


RESEARCH ARTICLE	 Mechanisms of Translating the Qur'an from Syriac into Arabic (A Terminological and Semantic Approach)
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Abstract The terminology constitutes the keys to the sciences; through it, the text is interpreted, its codes are deciphered, and its aesthetic and contextual depths are addressed until it rises to the level of translation and openness to the Other. This prompts us to ask: How do we translate? For whom do we translate? This question becomes especially pertinent when the text is sacred and its linguistic expression surpasses the semantic and exegetical level, as it reflects a divine revelation and a cultural burden for a particular nation. The interpretation of pre-Islamic poetry using the Qur'an is, in itself, evidence of this and has contributed to the emergence of the theory of knowledge, which has, in turn, sought to describe the act of reading the sacred text, a text whose secrets have not been fully unveiled. Moreover, the act of interpretation is manifold and generative; it cannot be grasped all at once within the sacred text, let alone in its translation. Translation may be likened to a comprehensive epistemic vessel, possessing the characteristics of a living being. Here, we encounter the concept of tarjama, borrowed from Syriac, which not only involves finding the best way to transfer words from the source but also requires an understanding of the intent of these words within a particular cultural context. From the perspectives of translation studies, terminology, and semantics, it is necessary to revisit these issues. Did the Qur'an descend with foreign words? If so, are they Arabised? Did these terms influence the various modes of its interpretation? Why do Syriac terms abound in the Qur'an in comparison to other languages?	
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Introduction:

Many hold a firm belief that the Arabic language is independent and complete in and of itself, requiring no other languages to compensate for any deficiency or imperfection. They describe it as the "language of sacred being," as if it were a sanctified entity, breathing its spirit into all human languages, whether they acknowledge this or not. This, they claim, is the secret behind the existence of linguistic families throughout the world, such as Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic families. Among the ancient languages in which the Holy Bible was written is Aramaic, or modern Syriac, traces of which can be found in the Qur'an, including proper names such as Mūsā, 'Isā, Maryam, Ilyās, and Sulaymān. Most of us are unaware of their foreign origins and do not know their meaning. Setting aside accusations of heresy often directed at those who present this view for motives known only to themselves, we find that the majority of Muslim scholars remain perplexed as to whether some words in the Qur'an are indeed foreign. They often cite the revelation of the Qur'an in the language of Quraysh, as it is considered the eloquent Arabic dialect. This enabled them to compile, record, and write the Qur'an in the noble muṣḥaf and to interpret it in the books of exegesis, forgetting that God addresses people at every time and place in their tongues. Meanwhile, their argument rests on the claim that

Orientalist thought is the source of such theories, aiming to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Qur'anic account and the prophecy of Moḥamed (peace be upon him):

"I knew that the Orientalists lacked a scientific spirit in their research on Islam and that their investigative methods did not honour science. They would make an assumption and then seek its causes; if they found verses in the Qur'an that suited their purpose, they would cite them, and if they found verses that did not, they would ignore them, claiming they did not exist in the Qur'an. Thus, the reader leaves their writings accusing Islam of fabrication, just as they themselves accused it."¹

Moreover, they assert that the proper names mentioned in the Qur'an are familiar and well known to Arabs and therefore do not require recourse to the dictionaries of foreign languages. For example, the interpretation of (Ṭā Hā) has been said to mean "O man," whereas other interpretations have also been proposed. The interpretation "O man" does not contradict the Qur'an's Arabic nature, as the Arabs themselves used it to mean "O man," rendering it, therefore, Arabic. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, in his exegesis, cited a line of poetry by Mutammim ibn Nuwayrah:

هَنَفْتُ بِطَهَ فِي الْقِتَالِ فَلَمْ يُجِبْ... فَخَفْتُ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَكُونَ مَوْنًا

English translation

I called out "Ṭā Hā" amidst the battle, but he did not answer;

So I feared for him, lest he become one who seeks refuge (a fugitive seeking escape).

Another said:

إِنَّ السَّفَاهَةَ طَهَ مِنْ خَلَائِقِكُمْ... لَا بَارَكَ اللَّهُ فِي الْقَوْمِ الْمَلَاعِينِ

English translation

"Indeed, impudence, O Ṭā Hā (man), is among your traits—

May God not bless this accursed people."

Al-Qurṭubī also affirms, "There is no disagreement among the imams that there is nothing in the Qur'an constructed upon the patterns of non-Arab speech and that it contains proper names belonging to those whose tongue is not Arabic, such as Isrā'īl, Jibrīl, 'Imrān, Nūḥ, and Lūṭ. They differ, however, in terms of whether there are any words other than individual proper names from the languages of non-Arabs.

Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-Ṭayyib, al-Ṭabarī, and others have held that such words do not occur therein and that the Qur'an is pure and unequivocal Arabic. Any words found in it that are attributed to other languages are only because multiple languages have come to use them, so they have been spoken by Arabs, Persians, Abyssinians, and others. Some scholars, on the other hand, have held that such words do exist, yet their scarcity does not negate the Qur'an's status as clear Arabic, nor does it mean that the Messenger of God was not speaking in the tongue of his people."²

To achieve a comprehensive terminological study of the Holy Qur'an, it is necessary to consider the understanding, analysis, and interpretation of every word and verse within it by synthesising various sciences, such as the occasions of revelation, the sciences of the Qur'an (including abrogating and abrogated, explicit and ambiguous), and the sciences of exegesis and jurisprudence. This is a task impossible for a single researcher to accomplish, yet the researcher may be guided by foundational principles to regulate his or her approach, including the following:

- The term is established in such a way that the recipient understands a single, unambiguous meaning.
- Relying on the principle of quantification in lexicography and text linguistics, the term is then set accordingly.

- Clarifying the mechanisms of the adopted methodology in the reading of the Qur'anic text.
- Presenting a forward-looking vision in reading the Qur'an as an ancient text in light of modern criticism is a necessity imposed by the contemporary era.

For this reason, many early scholars did not distinguish between translation and Arabisation at that time. Those who excelled in translation and were both trusted and well versed in the sciences of other civilisations were very few. It is reported that the Prophet (peace upon him) entrusted the transmission and interpretation of sciences to no one except Zayd ibn Thābit, whom he encouraged to learn the Syriac language. Zayd translated many Syriac books into Arabic, and using these translations, numerous words and the openings of specific Qur'anic chapters of Syriac origin were interpreted, including the word “al-Qur'ān,” which refers to *quryānā* (with a kasra under the qāf), an expression from Syriac liturgical rites meaning “the Book of Lessons,” containing hymns and quotations from the Christian Holy Scriptures. Notably, the similarity in content is not intended to cast doubt upon the revelation of the Qur'an, nor upon the prophecy of Moḥamed (peace upon him), as some have claimed, but rather because the Qur'an, the Gospel, and the Torah all originate from the same source, namely, the Syriac language.

The Arabic language, like other languages, has evolved and been refined over time. Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī undertook to codify it in its final form so that it attained its present structure by introducing diacritical marks to distinguish one letter from another. Calligraphers have since excelled and continue to do so to this day in devising numerous styles of Arabic script, including those inspired by other languages, such as Persian, Arabic, Kufic, and Andalusian script. It is thus not surprising that the Qur'an was written in Syriac script and in the Arabic Kufic script, which itself was derived from the Syriac script.

The letters of the alphabet in the Qur'an are pronounced by their names, such as (ص) “ṣād,” (ق) “qāf,” and each letter possesses both a name and a sound: for example, the names are *alif, bā', jīm, dāl* ..., whereas the sounds are ' , b, j, d, and so on. To refer to any given letter, one must pronounce either its name or its sound. However, the expressions of the disjointed letters at the beginnings of specific chapters can only be conveyed via their names, as in (يس) “Yā Sīn.” The majority, however, are unaware of the meaning of this name.

Arab scholars' knowledge of Semitic languages remains incomplete, which has rendered their conclusions deficient and unreliable. Analysing the Qur'anic text outside the confines of traditional exegesis yields new information about the relationships between Arabic and other languages. As Mingana put it, “If we take the number one hundred as a unit for the foreign influences upon the style and terminology of the Qur'an, we can state with some confidence the following proportions: Abyssinian constitutes five percent of the whole, Persian about five percent, Hebrew ten percent, Greek and Latin ten percent, and Syriac seventy percent.”³

Al-Suyūfī reports from Abū al-Qāsim in his Book of *Languages of the Qur'an* that the word *taḥta* (“under”) is of Nabataean origin and means “abdomen.”⁴ Christophe Luxenberg later asserted that the word *taḥta* does not exist in the Arabic language but is derived from the Syriac verb *naḥet*, meaning “descended” or “went down,” from which comes the verb *naḥata* (“to hew”) and *naḥata* as in the hewing of rock, stone, or wood. If the preposition *min* is added—*min taḥti*—it no longer denotes spatial circumstances but rather temporal circumstances, in the sense of birth or nativity. Its Syriac equivalent is *hbat*, and the Qur'an itself contains the verb *walada* (“to give birth”), as in the birth of the Messiah, son of Mary. Thus, the verse transforms into:

فَنَادَاهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَا تَحْزَنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ سَرِيًّا

(“Then, he called her from beneath her, 'Do not grieve; your Lord has provided a stream beneath you. ’”) [Qur'an 19:24]⁵

However, what Christophe Luxenberg asserted regarding the absence of the word *taḥta* in the Arabic lexicon is unfounded. The word appears one hundred times in pre-Islamic poetry by forty-six poets. Among their uses of the word *taḥta*, we may cite, for example, the words of 'Antarah ibn Shaddād:

فَعَيْنُكَ تَحْتَ ظِلِّ الْعِزِّ يَوْمًا وَلَا تَحْتَ الْمَذَلَّةِ أَلْفَ عَامٍ

لَهَا مِنْ تَحْتِ بُرْقَعِهَا عُيُونٌ صَبَاحَ حَشْوٍ جَفَّتْهَا سِهَامٌ

English translation

“To live, even for a day, under the shade of honour

is better than a thousand years beneath humiliation.”

“She possesses, beneath her veil, eyes—

Sound, with eyelids filled with piercing arrows.”

Many Christian clergy members have even gone so far as to claim that the *basma* contains Syriac foreignness, in that the letter *sīn* is pronounced as *shīn*. Christophe Luxenberg, in his Book *A Syriac Aramaic Reading of the Qur'an*, reiterates this view, stating: “The Qur'an is not written in Arabic, but in a mixed language that combines Arabic and Aramaic, which was in use in Mecca at the time of Muḥammad peace be upon him and Mecca was originally an Aramaic settlement.”⁶

Perhaps some support for this opinion can be found among certain early linguists, such as the Companion ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, who affirms the presence of foreign terms in the Qur'an, a view documented in his Book *Languages in the Noble Qur'an*. Similarly, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān authored the work *Al-Aqsām wa al-Lughāt*, and the historians Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī, al-Haytham ibn ‘Adī, al-Farrā’, al-Aṣma‘ī, Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī, and Ibn Durayd, the latter dedicating a chapter to this topic in his *Jamharat al-Lughā*. Nor should we forget Ibn Qutaybah in his *Adab al-Kātib*, in which he discussed the strange or borrowed elements in Arabic, the work *Al-Mu‘arrab min Kalām al-‘Arab ‘alā Ḥurūf al-Mu‘jam* by Abū Manṣūr al-Jawālīqī, and *Al-Muhadhdhab fīnā Waqa‘ fī al-Qur‘ān min al-Mu‘arrab* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī.

Among the many foreign words of various languages found in the Qur'an, we find terms from Syriac, Greek, Latin, Persian, Hebrew, Abyssinian, and Nabataean, to mention only a few examples.

Syriac words:

The word *jannah* (جَنَّة) is pronounced in Syriac as “gannā” and means a luxuriant garden with trees and lush plants.

The word *al-Raḥmān* (الرَّحْمَنُ) is pronounced in Syriac as “raḥmānā,” and it is one of the attributes of the Lord, recited at the beginning of every sūrah: “In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.”

Rūḥ al-Qudus (رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ) is pronounced in Syriac as “rūḥ qudshā”; it is a well-known Syriac expression meaning “the Holy Spirit.”

إِذْ أُنْزِلَتْ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ

[al-Mā'idah: 110]

Most of the foreign words that appear in the Qur'an are of Syriac origin, as Syriac is the language of the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament (the Torah) and the Gospel, as well as the language of certain esoteric sciences, such as the science of jafr and the science of letters, and even astronomy and magic. This stems from the principle of linguistic kinship among Semitic languages, including Arabic and Syriac. Such kinship is manifested in the shared linguistic capacity that has allowed them to endure and in their ability to develop and absorb the principles of derivation and immersion, which is reflected mainly in the syntactic structuring of these two languages.

Linguistic kinship features are shared among languages, which aspire to establish comparative philology or comparative grammar. In this context, Ferdinand de Saussure observes the following: "The third stage (of linguistic studies) begins when we discover that it is possible to compare languages with one another... (and) to illuminate one language by means of another and to clarify the forms present in one language through those in another."⁷

1. The Terminological Approach:

It has become common in Orientalist literature to classify the translation of the Qur'an into Syriac according to three circles or groups, each on the basis of the following foundations:

- The first group has a Christian religious background and seeks to exalt the ideological and polemical dimensions existing between Christianity and Islam, transferring terminology between the two sides. This approach often serves not the interests of translation but rather those of philosophical and atheistic distortions, particularly from the Islamic perspective.
- The second group aims to allow Islamic communities to express their Islam in their way to appropriate from it what suits their polemical framework, according to the cultural context of each community.
- The third group, which adopts a Marxist perspective, attempts to implant its terminology within Muslim societies, focuses on the material dimension, and is represented by leftist intellectuals who are sympathetic to the impoverished Third World.

These three groups have sought to arrive at the terminological meaning in the translation of the Qur'an by drawing upon the prevailing collective sense in Muslim societies. For this reason, the researcher among them must be equipped with a considerable arsenal of knowledge and caution in selecting his or her terminology both individually and collectively, whether explained or ambiguous.

The concept of the "terminological study method," which refers to the methodological foundations and procedural mechanisms from which the researcher commences the study of terminology, is embodied. The terminological approach is not a scientific method employed exclusively in the humanities or the sciences but rather a set of mechanisms drawn from various disciplines, such as psychology, history, sociology, and linguistics, that focus on the term and its role (the principle of pragmatics) in the study of texts, especially sacred texts, in which hermeneutics has long found fertile ground for interpreting their meanings. This approach is considered the most suitable for the study of the Qur'anic texts until such a time as a discipline emerges to support or refute it with new developments that further enhance the reflection and study of the Holy Qur'an. For the study to be conducted properly, it must be considered from two perspectives: the Qur'an's need for a scientific methodology by which to be studied and the suitability of this methodology for the Qur'an itself.

Several scholars have endeavoured to lay the foundations for the terminological study method, establishing various schools, including the Indian school under the guidance of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī, the Levantine school under the guidance of Aḥmad Ḥasan Farḥāt, and the Fāsī school under the guidance of al-Shāhid al-Būshīkhī. All have sought scientific objectives, namely, to establish correct concepts among recipients and to rectify erroneous ones. Regarding terminological study, al-Shāhid al-Būshīkhī states, "It is a rigorous scientific method based on research into the historical development and semantic reality of the term within a text belonging to a specific field of knowledge, through describing the term, analysing its intrinsic components and external extensions, to arrive at precise, objective, and reliable conclusions about it."⁸

2. Semantic Formation between Syriac and Arabic:

The term "Semitic languages" was introduced into the field of linguistics and ethnology in 1781 by the German scholar Ludwig Schölzer and was further developed by the French scholar Renan. With Hjelmslev, the concept evolved considerably, reinforcing the idea of linguistic proximity among languages of common origin, or what he termed "linguistic kinship" between languages descending from a single family.

Thus, we observe a significant and, at times, remarkable resemblance between the Arabic and Syriac alphabets: both are pronounced with the same sequence *abjad, hawwaz, ḥaṭṭi, kalamān, sa'faṣ, qarshat*. In terms of letter shape, number, pronunciation, and arrangement at the beginning and end of words, there are many similarities. Comparing the two alphabets, we find that the Estrangelo script and the Kufic script closely resemble each other in their design. This supports the view that the Arabic Kufic script descended from the Estrangelo script after separating from the ancient Nabataean script and that it continued to develop into later Arabic script.

History thus bears witness to the cross-pollination of Arabic and Syriac in the domains of orthography and imitation. Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Yahyā ibn Jābir al-Balādhurī, in his *Futūḥ al-Bulḍān*, relates: “‘Abbās ibn Hishām ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī narrated to me, from his father, from his grandfather, and from al-Sharqī ibn al-Qaṭamī, who said: Three men from Ṭayy' gathered at Bīqqa Mārāmīr ibn Murrah, Aslam ibn Sidrah, and 'Āmir ibn Jadrah. They devised the script, modelling the orthography of Arabic on that of Syriac. Some people from al-Anbār learned it from them, then the people of al-Ḥīrah learned it from the people of al-Anbār. Bishr ibn 'Abd al-Malik, the brother of Akīdar ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd al-Jinn al-Kindī and later al-Sukūnī, the ruler of Dūmat al-Jandal, used to visit al-Ḥīrah and reside there for a while. He was a Christian and learned the Arabic script from the people of al-Ḥīrah.”

He then came to Mecca on some business, where Sufyān ibn Umayyah ibn 'Abd Shams and Abū Qays ibn 'Abd Manāf ibn Zuhrah ibn Kilāb saw him writing. They asked him to teach them the script, so he taught them the alphabet and then demonstrated the writing, so they wrote as well.

Afterwards, Bishr, Sufyān, and Abū Qays travelled to al-Ṭā'if on business, accompanied by Ghaylān ibn Salamah al-Thaqafī, who learned the script from them.

Bishr then left them and went to the lands of Muḍar, where he learned writing from 'Amr ibn Zurārah ibn 'Adas, who was thus called 'Amr the Scribe.

Bishr later went to Syria, where he taught the script to some people there.”⁹⁹

Through the above, Abū al-'Abbās al-Balādhurī illustrates the reality of what linguists have posited: the men who gathered at Bīqqa devised a script, modelling the Arabic alphabet in the Syriac language. They found themselves imitating the Musnad Himyaritic script, which itself was originally Syriac.

The most recent fully vocalised edition of the Noble Muṣḥaf to have reached us in the modern era is the Cairo edition of 1924, which represents the final stage in the documentation of the Qur'an. No other edition is known to us to this day, nor do we know when its vocalisation was completed. Another edition of the Muṣḥaf may yet be discovered in the future, given the ongoing efforts of historians, archaeologists, and manuscript scholars.

The diacritical marks of certain letters may also change, perhaps due to unintentional error, thereby altering the meaning within the same Arabic language or even resulting in a reference to another language, as in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb:

فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَنْتَظِرُ

("Among them are those who have fulfilled their vow, and among them are those who are still waiting.")

The Arabs say, “So-and-so *qaḍā naḥbahu*,” meaning that God has taken his soul and that he has died. However, the phrase *qaḍā naḥbahu* has no actual connection with death; rather, the diacritical marking is an erroneous Syriac rendering. In Syriac, we say “baḥnā” (ܒܚܢܐ), meaning “to erase,” and in Arabic lexicons, the phrase *sāra 'alā naḥbih* means “to travel swiftly.” When translated into Syriac, it does not retain the same meaning, but instead means “to be transported.” As is well known, *to walk* is not the same as *to be transported*, just as in the phrase: “The caravan travelled for a month,” meaning its members walked on foot = ܡܚܠܬ ܡܚܠܬ ܡܚܠܬ, while *being transported* requires company or means of transport, as in: “Today I travelled to the university by bus” = ܡܚܠܬ ܢܗܝܬ ܠܝܚܬܝܬ ܒܚܒܝܬ.

As for His saying, the Exalted:

مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَنْتَظِرُ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا تَبْدِيلًا (٢٣)

ܡܢ ܐܠܡܘܢܝܢ ܪܝܓܐܠܝܢ ܨܕܩܘ ܡܐ ܥܐܗܕܘ ܐܠܠܗ ܥܠܝܗ ܦܡܢܗܡ ܡܢ ܦܩܨܝ ܢܚܒܗܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܦܩܨܝ ܢܚܒܗܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܢܬܐܬܪ ܡܐ ܒܕܠܘ ܬܒܕܝܠܐ (٢٣)

If we were to substitute the word “bahnā,” meaning “to erase,” in the verse, it would imply that whoever is killed in the way of God receives no reward, thus nullifying the very principle of jihād in defence of life, land, and honour. Indeed, it would be a grave matter for the interpretation of this verse, in the Syriac language, to take such a direction; it would completely alter the meaning and understanding of the text. The precise meaning of Syriac is thus distinct from that of Arabic. At that time, Arab scribes and copyists did not understand the word’s meaning owing to their limitations in translation, as previously explained, so they added diacritical marks to the word “naḥbih.” It should be “baḥnih,” a term existing in Syriac meaning “to erase from existence” = ܒܚܢܝܬܐ. This is correct, and there are many such examples in the Holy Qur’an where errors have altered both interpretation and jurisprudence, such as His saying:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ الْبَقَرَةُ (١٨٥)

“The month of Ramaḍān is that in which the Qur’an was sent down as guidance for mankind and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever of you witnesses the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey, then a number of other days. God intends ease for you and does not intend hardship for you, so that you may complete the prescribed period and magnify God for that to which He has guided you, and perhaps you will give thanks.”

[al-Baqarah: 185]

Some readers understand that the Qur’an was revealed only in the month of Ramaḍān; this is incorrect, as they have paused in their recitation at the word *al-Qur’an* and then resumed with the remainder of the verse. The intended meaning, however, is that the Qur’an was sent down during the blessed month of Ramaḍān, just as it continued to be revealed throughout the years during which the revelation descended upon the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) over twenty-three years. The specific reference to its revelation in this month pertains to the clarification of the rulings concerning fasting for the sick, the traveller, and the young, among others.

It is therefore necessary to complete the recitation of the following verses to grasp the meaning of these noble verses. The purpose of this, about the month of Ramaḍān, is the set of instructions that you, O Muslims, are required to observe.

1.2. Phonetic level:

Like any language, Syriac possesses a range of phonetic components that enable it to determine meaning with precision. It is composed of twenty-two letters: *abjad*, *hawwaz*, *ḥaṭṭi*, *kalaman*, *sa’faṣ*, and *qarshat*, while Arabic adds to these *takhadh*, *ḍazgh*. Syriac sounds share most of these sounds with those of Arabic, although some differences exist.

– **Pharyngeal Letters:** The Arabic *ghayn* corresponds to the Syriac *gimeḥ*; thus, the *gimel* is replaced by *ghayn*. This resembles the contemporary Egyptian dialect, where “g” is pronounced as in “go.” For example, one might say “qābli” (written with a qāf bearing three dots) for “he brought me a bag of oranges,” instead of “jāb li” as in standard Arabic.

Syriac also retains most pharyngeal consonants, except *ghayn*, which is pronounced as (g), for example. The pharyngeal letters in Syriac are *alif*, *he*, *het*, *‘ayn*, *resh*—in Syriac: ܐ ܚ ܝ ܬ ܐ. If a verb ends with one of these letters, the preceding vowel in the singular is open, as in:

ittaka’ a (ܐܬܟܐ), *madaḥa* (ܡܕܚ), *nabbaha* (ܢܒܗ), *qarrara* (ܩܪܪ), *ṣafaḥa* (ܨܦܚ):

ܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ.

- Geminated (Emphatic) Letters:

These are letters with a pronounced, deep, and sonorous sound in both articulation and hearing, such as the letter *tāʾ*. In Syriac, the same emphatic sound is present, for example, in “*tāb*,” meaning “to float,” “to be abundant,” or “to swim,” as well as in “*ṭilāʾ*” (shadow) and “*qurbaʾā*” (frog): ܩܘܪܒܐܐ, ܬܒ, ܬܠܐ. However, Syriac has lost the sounds of *dād* and *zāʾ*, which are not present in its alphabet.

Dr. Maḥmūd Fahmī Hijāzī observes that “Arabic has been described as the language of the *dād*, as if this sound existed only in Arabic. In reality, *dād* is a sound shared by both Northern and ancient Southern Arabic, whereas its counterpart in the Northern Semitic languages is *ṣād* in Hebrew and Akkadian, and *ʾayn* in Aramaic... The correspondence between Arabic *dād* and Aramaic *ʾayn* is one of those confirmed phenomena for which it is difficult to find a phonetic explanation.”¹⁰

For example, the Arabic word *arḍ* (“land”) corresponds to *arā* in Syriac. They say “*arḍ ẓalīlah*,” meaning “a land of dense, shady trees”:

ܐܪܥܐ ܕܕܠܝܠܐ.

- Sibilant and Fricative Letters:

Most of the letters articulated at the lips, producing a whistling or rustling sound to the ear in Arabic, are also present in Syriac, except for *shīn* and the softened *sīn* in both languages. “Comparative research has established that Proto-Semitic contained three sounds, which in Arabic and Syriac became two. Evidence for this lies in the existence of symbols for *shīn*, *sīn*, and a third, *samekh*, in Hebrew, which indicates the original presence of three distinct sounds in this group.”¹¹ Thus, the sounds of *shīn* and the softened *sīn* are both missing in Arabic and Syriac.

- Dental Letters:

The letter *thāʾ* in Syriac is pronounced as *tāʾ* in Arabic: for instance, *thālūth* (Trinity) in Arabic corresponds to ܬܠܬܐ in Syriac; *thūm* (garlic) becomes ܬܘܡܐ (*tūmā*); and *Tūmā* (Thomas). The remainder of the letters remain unchanged.

Notably, Syriac scholars interpreted the disjointed letters at the beginnings of the Qurʾanic chapters as confirmation of the principle of the Trinity in Christianity. Among them was Bishop Eliya of Nisibis, who, in his debate with the vizier Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Maghribī, interpreted the meanings of the Qurʾān according to Christian belief. Meanwhile, scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and exegesis, among them al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Itqān*, affirm that the three disjointed letters at the openings of the chapters indicate, for example, *Alif-Lām-Mīm* in Sūrat al-Baqarah: “I am God, All-Knowing”; *Alif-Lām-Mīm-Ṣād* in Sūrat al-Aʿrāf: “I am God, the Best, I am God, the Truthful”; and *Alif-Lām-Rā* in Sūrat Yūnus: “I am God, All-Knowing and Protecting.” Interpreting them as representing the Trinity is not supported by the majority of the revealed scriptures, all of which emphasise the Oneness of God. Were this otherwise, we would find the doctrine of the Trinity in all extant versions of the Gospels, even the apocryphal ones.

Ibn al-Naṣībī’s translation of the Arabic letters into Syriac was intended not only for translation but also for polemical debate with Muslims, for example:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الم (1) ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ (2) الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ (3) وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ (4)

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Alif Lām Mīm. (1) This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah - (2) Who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; (3) And who believe in what has been revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are certain [in faith]. (4)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

كَلِمَ (1) هَذِهِ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ الْخَالِدَةُ (2) هَذِهِ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ الْخَالِدَةُ (3) هَذِهِ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ الْخَالِدَةُ (4)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الم (1) اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ (2) نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ (3) مِنْ قَبْلُ هُدًى لِلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انتِقَامٍ (4)

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Alif Lām Mīm. (1) Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of existence. (2) He has sent down upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming what was before it. And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel. (3) Before, as guidance for the people. And He revealed the Qur'an. Indeed, those who disbelieve in the verses of Allah will have a severe punishment, and Allah is exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution. (4)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

كَلِمَ (1) هَذِهِ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ الْخَالِدَةُ (2) هَذِهِ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ الْخَالِدَةُ (3) هَذِهِ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ الْخَالِدَةُ (4)

The methodology of philology that prevailed during the nineteenth century did not open up to the epistemology of the human sciences at the end of the last century. As a result, the philological method, in the context of translating sacred texts, does not consider myths and systems of imagination from a cultural and social perspective. Philology thus remained preoccupied with the historical event itself, neglecting all legendary and imaginative elements that accompanied the historical event.

Similarly, the Orientalist approach works to gather all sciences into a single research method without considering the epistemological framework that governs Islamic thought. Consequently, these Orientalists succeeded in collecting scientific material from the ruling authorities while ignoring the knowledge found among the margins and the religiously marginalised or dissenting groups. It is as although the Orientalist approach to translation was concerned solely with tracing the origins of words and the genealogy of letters through the genetic lineage of humanity's presence on earth, forgetting that there is a cultural context in which language and ideas are born, live, and die. Those that are used are revived, whereas those that are neglected are consigned to oblivion.

The Qur'an should not be reduced to biblical or gospel language and ideas, merely for the sake of producing translational innovation. Likewise, focusing on the singularity of the meaning of the sacred text removes it from the recognition of neighbouring and surrounding meanings. Furthermore, they negate methodological plurality.

Among the distinctive features of the Syriac language is the substitution of certain letters in pronunciation for entirely different ones. These letters are six: kāf, zāy, sīn, 'ayn, hā', and qāf, corresponding in Syriac to ܟܐ ܙܐ ܣܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܗܐ ܩܐ. The alif is often converted into a yā' in three instances, since yā' cannot occur at the beginning of speech among the ancient Easterners; thus, a small alif is placed above the letter, so it is pronounced as an alif, as is the case in the Qur'anic

language: *haywah* is pronounced *hayāh* (ܚܝܐܐ, ܚܝܐܐ). If a *yā'* is introduced to such words, it must be rendered with lengthening and vocalisation, as in *malik yawmi al-dīn* ("Master of the Day of Judgement"), pronounced *mālik* (ܡܠܝܟܐ, ܡܠܝܟܐ). It is also silent in specific Syriac names of Greek origin, such as *Athina*, which is pronounced today in French as *Athènes* (ܐܬܝܢܐ).

The *kāf* is substituted when followed by a *tā'*, for example, *mujaddalā* (ܡܝܚܕܠܐ). Likewise, the *kāf* is replaced by a *tā'* in words such as *karb*, which becomes *yarb* (ܝܪܒ). Even the *jīm* is sometimes rendered as a *yā'*, as in *jawf* ("cavity"), which becomes *yūf* (ܝܘܦ)—a feature often heard in the Iraqi dialect. All these clear characteristics of Syriac letters have a direct influence on the translation of the Noble Qur'an.

- Labial Letters:

The labial letters in Syriac alternate between emphatic and soft pronunciations. The letter *bā'* is sometimes pronounced as a voiceless sound, akin to the French (p), and sometimes as *bā'* as in Arabic; the same applies to *mīm* and *nūw*. In Arabic, however, the voiceless *bā'* does not exist. For example, *bābā* (ܒܒܐ) and *bālūn* (ܒܠܐܢ); the former may be pronounced softly, whereas the latter is pronounced normally.

"This means that the sound *lā'* in Arabic is not a direct continuation from the Semitic language, but rather the result of a phonetic change; the voiceless *bā'*, which is a labial sound produced by completely closing the lips, shifted to *lā'*, a labiodental sound pronounced by bringing the lower lip into contact with the upper teeth."¹²

For this reason, Arabic has always been used. It remains a source of inspiration for many Semitic languages. However, its sounds have evolved for various reasons, among the most significant of which are those mentioned in the Syriac narrative of the translation of the Qur'an. Many historical facts and events are scattered across various Islamic Arabic sources, necessitating their revival and reassessment. Some events are absent from our Arabic sources, especially those concerning the rise and fall of Islamic states and the changes in the geopolitical map. Even though the conquest of Jerusalem was a divine decree realised twice, once during the era of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and once under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, the participation of non-Arab Muslims established the cross-pollination of languages, including Syriac, whose traces are still evident today in the Levant and Iraq.

2.2. Morphological level:

Corruption (*lahn*) has entered the Syriac language, and whereas words previously began with a vowel, they now begin with a consonant, similar to the current dialect of the Levant. For example, the word *'ūlūi* (meaning "leave me") ܘܠܝܝ, which originally ended with a kasrah, has lost this vowel and now ends with a neutral vowel, neither fathah nor sukun. Those unfamiliar with its meaning might be mistaken for the plural, but in this context, it is singular. For example, if someone quarrels and says, "utrūknā yā rajul," he means "leave me," ܐܬܪܝܬܝܢܝܐ ܝܐ ܪܝܝܬܝܐ. This phenomenon also applies to the third-person singular pronoun, whose pronunciation coincides with the first-person plural. This is also evident in the Algerian dialect; for example, "naqdar n-sa'id fī kitābat al-taqrīr" corresponds to ܢܥܕܪܢ ܢܫܐܝܕ ܦܝ ܟܝܬܐܒܬ ܐܠܬܩܪܝܪ, where the speaker is singular, although someone unfamiliar with the dialect might think it is plural. In this case, the singular and plural forms are identical in pronunciation. Thus, both languages share the same morphological structures, including the following:

Verb Forms: Most verbs in Arabic and Syriac are based on a trilateral root, to which prefixes and suffixes are added, as in the morphological patterns of *zar'a* (to plant), *istazra'a* (to make someone plant), and *zira'a* (agriculture). The three core consonants define the basic meaning of the word, to which further morphological units are added.

The active participle in Syriac, as in all Semitic languages, is categorised by tense: past, present, and imperative; by voice: active and passive; by transitivity: intransitive and transitive; by form: simple and augmented; by origin: basic and derived; and by inflection: regular and irregular. The verb is marked by the presence of *tā'* and *yā'*, *tā'* for the feminine, *sīn* for the future, and other tools for subjunctive, accusative, and genitive cases.

He treats the phrase *dīnan qiyaman* as a specification, translating it as: *إِنَّمَا قَدَّمْتُ لَكُمْ دِينًا*, meaning “Indeed, my Lord has truly guided me to the true and correct religion” (*فَهَلْ لَكُمْ لِقَاءُ رَسُولٍ مِّنْكُمْ لَدِينِكُمْ*), which is not what the Jews and Christians intend; instead, they seek to bend the meaning by translating, “My Lord has guided me to a firm religion” (*وَأَمَّا خَيْرُ لَدِينِكُمْ فَلَكُمْ*). We know that what is entrenched in their minds, and what they seek to instill in others, are remnants of a distorted Christianity based on the principle of the Trinity and the resurrection of the Antichrist.

Christoph Luxenberg continues with his conjectures and beliefs, weaving a veil of deception around the Qur’an that makes its parsing difficult for us. It is therefore necessary to re-examine Arabic grammar. The grammatical reading imposed on the non-Arabic tongue does not carry the same cultural weight as it does for the Arab. It may be difficult for a non-Arab to read and comprehend the Qur’an, but what is remarkable and intriguing is that a non-Arab may recite the Qur’an from memory in the manner of an Arab and articulate its grammatical vowels correctly, these same vowels upon which the commentators have relied, at least since the era of al-Ṭabarī. However, those who do not memorise the Qur’an, whether Arabs or non-Arabs, do not comprehend its grammatical rules and, consequently, are unable to interpret or translate it.

The essential difference here lies between the use of the first person singular “*hadānī rabbī*” (“My Lord has guided me”) and the defective past verb form “*wa nā kāna min al-mushrikīn*” (“and he was not of the polytheists”).

3. Lexical Homonymy between Qur’anic Arabic and Syriac

Orientalists have sought to strip the Noble Qur’an of the aura of sanctity that God has bestowed upon it, asserting that it represents a developed form of early Christianity and Judaism and that Muḥammad was but a third-generation messenger advancing the cause of Christianity. According to their claims, he conspired to steal the liturgical Book of Lessons (*Qiryānā*) and Arabised it. Some Orientalists contend that arranging the sūrah of the Qur’an in the order of their revelation is the most objective way to approach each sūrah. In contrast, the order set by Muslim scholars does not correspond to the appropriate context or occasion of the verse. In this context, they attempt to attribute a social and anthropological dimension to the Qur’anic text, as each verse was a specific divine message directed to a particular human race. Moreover, they differentiate between what is Meccan and what is Medinan, claiming that the Meccan is related to the life of Muḥammad (peace be upon him). At the same time, Medinan refers to incidents that occurred before its revelation. They argue that the Qur’an is nothing more than a conjecture about the unseen or a form of soothing and divination and that it derives its characteristics from the thoughts, style, and culture of its compilers and scribes.

The books of the Old Testament, or the *Tanakh*, comprising the Torah, Prophets, and historical books, are attributed to Ezra in the sixth century BCE. Similarly, the Qur’an, according to their view, is shaped by its compiler and scribe. If we compare what Ezra wrote with what was compiled and written in the Qur’an, we indeed find similarities in the recording and the setting of the text. The Old Testament was memorised, just like the Qur’an was, then recorded over nine centuries, and finalised over six centuries. The main point is that the characteristics of spoken text (recitation or chant) differ from those of written text.

At this level of discussion, Orientalists, in their translation of the Qur’an from Syriac into Arabic, employed a set of religious terms of Syriac origin, such as:

Dīn (دين), *āyah* (آية), *nafs* (النفس), *rūḥ* (الروح), *tūbā* (طوبى). While Mingana counts these words as nineteen, he notes that their roots are fixed in the Syriac language, and in fact, many do not exist there at all but were borrowed from Arabic. Thus, he inadvertently refutes his thesis when he states:

“From the point of view of the etymology of words, it is always difficult to be certain whether the Arabic word in question was taken from Syriac... and is actually original to Arabic, as there are thousands of lexicographical parallels in all Semitic languages.”

Even though Christoph Luxenberg, the originator of this claim, asserts all of this without any confrontation or debate with Muslim scholars, François de Blois maintains that Luxenberg did not even make the effort to learn the basics of

the Syriac language, for had he done so, he would not have reached such opinions regarding the language of the Qur'an.

Conclusion:

The Noble Qur'an is a clear Arabic text; it does not derive its vocabulary from any other language, nor does it employ synchronic studies as claimed by the priests of Orientalism. It is, quite simply, a divine book, a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. All revealed scriptures descended in the tongue of their prophets' peoples: the Torah was written in pure Hebrew, and there are Aramaic texts of the Gospels other than the Gospels we know, which are written in the vernacular Greek known as *Koinè*, not classical Greek, and which carry the culture of the Canaanite Levant.

Revelation is the truth that guides humankind on this earth; it is therefore necessary to read, interpret, and translate the Qur'anic text to produce a collective awareness of which sciences may be built. Doubting the authenticity of the compilation of the Muṣḥaf does not negate the reasons for revelation, either before or after, nor does it necessitate an epistemological rupture leading to the abandonment of translation, a fundamental principle of the Islamic intellect in the study of all sciences. The West believes that we are incapable of mastering such sciences, promoting myths such as the translation of the Qur'an from Syriac into Arabic. For this reason, terminological and semantic studies serve as an entryway to clarify the true nature of the term. Among the subtle points revealed by such a lexicographical study is the determination of the meaning from which the term was created.

For refuting the ignorant, whether intentionally or unintentionally, their approach to translating the Qur'an resembles the method of translating the Qur'an into modern languages today. For example, the Qur'an translated into French is a Qur'an in French, and this language, which is foreign to Arabs and Arabic, carries within it an Arab culture that is more than fourteen centuries old, with no connection between this French Qur'anic text and French culture.

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