

# Interpreting and Rendering of Qur'anic Verses in Conformity with Convention and Tradition

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## Abstract

In this article, the role of convention and tradition in the interpretation and rendering of Qur'anic verses are discussed. An overview is given of the reciprocal relationship between Muslim theology and that which is usually referred to as the "Sciences of the Qur'an". Selected examples of the rendering of specific Qur'anic verses are analysed, illustrating the influence (or presumed influence) of classical interpretative sources and convention on the translation of the meanings of the Qur'an.

**Keywords:** Qur'an; Koran; tafsir; Qur'anic exegesis; Qur'an translation

## Introduction

Saudi Sadiq (2008) has identified instances in which culture needs to be considered in Arabic translation in general and in Qur'anic translation specifically. He has, however, limited himself to words he considers idioms, proverbs, and culture-bound words. Culture-bound words are those words that are deeply rooted in a given culture. Our study shows that culture and tradition have implications beyond the identification of specific words as linked to culture or tradition. Lyons (1981, 325) explains that there are certain aspects of the interdependence of language and culture which are not as widely appreciated as they ought to be. One of these, he states, is the degree to which cultural diffusion reduces, and at other times conceals, semantic differences between languages. André Lefevere (1992, 9) states:

Translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and ... it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of the culture of origin.

Venuti (1995, 18) sees the aim of translation as:

To bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, where translation serves an appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, and political.

Newmark (1998) states that culture specific items are those which the readership is unlikely to understand and the translation strategies for this kind of concept depend on 1) the particular text-type, 2) requirement of the readership and 3) client and importance of the cultural word in the text.

## Application

### Orientation

This study scrutinises the rendering of three different Qur'anic verses in five English translations by Muslim scholars, paying special attention to the ways the respective renderings of the chosen verses reflect traditional interpretations and existing conventions.

The three Qur'anic verses (3:7, 24:31 and 93:7) are representative of different contexts, namely the taxonomy of Qur'anic verses (3:7), women's dress code (24:31), and biographical aspects of the Prophet's life (93:7). A feature shared by the verses is an expression in each that leaves room for divergent interpretative endeavours.

An interplay is thus assumed between the specific verses, traditional interpretations, and choices exercised by the respective translators. The objective is to identify individual and common elements in the five renderings.

The methodological approach applied is to investigate the Qur'anic environment of a verse, then existing traditional interpretations, and finally their utilisation by the five translators operating within their different cultural milieus.

### Q. 3:7

Surah 3:7 consists of an introductory statement (7a) referring to Allah as the revealer of '*al-kitāb(a)*' ("the Scripture"/"Book")

It is He (*huwa*) who (*'alladī*) sent down (*'anzala*) to you (*'alai-ka*), [O Muhammad], the Book (*'al-kitāba*);

This statement (7a) is followed by a characterisation of the contents of '*al-kitāb(a)*' ("the Scripture"/"Book") in terms of the nature of its '*āyāt(un)*' ("verses"/"signs"). Reference is made to two seemingly opposing kinds of '*āyāt(un)*' ("verses"/"signs"), respectively typified as *muḥkamāt(un)* (7b) and *mutashābihāt(un)* (7d).

The former (*muḥkamāt(un)*) is typified in (7c) as “the foundation (‘substance’ or ‘cornerstone’; *’umm(u)*) of the Book (or ‘Scripture’; *’al-kitāb(i)*).”

The nature of the latter kind (*mutashābihāt(un)*) of *’āyāt(un)* (“verses”/“signs”) is not specifically elaborated upon, although allusion is made (7h) to the difficulty in interpreting them:

And no one (*wa-mā*) knows (*ya ’lam(u)*) its [true] interpretation (*ta ’wīla-hu*) except (*’illā*) Allāh (*’Allāh(u)*).

According to the Qur’an, these *mutashābihāt(un)* elicit divergent responses both negative (7e-g) and positive (7i-k), depending on the predisposition of the people concerned. They are respectively “those (*’alladīna*) in whose hearts (*fī qulūbi-him*) is deviation (*zaigh(un)*) [from truth]” (7e), as opposed to (7i) “those firm (*wa-’al-rasikūn(a)*) in (*fī*) knowledge (*’al-’ilm(i)*).”

Those responding negatively choose to be guided by the *mutashābihāt(un)* (7f),

they will follow (*fa-yattabi ’ūn(a)*) that of which is unspecific (*mā tashābaha min-hu*).

They use these *mutashābihāt(un)* to create disharmony within the community, interpreting them using their own discretion (7g),

seeking (*’ibtighā’a*) discord (*’al-fitnat(i)*) and [seeking] an interpretation (*ta ’wīli-h(i)*) [suitable to them].

The alternative and commendable approach to the said *mutashābihāt(un)* is exhibited by those who are erudite and steadfast in their acceptance of religious knowledge. Their typical response (7j and k) is to say,

We believe (*’āmannā*) in it (*bi-hi*).

All (*kullun*) [of it] is from (*min ’inda*) our Lord (*rabbī-nā*).

A close inspection of the quoted positive and negative attitude towards *mutashābihāt(un)* leads to the observation that they differ, but that they are not exactly comparable on surface level.

Those with an undesirable attitude, by implication, also believe in the *mutashābihāt(un)* (cf. 7j) and accept them as being of divine origin (cf. 7k). Those with the exemplary attitude would, in turn, also need to give account of the interpretation and application of the *mutashābihāt(un)*.

Comparing the different dispositions towards *mutashābihāt(un)*, one may surmise that divergent dispositions towards *mutashābihāt(un)*, as stated above, represent responses to different kinds of *mutashābihāt(un)*. It may furthermore be conjectured that the

classification of verses as *mutashābihāt(un)* may also depend upon the hermeneutic situation.

Nasr (2015) quotes a tradition by al-Tabari who mentions—as occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzul*) of Q. 3:7—a circumstance in which the Prophet Muhammad was confronted by Christians regarding the interpretation of Q. 4:171:

The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was [but] a messenger of Allah (*rasūlu 'Allāh(i)*) and (*wa-*) His word (*-kalimatu-hu*) [which] he directed it (*'al-qā-hā*) to Mary and (*wa-*) a soul (or 'spirit'; *-rūḥ(un)*) from Him (*min-hu*).

According to tradition (as summarised by Nasr 2015) the Christians asked the Prophet, “Do you not say that he [Jesus] is the Word of God and a Spirit from Him?” The Prophet agreed, whereupon the Christians responded, “That suffices us.” However, at this moment the part of the verse discussed above (cf. 7b and d) was revealed, the connection being that “Spirit” and “Word” are *mutashābih* rather than *muḥkam*.

Taken at face value, Q. 4:171 is prone to misinterpretations and misuse as alluded to in Q. 3:7f-g. However, classifying Q. 4:171 within the *mutashābihāt(un)* category would relativise a key text in the Qur'an relating the relationship of Jesus to Allah. Q. 4:171 asserts the conviction that Jesus was but a messenger of Allah (*rasūlu 'Allāhi*). In Q. 4:171 the Prophet Muhammad responds to central claims regarding Jesus featuring in mainline Christian communities (cf. Griffith 2013, 28). However, rather than relating theological concepts such as “word” (cf. John 1:1) and “spirit” (cf. Mark 1:10) to the doctrinal views regarding the presumed divinity of Jesus, an alternative conviction is expressed. Q. 4:171 states that Jesus was only a “messenger of Allah” (*rasūlu 'Allāh(i)*) and that “word” (*kalimatu*) and “spirit” associated with him are from Allah.

Thus, the categorisation of the *mutashābihāt(un)* eludes categorical classifications.

Another line of thought evident in traditional interpretations is to focus on both *muḥkamāt(un)* and *mutashābihāt(un)*, viewing them as polar opposites and seeking appropriate examples within the interpretative tradition of the Qur'an. Nasr (2015, 130) mentions eight instances identified by scholars. These include “perennial moral commandments ... as opposed to the variable specifics of those commandments”; “that which deals with the licit and forbidden (*ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*), as opposed to that which addresses other matters”; and the “opening chapters of the Qur'an ... as opposed to the remainder of the text.” Nasr (2015, 130) suggests that one should think of the *muḥkam* “as unambiguous or univocal, and the *mutashābih* as multivalent and equivocal ... being open to levels of meaning.” As example of the *mutashābih* category, Q. 48:10 is quoted, where those who pledge alliance (*yubāyi 'ūna*) to Allah are promised, “The Hand of God [*yadu 'Allāh(i)*] is over their hands.” Nasr (2015) argues that the “Hand of God could not be purely identical to a human hand or any other material hand.” In this regard Ṣaḥīḥ International (1997, 4) explains that one should not even attempt to explain how a certain quality related to Divinity (such as Hand of God) could be. In terms of this

reasoning what is thus presumed is an unquestioning belief (cf. 3:7j) of that which is deemed to have been revealed by Allah (cf. 3:7k).

This leads to the question how the concepts *muḥkamāt(un)* and *mutashābihāt(un)* are rendered by English versions of the Qur'an. Meanings proposed for Q. 3:7b, mentioning *muḥkamāt(un)*, are as follows:

7b in it (*min-hu*) are verses (*'āyātun*) that are precise (*muḥkamātun*) (Şaḥīḥ International 1997)

7b In it are verses that are entirely clear (Al-Hilālī and Khān 1993)

7b wherein are clear revelations (Pickthall 1930)

7b Some of its verses are definite in meaning (Abdel Haleem 2004)

7b therein are signs determined (Nasr 2015)

Juxtaposed to these meanings (cf. 7b) are the translations' suggested renderings for Q. 3:7d, referring to *mutashābihāt(un)*:

7d and others (*wa- 'uḳaru*) unspecific (*mutashābihāt(un)*) (Şaḥīḥ International 1997)

7d and others are not entirely clear (Al-Hilālī and Khān 1993)

7d and the others (which are) allegorical (Pickthall 1930)

7d –and others are ambiguous (Abdel Haleem 2004)

7d and others symbolic (Nasr 2015)

Contrast between verses containing the individual terms *muḥkamāt(un)* and *mutashābihāt(un)* is expressed by the respective translations as follows:

precise ... unspecific (Şaḥīḥ International 1997)

entirely clear ... not entirely clear (Al-Hilālī and Khān 1993)

clear ... allegorical (Pickthall 1930)

definite in meaning ... ambiguous (Abdel Haleem 2004)

determined ... symbolic (Nasr 2015)

Şaḥīḥ International (1997) and Al-Hilālī and Khān (1993) define *mutashābihāt(un)* as being the opposite of *muḥkamāt(un)* using the negations “un-” and “not”. Their

renderings of *muḥkamāt(un)* and *mutashābihāt(un)* thus attempt to be inclusive of the whole scope of traditional interpretations of the two terms.

The translation equivalent “ambiguous” (Abdel Haleem; cf. *mutashābihāt(un)*) as opposed to “definite in meaning” (cf. *muḥkamāt(un)*) reflects the perspective that *mutashābihāt(un)* may be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the context in which they are used.

Pickthall (1930), “clear ... allegorical,” and Nasr (2015), “determined ... symbolic,” are more specific in their rendering of *mutashābihāt(un)* (versus *muḥkamāt(un)*), but their interpretations are only applicable to a limited number of environments traditionally associated with the two terms.

Related to a particular expression, “allegorical” (cf. allegory) may refer to “a second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visible meaning” (Baldick 2015, 8). Subcategories are “personification” and “metaphor”.

The rendering *mutashābihāt(un)* as “symbolic” by Nasr (2015) is closely related to the previous translation equivalent, “allegorical”. However, the subcategory “metaphor” is usually not associated with the literary classification “symbolic”. The argument is that a symbol’s application “is left open as an unstated suggestion.”

Theoretically viewed, “symbolic” could thus be utilised to characterise the use of *mutashābihāt(un)* in a wider range of contexts than to which the term “allegorical” may be applied.

### **Q. 24:31**

In Surah (Chapter) 3:7 the focus was on the interplay with tradition in the interpretation and translation of two contrasting terms related to the taxonomy of Qur’anic verses. In Q. 24:31 attention will be given to the influence of culture and tradition in applying Qur’anic injunctions regarding women’s dress code.

Surah 24 deals with various aspects including legal and social questions, for example, prescribed rules of etiquette when visiting one another’s homes (Q. 24:27–29). This is followed by admonitions to men (Q. 24:30) and particularly women (Q. 24:31) about the proper demeanour in their behaviour towards one another, and the covering of their bodies.

In Q. 24:31 elaborate attention is given to women’s prescribed conduct and the appropriate way in which they should dress, and to whom they may expose (*yubdīna*) their *zīna* (literally “adornment”). For the purpose of this paper, however, the introductory part of Q. 24:31 will be given detailed consideration.

Ṣaḥīḥ International (1997) translates the first part of Surah 24:31 as follows:

- 31a And tell (*wa-qul*) the believing women (*lil-mu'mināti*) to reduce (*yaghḍuḍna*) [some] of their vision (*min 'absāri-hinna*)  
31b and guard (*wa-yahfazna*) their private parts (*furūja-hunna*)  
31c and not (*wa-lā*) expose (*yubḍīna*) their adornment (*zīnata-hunna*) except (*'illā*) that which (*mā*) [necessarily] appears (*zahara*) thereof (*min-hā*)

Q. 24:31 provides advice to “believing women” regarding the directing of their eyes (31a), the covering of their private parts (31b), and the exposure of “their adornment” (*zīnata-hunna*).

The injunction (Q. 24:31a) to women “to reduce (*yaghḍuḍna*) [some] of their vision (*min 'absāri-hinna*)” is an idiomatic expression which may be paraphrased as exacting them “to lower their gaze” (cf. Al-Hilālī and Khān 1993, and Pickthall 1930), “their glances” (Abdel Haleem 2004), or “their eyes” (Nasr 2015). This order may imply averting eye contact with strangers. However, the traditional interpretation is to explain the statement as a prohibition “from looking at forbidden things” (Al-Hilālī and Khān 1993), or positively formulated, “Looking only at that which is lawful” (Ṣaḥīḥ International 1997).

The second instruction (Q. 24:31b) to believing women, to “guard (*wa-yahfazna*) their private parts (*furūja-hunna*)”, literally translated, exacts from them the obligation to cover their pudenda. The injunction may have sounded too crude to Pickthall (1930), living in the Victorian era in England. He thus renders Q. 24:31 in a euphemistic way as “and be modest.” However, tradition also extends the scope of the injunction as literally understood, inferring from it the instruction to “protect their private parts from illegal sexual acts, etc.” (Al-Hilālī and Khān, 1993).

The third requirement (Q. 24:31c) that “believing women” are expected to comply with is formulated by means of a prohibition and an exception. The prohibition is “not (*-lā*) to expose (*yubḍīna*) their adornment (*zīnata-hunna*).” The exception is “that which (*mā*) [necessarily] appears (*zahara*) thereof (*min-hā*).”

Both the prohibition and exception refer to *zīna* and demand that a wider scope of meaning be associated with them. According to Ṣaḥīḥ International (1997), *zīna*, referred to in the prohibition clause, should be interpreted to include “both natural beauty, such as hair and body shape, and that which a woman beautifies herself of clothing, jewellery etc.”

More problematic is the manner in which the exceptive clause, *mā zahara min-hā*, should be understood.

Amina Wadud (1992, 10), articulating modern feminist tradition, translates Q. 24:31c in accordance with Yusuf Ali (1938) as “what [must ordinarily appear thereof.” She

then postulates the interpretative principle that “there are culturally determined guidelines for modesty.” Her point of view is that divergent rules to give expression to “modesty” could legitimately be applied in different cultures.

Orthodox interpretation, however, maintain that Q. 24:31 restricts women’s dress rather than paving the way for liberal understandings. According to Ṣaḥīḥ International (1997), Q. 24:31 refers to “the outer garments or whatever might appear out of necessity, such as part of the face or the hands.” Al-Hilālī and Khān (1993) render Q. 24:31 in an amplified way as “except only that which is apparent (like the palms of the hands or one eye or both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, etc.).”

The explications of Ṣaḥīḥ International (1997) and Al-Hilālī and Khān (1993) reflect the general tenor of Q. 24:31, but nevertheless interpret a seemingly open-ended exception in harmony with both traditional sources and contemporary local customs in conservative communities.

### **Q. 93:7**

The two verses thus far discussed paid attention to the role of tradition in Qur’anic interpretation (Q. 3:7), and rules applying to women’s dress code (Q. 24:31). Q. 93:7 and adjacent verses relates to the understanding of statements pertaining to the Prophet Muhammad. The main theme of Surah 93 is the consolation of the Prophet (cf. Nasr 2015). Verses 6 to 8, in particular, remind him of God’s favour towards him.

Ṣaḥīḥ International (1997) translates

- <sup>6a</sup> Did He not find you (*'a-lam yajid-ka*) an orphan (*yaṭīman*)
- <sup>6b</sup> and give [you] refuge (*fa-'awā*)?
- <sup>7a</sup> And He found (*wa-wajada-ka*) you lost (*ḍāllan*)
- <sup>7b</sup> and guided [you] (*fa-hadā*).
- <sup>8a</sup> And He found you (*wa-wajada-ka*) poor
- <sup>8b</sup> and made [you] self-sufficient (*fa-'aḡhnā*).

The first part (6a, 7a and 8a) of each of the three verses consists of the description of unfavourable circumstances that the Prophet experienced, followed by a reference to their amelioration (6b, 7b and 8b). In all three verses God (Allah) is the subject of the “a” and “b” clauses. The Prophet is reminded that it is God who had “found” him in a certain condition, and it is likewise through divine intervention that the said state of affairs was improved.

Together the three verses provide, in fact, a short biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet. Three consecutive stages of his life are depicted, commencing with his childhood. The Prophet was “an orphan” (6a), “lost” (7a) and “poor” (8a) but was eventually given “refuge” (6b), “guided” (7b) and made “self-sufficient” (or “rich”).



The contents of the first (93:6) and third (93:8) verses are relatively clear, but verse 7 has been divergently interpreted within exegetical tradition. The immediate image evoked is that of a person who had lost his way, and was then directed, cf. Ṣaḥīḥ International (1997):

<sup>7a</sup> And He found (*wa-wajada-ka*) you lost (*dāllan*)

<sup>7b</sup> and guided [you] (*fa-hadā*).

A scrutiny of other Qur’anic verses, however, leads to the observation that “lost” is predominantly used in a metaphorical sense, e.g., Q. 2:108

And whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has certainly strayed (*dālla*) from the soundness of the way.

Similarly, *hadā* usually has the meaning of providing spiritual guidance, e.g., Q. 2:213:

And Allah guided (*fa-hadā*) those who believe to the truth concerning that over which they have differed (*‘iktalafū*) by His permission (*bi- ‘idhni-hi*).

In addition to a literal understanding, Nasr (2015, 1528) mentions the following interpretative choices exercised by commentators:

1. Muhammad had been astray and God guided him to belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) and the reality of prophethood (*nubuwwah*), cf. Q. 12:3:

We recount to you, [O Muhammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you this Qur’an although you were, before it, among the unaware (or “heedless”; *ghāfilīna*)

2. The Prophet had strayed in the sense that he did not follow a revealed law or rite (*sharī ‘ah*), as none was known to his people, but not that he had strayed from the belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*).

3. Although the Prophet had believed in the Oneness of God, he had no scripture and no direct guidance until the Qur’an was revealed, cf. Q. 42:52:

And thus We have revealed to you a Spirit (*rūḥ(an)*) of Our command. You did not know what is the Book (or “the scripture”; *‘al-kitāb(u)*), nor faith. But We made it a light whereby We guide (*nahdī*) whoever We will (*nashā ‘u*) among our servants

The first interpretative option represents the most extreme theological position, implying that (prior to revelation) the Prophet was absolutely ignorant of the central issue of monotheism. The second and third options are more or less identical, assuming that the Prophet was a believer but initially without the set of theological directives furnished by Qur’anic revelation.

The five chosen translations render the second (“b” part) of Q. 93:7 almost identically, explaining *hadā* in a semantically neutral way as “guide[d]” or “direct [you]” (Pickthall 1930), i.e., show the way.

Interpretations of the first part (*wa-wajada-ka dāllan*) of Q. 93:7 by the five translations are as follows:

<sup>7a</sup> And He found (*wa-wajada-ka*) you lost (*dāllan*) (Ṣaḥīḥ International 1997)

<sup>7a</sup> And He found you unaware (of the Qur’an, its legal laws, and Prophethood etc.) (Al-Hilālī and Khān 1993)

<sup>7a</sup> Did He not find thee wandering (Pickthall 1930)

<sup>7a</sup> Did He not find you lost (Abdel Haleem 2004)

7a find thee astray (Nasr 2015)

The five translations agree (although they differ syntactically) in their rendering of *wa-wajada-ka* (“and He found you”).

Four of them also provide related English equivalents for *dāllan*, namely “lost” (Ṣaḥīḥ International 1997; Abdel Haleem 2004), “wandering” (Pickthall 1930) and “astray” (Nasr 2015). By doing so the Qur’anic expression is rendered in a literal way. No elucidation in the target language (English) is thus given of any figurative or metaphorical connotation of Q. 93:7a. However, the allusion is clearly to a state of being still devoid of revelation elaborated in the Qur’an.

An alternative interpretation is, however, suggested in the English version of Q. 93:7a by Al-Hilālī and Khān (1993). They translate the clause in an amplified way as

And He found you unaware (of the Qur’an, its legal laws, and Prophethood etc.).

Recognition is thus given to the validity of traditional interpretative options two and three mentioned by Nasr (2015).

The more radical interpretative option, number one mentioned above, is not utilised in any of the five chosen translations of Q. 93:7a. The four translations that provide a literal rendering of *wa-wajada-ka dāllan* (Q. 93:7a) of course leave open to the agency of the reader the possibility of assuming the initial absence of belief in monotheism by the Prophet. However, respect for the Prophet within Muslim circles would make conservative commentators cautious to overtly express this interpretative choice in their explication or translation of Q. 93:7a. The German scholar Rudi Paret (1962, 512), on the other hand, is less hesitant to avail himself of the use of the said interpretative option (number one). In his *Übersetzung* of Q. 93:7 he translates

(7a) [Hat er nicht] dich auf dem Irrweg gefunden (7b) und rechtgeleitet?  
(7a) [Did He not] find you on the wrong way (7b) and guide you in the correct direction?

In his commentary, Paret (1971, 513) motivates this rendering of Q. 93:7 by referring to observations regarding Q. 93:6–8 made by Richard Bell (1937–39) in his Qur'an translation (1939, vol. 2, 663):

There seems to be no reason why these statements should be taken in any other than the literal sense, viz. that Muhammad has been an orphan, has at one time followed a false religion, and had been relieved of poverty

Implicit in Bell's argument is that the three verses postulate extreme positions (or conditions) at consecutive stages of the Prophet's life from which he was relieved through divine intervention.

Summarising the discussion, it could be said that Q. 93:7 reminds the Prophet of grace bestowed upon him. God (Allah) is referred to in the third person (He), and Muhammad is addressed in the second person. The Prophet thus reminds himself or uses stylistically an unidentified spokesperson. Focus is on three phases of his life that were drastically changed in a positive way. Human involvement is not mentioned. What had happened to him is characterised as being the result of divine action. Statements are formulated in a general way but are relatively clear. However, Q. 93:7 is expressed by way of an image that invites a range of interpretations. A scope of possible explanations was identified and suggested within Qur'anic tradition. Some, but not all of them, have been utilised in the five chosen translations. The option of initial total ignorance by Muhammad was found only to have been bluntly expressed in Western sources.

A drastic interpretation of Q. 93:7a would bring into question cardinal theological viewpoints regarding the Prophet of Islam and conveyor of revelation believed to be divinely inspired. The verse can thus rightly be categorised among the *mutashābihāt* elucidated in the discussion of Q. 3:7. Seen from an exegetical angle the verse (especially Q. 93:7a) is multivalent (cf. Nasr 2015), paving the way for divergent interpretations. It could potentially be misused by religiously ill-minded people "seeking (*'ibtighā'a*) discord (*'al-fitnati*) and [seeking] an interpretation (*ta'wīli-hi*) [suitable to them]" (Q. 3:7g). Rendering the verse literally (as usually preferred by translations) is an obvious solution. The motivation would be, as in the case of *mutashābihāt(un)*, not to articulate a specific choice, contending, "And no one (*wa-mā*) knows (*ya'lamu*) its [true] interpretation (*ta'wīla-hu*) except (*'illā*) Allāh (*'Allāhu*)" (Q. 3:7h). However, the question remains whether a surmised interpretation based upon an analysis of Qur'anic context should prevail, or one in accordance with fixed beliefs prevalent within conservative theological circles.

## Reflection

The analysis and discussion of the above Qur'anic verses as rendered by five translators has clearly demonstrated an awareness and eclectic use of conventional Muslim interpretative convention. Cultural influences exerted by local customs have also come to the fore.

In the case of Q. 3:7, a specific categorisation of verses was translated in general and focused ways. In Q. 24:31, prevailing contemporary customs were deemed to be in harmony with those prevailing in the Prophetic era. In Q. 93:7, the general choice exercised was to retain in the target text a vague reference to an episode in the Prophet's life rather than expressing in a pronounced way its meaning suggested by Qur'anic context.

Broadly speaking, one may venture to state that the undertone discernible in all the translations is an attitude of preservation of that deemed to be precious. In Q. 3:7, the sanctity of the Qur'an is defended; in 24:31, conservative, commonly agreed on views as regards women's dress code are safeguarded; in 93:7, respect and high regard for the Prophet is seen as *leitmotiv* for the interpretation of relevant Qur'anic verses.

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