should repent, converting from the false to true one. However, having stated the fundamental principle according to which the religion of Jesus Christ is the only, alone, worth to profess, the knowledge of other religions will not be useless for any fervent and zealous Roman Catholic and Apostolic, with the aim of pointing out their errors, making the comparison with the true religion, and increasingly consolidating his own beliefs [...]. I hope that this Preface will teach the intelligent reader the sole purpose that the author has had in writing the translation of the Qur'ân, therefore no other interpretation should be given to similar work." (cited in Branca, 2000b, p. 119). Not many years later, in 1882, it was the turn of an anonymous translation published in Milan by Panzeri publisher, also made on a French version, the Savary's (Branca, 2006, p. 57).

Again from Kazimirski one can find the translation by the journalist Eugenio Camillo Branchi, who did not know even Arabic alphabet, even though on his Preface shameless declared: "I translated for the first time the Qur'ân in Italian language..." (Branca, 2000b, p. 121). The first translation decently based on the original Arabic was written by Aquilio Fracassi on 1914, and published in Milan with the Arabic parallel text. As Branca explains (2000a, p. 104), Fracassi dedicated his work to the Minister of Education, declaring that his aim was 'to show the Arab people, and in particular those under Italian rule, the respect of the Italian government for their religion and culture.' Despite these declarations, however, Fracassi 'used the old Latin version by Marracci as a source' (Branca, 2000a, p. 105), so one can safely say that the work was still imperfect. This might be one of the reason why the same publisher Hoepli replaced it, only a few years later, with the translation by Luigi Bonelli, a talented orientalist, even though mainly specialized in Turkish language (Branca, 2006, p. 57).

Bonelli's translation is very literal, and not so easy to read for a non-specialist, mostly for the long subordinated sentences and the abundant use of italics; whenever it was necessary to add even a single word to the Italian text, which was not present in the Arabic original version, Bonelli with meticulous consistence put it in italic font. The translator also follows a different numbering of the verses, compared to the most common Arabic editions and this can lead to difficulties in tracing the same sentences as in the original. It was still quite popular, and for many years, it was the only one to be regarded as a truly scientific work (Branca, 2006, p. 57). In the opinion of the famous orientalist Francesco Gabrieli (cited in Branca, 2000b, p. 125), Bonelli was 'a great but pure philologist, who had given us [...] a punctilious literal translation [...] without any sympathy with the translated text, and any literary merit'.

However, all these translations had no detailed introductions and notes, therefore they were not addressed to non-specialist readers. On 1955, the translation by Alessandro Bausani tried to remedy this problem, not only with a very long introduction and numerous notes, but also through a more sophisticated prose

(Branca, 2006, p. 57). Bausani's translation is academically considered the most accurate and perhaps more sympathetic, a remarkable example of the synthesis of different demands, both religious and philological. Branca (2000a, p. 105) apologetically argues that 'his translation is perhaps the best, as stated by the most prominent Italian scholar', namely Gabrieli. Actually, Bausani's translation deliberately distorts many Arabic words, leaning toward Bâha'î doctrine, to which he 'reverted' on 1955, the same year of the publication of his translation of the Qur'ân (Bahairesearch.com, 2015).

A few years later, in 1967, Martino Mario Moreno, a former official of the Italian Ministry of the Colonies during fascist era, published a new translation of the Qur'ân. This work did not include many notes, however from a linguistic point of view is noteworthy, because Moreno tried to reproduce the original rhythm of Arabic language, despite the limitation due to the very different linguistic code (Branca, 2006, p. 58). The translation by another priest, Federico Peirone, in 1979, was accompanied by many notes, but it was not scientifically rigorous. The translator's linguistic choices are questionable, in particular when he translates from Arabic many technical terms and even many names of biblical origin – and for this reason familiar for the Italian reader. The outcomes are often puzzling:

المَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ

**the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.** (An-Nisâ', 4:157)

is translated as: **"il Masîh, 'Îsâ ibn Maryam, rasûl del Dio"** [*al-Masîh, 'Îsâ ibn Maryam, rasûl of God*].

As Buzzetti argues (cited in Branca, 2000b, p. 134), Bonelli's translation 'induces in most of the readers a disproportionate sense of the difficulty and extraneousness of the text'.

In 1986, Hadrat Mirzâ Tahir Ahmad, 'Khalifatul Masih IV and the head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community', published a new Italian translation of the Qur'ân, distributed by Al-Shirkatul Islamiyyah of London (Ahmad, 1986). The

Qadiyânî movement, as Qadhi (1999, p. 360) explains, 'were declared non-Muslims in a conference of world-wide scholars hosted in Pakistan in the late 70's'. The Italian translation was done by 'a group of specialists', and revised by Dr. Vincenzo Gatti, Dr. Aldo De Rosa, and Aftab Ahmad Kahn (Ahmad, 1986, n.p.). The cost of the translation and printing was paid by Professor Mohammad Abdus Salam, winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics and founder of the International Centre for Theoretical Physics of Trieste (Ahmad, 1986, n.p.). In the first five pages, one can read the *Foreword* by Mubarak Ahmad Saqi, whose obvious aim is to mix some points that are part of Islamic doctrine with misleading ideas of the Ahmadiyya sect. In particular, Saqi stresses the belief according to which the Promised Messiah has come in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) of Qadian: 'The Holy Quran states that Islam is the message of Light that after a long struggle in the end will defeat the darkness [...]. This final victory of Islam, according to the prophecies of the Holy Prophet, is bound to be fulfilled by a servant of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, called Mahdi or Messiah, through logic, reasoning and persuasion. Towards the end of the last century, according to the Muslim faith of the Ahmadiyya, in fulfillment of this prophecy, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, India, was raised up by God, as the Promised Reformer of this age, under the title of Mahdi and Messiah. In 1889, he founded a group called the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam...' (Ahmad, 1986, n.p.).

It is interesting to note that initially, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad fought to defend Islam against Christian missionaries, sent in the subcontinent to discredit the indigenous faith. Actually, as Kidwai reminds (2009, p. 61), some of them 'branded Islam, especially its articles of faith, its theology and the Qur'ân as a heavily borrowed and poor replica of the Judeo-Christian tradition [...] merely a Christian heresy and Muslims should therefore revert to the original, true faith – Christianity'. For this reason, when Mirza Ghulam Ahmad seems to work in defend of faith, many naïve Muslims 'could not and did not see through his imposture' and they did not understand that he was drifting 'towards apostasy, claiming himself to be a messenger and prophet of God!' (Kidwai, 2009, p. 62).

The first Qâdiyânî translation of the Qur'ân in English was the work of Mohammad Adbul Hakim Khan (MAHK), even though it was considered the first Muslim translation of the Noble Book, as Kidwai explains (2009, p. 59). As a matter of fact, the translator hid his sectarian belief, presenting himself in the Preface as an 'orthodox, devout Muslim scholar, whose mission is to vindicate, ironically enough, "the great miracles and prophecies of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)."' (Kidwai, 2009, p. 63). Another Qâdiyânî translation in English, by Muhammad Ali (1874-1951), was published in 1917 and, as Philips explains, was very popular in the West until recently 'due to the strong missionary activity of the sect' (1997, p. 78). The Italian version did not share the same popularity, and this work nowadays is virtually out of print.

In 1992, shaykh 'AbdurRahman Rosario Pasquini, a former lawyer who became Muslim in 1974, and is currently a teacher of Arabic and Islamic culture at the mosque Ar-Rahmân, in Milan, and the author of many books for the new Muslims and very active on the Italian Da'wah, published the first volume of his own translation of the Qur'ân. On its *Preface*, Dr Ali Abdellatif Abu Shwaima, Amir of the mosque Ar-Rahmân, explains that this work derives from years of study of the Arabic language and the Qur'anic text by the translator: "It is the first time in history that a work of this kind comes from an Italian Muslim translator, and it comes directly from the text of the Qur'ân and its most famous commentator, as the Tafsîr of Ibn Kathir, Qurtubi and Sayyid Qutb." (Pasquini, 1992, n.p.). After his proof-read of the text, Abu Swaima says to have found that the translation complies not only with the doctrinal content, but also from a linguistic and literary point of view (Pasquini, 1992, n.p.). Unfortunately, only the first volume has been published until today, containing the first eight surahs, namely until *Sûratu-l-Anfâl*.

On 1993 Angelo Terenzoni, an Italian shi'ite, published a non-academic translation; he relied on an English version of the Qur'ân for his work, without any linguistic neither doctrinal verification with the original Arabic text. In his *Introduction*, Terenzoni immediately states his creed: "After the death of

Muhammad, the Imams of the Shi'a were the custodians of the 'spirit' of the Qur'ân, whose First Ring is represented by Ali, nephew and son in law of the Prophet of Islam, who made him the custodian of the 'secrets' of the Book. Ali had eleven successors, complementing with them the pleroma of the Twelve Imams, according to a numerology expressing the Cosmic Totality. The Twelfth Imam went into occultation in the tenth century and, since then, he is hidden, speaking to the heart of those who can listen and manifesting himself in the eyes of those who can see him; he is the Mahdi, who will reappear on the Day of Judgment [...]. On the contrary the Sunnah, the major component of the Islamic Community, finds his approach to the Qur'ân on the statement: "The Book of God is sufficient for us", with which the Companions of the Prophet did not want to acknowledge the Guide of Ali. In so doing, they rejected the idea of a figure able to 'open' the Book, revealing its esoteric meaning; on the contrary, they are content of the purely exoteric expression [...], the merely surface of the Quranic verse" (Terenzoni, 1999, p. 7).

On the other side, on 1994 Hamza Roberto Piccardo, an Italian author reverted to Islam, has published what he calls the *Translation of the Meanings of the Qur'ân*, sharing the same view argued by Philips: "All translations are in fact *tafsîrs*" (1997, p. 83). In the *Introduction*, Pino Blasone, an Italian professor, says that this work should be considered an 'interpretive translation', because 'in the case of a Sacred Text, indeed, it is difficult to imagine that a language, other than the original one, will adhere to the meaning of the message, so as to leave no room for doubts or misunderstanding that may affect in-depth understanding and worship' (Piccardo, 1994, p. 18). However, a correct paraphrase is useful both for the reader moved by impartial interest, and for the believer who does not yet understand the original [Arabic] text, while liturgically reciting parts of it for worship' (Piccardo, 1994, p. 18).

The story of Piccardo's great effort has been beautifully narrated in a reportage, *Hamza e i significati del Corano حمزة... و معاني القرآن*, with subtitles in Arabic (Film, 2012). As Piccardo argues (2006, p. 29), telling the story of his translation of the

Qur'an is telling a very important part of his being Muslims in Italy since the early '80s to this day. In those years, the condition of Italian Muslims was serene and peaceful. What was important for the community was the production, for Muslims and for the general Italian speaking public, of reference doctrinal and jurisprudential works that would enable the believers 'to be better Muslims and better communicators of our spiritual reality' (Piccardo, 2006, p. 29)

The biggest concern for the Italian ummah, as Piccardo remembers (2006, p. 29) was the lack of a translation of the meanings of the Qur'ân in Italian language. A reliable translation, containing as many notes as possible to be able to understand the message of the Book without having to go through the understanding or most often the misunderstanding of the orientalist. For an orientalist, as honest as he could be from his point of view, the concern is that his translation may be academically accepted at the university; on the contrary, as Piccardo explains, 'a Muslim translator's concern should be to serve Allah to the best of his abilities and make the meanings of His revelation accessible to all. It is a completely different approach.' (Film, 2012). Therefore, for a Muslim the goal of a good translation would not be a perfect translation, which can never exist, but a legitimate, clear and reliable explanation of the meanings.

When Piccardo accepted Islam, the only available alternative, limited to those who had an acceptable level of knowledge of foreign languages (especially French and English), was the reading of the different and valuable Muslim translations that had been made over the years in those languages. In the same period, a student committee from USMI (Union of Muslim Students in Italy) was laboriously translating and proceeding to the proof-reading of the translation of the Qur'ân by the Pakistani scholar Abul'Alà Mawdudi (1903-1979). Mawdudi had translated the Book first in Urdu and then in English for the sake of the Pakistani immigrants in the United Kingdom (Piccardo, 2006, p. 30). As Piccardo remembers (2006, p. 30): 'On 1988 I was called to participate to that committee; however, I immediately realized that this work, for methodology and quality, was not what we needed in Italy. I explained my reflections in writing, but the brothers

of the USMI had already been invested too much in terms of time and efforts, so that the people in charge of the project decided not to consider my advices. It was for me a matter of fundamental importance and as an Italian Muslim, my consciousness could not accept that the fundamental text of my religion could be produced regardless of our cultural reality. As a matter of fact, even though the teachings of the Qur'ân are addressed to all people at all times, [...] it seemed clear to me that, because of its universality, it should be translated and explained to Italian and Italian-speaking public in a way that could meet also Italian cultural sensibility. I decided then, with the courage of my faith – perhaps one could say with a certain grade of presumption mixed with unconsciousness – to write a first draft, translating from a language well-known to me, a generally accepted and established French translation. After that, a group of Arabic-native scholars, learned in the exegesis (tafsîr) would examine and correct my work. I chose as the primary reference the translation made by the late Muhammad Hamidullah (1908-2002), then edited by the King Fahd Complex for the translation of the Holy Quran in Mecca. However, I examined many other versions in French, English and Spanish. I did not take into account any previous Italian translation, with the exception of some wording of Bonelli's version, which I consider tricky but the most close to Italian language. I worked on my draft for over two years, during which I found myself often to cry tears of despair and fear of Allah, realizing how great was the task that I was given and how inadequate my science and my tongue to convey the greatness and the beauty of what the Most High, glory to Him, wanted to give us through the last of His Messengers, the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. But the Qur'ân needed to be translated and asking for forgiveness I went ahead.' As Piccardo underlines in the video-interview *Hamza and the meanings of the Qur'ân*: "I have dedicated myself to this work then, and I still am going to do, as the most important thing in my life [...] I was not in a position to do so. Why did I do that? Because it was necessary to do so" (Film, 2012).

The ideal translator, for Piccardo, would be an Italian Muslim who knew Arabic perfectly. Unfortunately, no one volunteered to do so, therefore the necessity to

have a true and acceptable translation led Piccardo and his colleagues to opt for a first draft from another language, namely French. This is a problem that they seriously discussed and that has also attracted much criticism to Piccardo's translation (Film, 2012). The meeting with Dr. Ghrewati Baha, member of the UCOfI (Unione delle Comunità ed Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia / Union of Islamic Communities and Organisations in Italy) was crucial, as Piccardo explains; Baha promised to set up a scientific committee that would make the linguistic and doctrinal revision. Indeed, they established the committee, in charge of commenting on the correctness of the translation, including the notes (Film, 2012).

Every two or three months, as Piccardo says (2006, p. 31): 'I came with my papers and notebooks full of notes, questions, doubts to the committee and proceeded to check verse by verse, word by word, to analyse the adequacy of the translation of the Sacred Book. As the work proceeded, the encouragement of the brothers who supported it appeased my anxiety, eased the sense of disproportion that accompanied me in the nights of hardship. I started to read entire surahs or groups of surahs to other Italian Muslims, spying their reactions to see if the language that I used was understandable for them, if I had managed to communicate the message clearly. I always carried with me folders full of papers that I submit to all those who could advise and criticize me, collecting suggestions and impressions that essentially comforted my heart. The book spoke an Italian language understandable and pleasant for the Italian reader'.

In particular, the classical exegesis concerns the conditions and the time of the revelation of a verse, a group of verses or a surah, based on classical comments about their literal meanings and the creed derived from them. Conversely, contemporary exegesis strives to give to the believers, and to the readers in general, correct interpretations and keys of understanding in context of the time and place. As Piccardo reminds us, 'The Quran has indeed different levels of understanding; based on this complexity as much as I was able I worked two

years in the drafting of over 2500 notes, 12 appendices, a chronology, and two indexes' (Piccardo, 2006, p. 32).

On 1994, Piccardo decided to publish the final version and he printed 3000 copies with editions Al Hikma, his own Islamic publisher, founded the previous year. The expectation determined the success of the first edition, which, although it contained many typos and some serious inaccuracies, was out of print in a few months. At this point, he needed to print and distribute an economic edition that could also be read by the public as well as in the circuit of Islamic associations. After careful examination of the publishing scene, Piccardo and his committee chose to submit their work to the Newton & Compton, a leader in the printing of paperbacks. Therefore, in 1996 Piccardo published the revised edition, deciding at the same time to translate all the Arabic words that he had left in the first edition. He explains this choice as an intention 'to correct what for us was loyalty to a certain doctrinal reading of the text, but it could sound as an 'exotic', unintelligible choice to the general public, turning away the average reader from the universality of the Book' (Film, 2012).

Especially the terms referring to heaven and hell were translated by roughly corresponding Italian words, even though this choice was considered incorrect by some scholars, based on a certain interpretation of a hadîth of the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi waSallam) who declared the substantial strangeness of these words to any human experience (Piccardo, 2006, p. 34). However, Piccardo decided not to translate the word 'Allah' with the Italian correspondent 'Dio' (God); during his interview, he explained his choice saying: 'When we say 'Allah', our heart gets up a little, we feel that our soul is content ... it is inexplicable, but every Muslim knows what it means' (Film, 2012).

Since the first edition with the Newton & Compton, Piccardo produced five additional publications, distributing over 140,000 copies. Before the publication of every new edition, the committee correct, change and improve the work, and this according to many suggestions and advices. The Newton & Compton is committed to notify in time the translator about their intention of reprinting a new

edition of the Italian version (Piccardo, 2006, p. 34). As Piccardo argues, 'the translation work is never completed and it will never end, because our work is susceptible to error. Only the word of Allah is perfect' (Film, 2012). This edition was finally chosen by the King Fahd Glorious Quran Printing Complex in Madinah for their Arab-Italian edition of the Glorious Qur'ân; their first edition was printed on 2013 (Piccardo, 2006, p. 34).

In 2003, As Scalabrin says (2015), the 'psychologist, archaeologist, lecturer, artist and Sufi Shaykh' of the Jerrahi sufi order Gabriel Mandel Khan published a new translation of the Qur'ân, 'more oriented towards mysticism and the spiritual aspects of Sufism'. As a matter of fact, in the Introduction Khaled Fouad Allam, Professor of Sociology of the Muslim world and journalist, argues that "For the Muslim the One God reveals Himself through words [...]. And the revelation happens only because the essence of the mystery remains [...] For any Muslim, the Revelation is essentially the testimony of the *Tawhîd*, which is manifested in multiplicity; and multiplicity never reveals its own secret, because it is impossible to know the mystery" (2005, n.p.). At this point, the reader might be confused, wondering whether this book is the translation of the Qur'ân, or a philosophical text. Here, Allam advises: "To understand the extent and consequences of this concept in terms of Islamic spirituality, one should analyse a fundamental text of Islamic mysticism, *The Meccan Illuminations* of the great Andalusian mystic Ibn 'Arabi' (2015, np). Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn 'Arabi, who was born in Spain on 1165 CE and died in Damascus on 1240 CE, as Philips explains (2006, p. 11), 'claims to possess inner light and knowledge of Allah's greatest name and referred to himself as the seal of the sainthood, which he implied was a status higher than prophethood'. His doctrine was pantheistic, as he believed that Allah was all and all was Allah, which is a form of shirk (Philips, 2006, p. 11). If in the *Introduction* to a so monumental work, the only scholar who has been praised is Ibn 'Arabi, we can safely argue that this translation looks suspicious from a doctrinal point of view.

The most recent Italian translation of the Qur'ân has been written in 2010 by Ida Zilio-Grandi, a lecturer and researcher at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and directed by Alberto Ventura, researcher at the *Institute of Oriental and African Studies* of the Faculty of Political Science, at the University of Cagliari, and Professor at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" (Scalabrin, 2015). It is a monumental work, and from a linguistic point of view an accurate work; however, on the notes one can notice the return of the orientalist's agenda.

#### 4. SOME EXAMPLES FROM DIFFERENT ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS

As I am not fully proficient in the Arabic language, nor in the Islamic sciences, I was not able to analyze the Qur'ân in its linguistic form, and I will not pretend to be able to identify the mistakes in the Italian translations. However, after coming across many different works about the subject, and in particular the chapter concerning this topic in shaykh Yasir Qadhi's book *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'ân*, I decided to investigate if the same inaccuracies were also present in any of the Italian translations.

An example is the translation of the word *burûj*, in verse 85:1. As Qadhi (1999, p. 366) explains, 'Allah swears by the skies, full of *burûj*. Yusuf 'Ali translates this as, "By the Sky; (Displaying) the Zodiacal signs." In classical Arabic, however, the word *burûj* is used to denote a constellation of stars. Later Arabic, however, gave it the added meaning of 'the Zodiacal signs', and this is the meaning by which later dictionaries define it.'

As one can see, most of the Italian translators fell in the same error as Yusuf 'Ali.

Allah Ta'âlâ says:

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ

Bonelli (1979, p. 583) translates:

**Giuro per il cielo, fornito di torri (i.e. dei segni zodiacali)**

*[I swear by the sky, full of towers (namely the zodiacal signs)]*

Bausani (1955, p. 468):

**Pel cielo dalle molte torri !**

*[by the sky with many towers !]*

And in his notes, he argues: “Towers. I have freely translated the term in a more poetically allusive manner. ‘Towers’ are the zodiacal signs” (Bausani, 1955, p. 708).

Peirone (1979, p. 884):

**Lo giuro per il cielo trapuntato di segni zodiacali!**

*[I swear it by the sky quilted of zodiacal signs!]*

The Qadiyânî translation (1986, p. 608) is linguistically correct:

**Per il cielo, con mansioni di stelle [costellazioni]**

*[by the sky, with custodianship of stars (constellations)]*

Terenzoni (1993, p. 424) writes:

**Per le costellazioni del Cielo!**

*[by the constellations of the sky !]*

Piccardo (1994, p. 536) correctly translates:

**Per il cielo delle costellazioni**

*[by the sky which contains constellations]*

Mandel Khan (2003, p. 305) likes Bausani’s idea:

**Per il cielo adorno di torri!**

*[by the sky, ornate by towers!]*

Zilio-Grandi (2010, p. 391) also says:

**Per il cielo con le torri**

*[by the sky with the towers]*

As the zodiacal signs derive from Greek mythology, and are related to astrology, they have clearly no role to play in Islam (Qadhi, 1999, p. 366) and imply shirk. For this reason, it is simply impossible that Allah had sworn by them.

Another example of where a particular word is mostly incorrectly translated is the verse 56:82. As Yasir Qadhi argues (1999, p. 367), the verb *taj'alûna* that is used in the verse comes from a class of verbs that need two 'objects' (*maf'ûl*) to them in order to form a complete sentence. The first 'object' that is mentioned, however (*rizqakum*), does not form a comprehensible sentence with the verb unless one adds a noun to it'. In this case, the missing noun is '*shukr*', following an authentic narration of Ibn 'Abbâs (radiAllahu 'anhu), but most of the English translators were apparently not aware of this, and they simply 'translated verbatim' (Qadhi, 1999, p. 367).

If one would read many of the Italian translation, he will realize that – again – many of these works include the same mistake. Indeed, Allah the Almighty says:

وَتَجْعَلُونَ رِزْقَكُمْ أَنْكُمْ تُكَذِّبُونَ

Bonelli (1979, p. 516) translates:

**E farete consistere il vostro alimento quotidiano nel trattarlo di menzogna?**

*[And shall you make your daily food that you declare it falsehood?]*

Bausani (1955, p. 408) says:

**E dello smentirLo farete vostro quotidiano cibo**

*[And of His denial shall you make your daily food?]*

Peirone (1979, p. 752) seems to know about the missing word *shukr*, nevertheless, he does not translate correctly:

**E anche il grazie vostro sarà menzogna ?**

*[Shall your thanking be a lie, too?]*

Even the Qadiyyânî translator (1986, p. 541) does not mention the missing word:

**È questo dunque il Divino discorso che vorrete rifiutare?**

*[Therefore, is this the Divine Speech that you will deny?]*

Terenzoni (1993, p. 367) introduces 'unbelievers and idolaters' in the verse, as they were part of the original, without even changing the font of the added words:

**Mentre i miscredenti e gli idolatri la considerano menzogna**

*[While unbelievers and idolaters consider it a lie]*

Finally, Piccardo (1994, p. 472) correctly translates:

**La vostra riconoscenza sarà taciarlo di menzogna?**

*[And instead of be thankful, shall you deny it?]*

Mandel Khan (2003, p. 273) inexplicably translates:

**Pur se vi nutre, gridando: "Menzogna!"**

*[Although it feeds you, by shouting : "It is a lie"]*

Equally imaginatively, Zilio-Grandi (2010, p. 337) writes:

**Accusarlo di menzogna è il vostro cibo quotidiano?**

*[Is accusing it of falsehood your daily sustenance?]*

In some cases, the translation is acceptable, but the note is instilling doubts in the reader's mind. Conversely, sometimes both the translation and the note are distorting the meaning of the *âyah*. Interesting examples are the verses 24:31 and 33:59 and the endless 'hijâb controversy'.

Allah says in the Qur'ân:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُنْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا  
وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ

أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ  
 أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ ۗ  
 وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ ۗ وَتَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ  
 تُفْلِحُونَ

And He says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ۗ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ  
 فَلَا يُؤْذِينَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

Hamza Piccardo (1994, p. 306) correctly translates 24:31 as:

**E di' alle credenti di abbassare i loro sguardi ed essere caste e di non mostrare, dei loro ornamenti, se non quello che appare; di lasciar scendere il loro velo fin sul petto e non mostrare i loro ornamenti ad altri che ai loro mariti...**

*[And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands...]*

And in a note, he specifies: 'Chastity, not only as abstaining from any illicit sexual relationship, but also as a general attitude of the mind and the senses is a key feature of the behaviour of the Muslim, whether male or female.' (Piccardo, 1994, p. 307).

As for 33:59, Piccardo translates (1994, p. 369):

**O Profeta, di' alle tue spose, alle tue figlie e alle donne dei credenti di coprirsi dei loro veli, così da essere riconosciute e non essere molestate. Allah è perdonatore, misericordioso.**

*[O Prophet! Tell to your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers that they let down upon them their veils; this will be more proper, that*

*they may be known, and thus they will not be given trouble; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.]*

And he specifies in a note: 'At a time when there is much talk of measures against sexual harassment, we would like to draw attention to the group of verses 59-62 [...]. After recalling the believing women to wear clothing that could not give rise to a minimum misunderstanding of their condition, Allah (Glory be to Him, the Most High) threatens of war, curse and death against those who would dare to disturb them again.' (Piccardo, 1994, p. 369)

Mandel Khan has a completely different comprehension of both the verses. Actually, he translates 24:31 (2003, p. 176) as:

**E alle credenti, che esse abbassino i loro sguardi, preservino la loro castità, mostrino dei loro ornamenti soltanto ciò che appare e calino un panno sul seno; e mostrino le loro grazie solo ai propri mariti...**

*[And the believing women, that they lower their gaze, preserve their chastity, display of their adornment only that which appears; and that they should draw their cloth over their bosoms and not display their beauty save to their own husbands...]*

Furthermore, he comments: 'And they should draw their cloth (*khimar*) over their bosoms. This passage is often quoted by those claiming to impose the veil on women [...] It should be noted that the veil that covers the face and the hair is a pre-Islamic custom, which is ongoing, especially in those countries where it was already practiced, and especially for those women who wanted to also protect the delicate skin of the face from the ardent sun' (Mandel Khan, 2003, p. 864).

Having said that, he reminds the reader that in this verse the word *khimar* is used, 'but 'veil' in Arabic is commonly known as *hijâb*' (Mandel Khan, 2003, p. 865). However, he translates *hijab* as 'cortina' (curtain, screen) in 33:53, which could be linguistically correct, but only seems to prove his attempt to confuse the

reader about the real meaning of *khimar* in 24:31. As for 33:59, he writes (2003, p. 213):

**...e alle donne dei credenti che facciano scendere il càmice fino in basso**

*[...the believing women that do the blouse / gown down to the bottom]*

All these notes are indicative of Mandel Khan's sùfi leanings; for this reason, the reader should be careful in reading his translation and commentary.

Another interesting example of a misinterpretation of Qur'an verses is what one could call the *undercover propaganda* of the Baha'i doctrine in Bausani's notes, especially when he argues about 32:5 and 33:40. He explains, for example, commenting 32:5, that: 'The Adam cycle is completed with Muhammad, the Baha'i cycle, which they think that will last for 50,000 years, began in 1844 with the manifestation of the Bab. Within the first great cycle there are sub-cycles such that of Moses, Christ and Muhammad. In the Baha'i cycle, there will be future prophetic cycles, that will begin in about a thousand years.' (Bausani, 1955, p. 623). One can only agree with shaykh Yasir Qadhi, who argues that orientalisks 'must be looked at with extreme caution, for when a researcher studies Arabic and learns more about Islam than the average Muslim, yet still remains a non-Muslim, his intentions must be questioned. Such people have, by their own testimony, lifted from themselves the veil of ignorance, and have seen and appreciated the beauty and authenticity of Islam [...] For reasons that can only be guessed, they heard and recognised the call of the Creator, but refused to answer and submit to Him!' (Qadhi, 1999, p. 374).

Our aim in this thesis was only to give some examples of the very different ways of translating the same verse, and how by simply change one word (or missing it) the mean is completely distorted. It could be very interesting to show a great many more examples of the occurrence highlighted above, and we ask Allah Ta'âlâ to be able to study more in deep this topic in future, âmîn.

## CONCLUSION

My aim for the thesis was to compare various Italian translations of the Qur'ân, to research which of them is acceptable from an Islamic point of view, and which of them should be completely or partially rejected, and why. After analyzing various works, one can safely say that there is only full translation of the Qur'ân available in Italian language, that a Muslim can recommend, namely the translation by Piccardo. As a matter of fact, Piccardo's work is the only complete translation of the Qur'ân in Italian language, in which the translator has an implicit belief in all the articles of faith of Ahlu-s-Sunnah wa-l-Jamâ'ah, as long as having understood the injunctions of the fiqh. Even though Piccardo initially translated from the French version by Hamidullah, his work was firstly revised by the U.C.O.I.I. committee, and finally checked and approved by the King Fahd Complex for the translation of the Holy Quran in Mecca. Taking all these factors into account, one can confidently conclude that Piccardo's translation and commentary is the only acceptable rendering of the meanings of the Book of Allah attempted so far in Italian language. This is the translation which should be recommended to Muslims reverts who do not know Arabic language, yet, as well as to non-Muslim readers, whose mother tongue is Italian.

Conversely, orientalists, apostates and deviated sûfis have always included their ideas, constantly looking for the more suitable misleading word, whether Catholic, Baha'i, Qadiyyani, or other. Non-Muslim translators, even those who are not inspired by prejudice, cannot shake off their beliefs, and their rejection of the Islamic message. As it has been mentioned in this research, translating the Qur'ân necessarily means interpreting it, therefore it is impossible for a non-believer to be completely objective, and not to transpose his own creed in his writing. Speaking about Bausani, one of his colleagues once said in admiration that 'he always spoke the language of his interlocutor' (Scarcia Amoretti, 1998, p. 515), and his translation is – indeed – literally charming. Yet, he did not accept the Words of His Lord; the Baha'hi sect misled him and he wanted to mislead

others. May Allah guide us and may Allah make us live and die as Muslims, âmîn.

In conclusion, even though no translator could ever 'do justice' to the Qur'ân, as Allah the Almighty says:

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لَّكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَنفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا

**Say: 'Were the oceans to become ink for the words of my Lord, the ocean would surely exhaust before the words of my Lord exhausted, even though We brought another ocean for support (Sûratu-l-Kahf, 18:109),**

one can only be grateful to those believers who have taken responsibility to practice the *fard kifâya* of the translation of the Book of Allah, may Allah reward them immensely, forgive their mistakes, and guide them to correct them, âmîn.

Al-'Imâd al Asfahânî (d. 597 H.) once wrote: "I have noticed that no author writes a book and finishes it, except that the next day he says, 'If I had only changed this part, it would have been better; and if only I had added this fact, it would have been appreciated more; and if I had only made this section earlier, it would have been easier to comprehend; and if I had only left this section out, it would have been more beautiful.' And this, in fact, is one of the greatest lessons and points to ponder over, for it is a clear indication of the inferiority of the nature of man." (cited in Qadhi, 1999, p. 15). And if this is true for a great scholar, what about a poor aspiring student of knowledge like me? For this reason, I beg my Lord to accept my humble effort, as it is my sincere desire that this humble research would be a useful contribution for enlightening the efforts of our Italian ummah, and for exposing the treachery of orientalist, sectarian and apostate translators. And I ask Allâh, the Almighty, to record it as a righteous deed done for His sake, âmîn.

All that is correct in this work and of benefit to the readers is from Allah the Almighty, and all that is incorrect is from myself and Shaytân.

And Allâh, the Glorious and Exalted, Knows best. Peace and blessing be upon Muhammad, the Master of His Messengers and Prophets, upon his family, his companions, and his successors.

And our last prayer is that all praise belongs to Allâh, the Lord of the Worlds.

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