

# TRANSLATING THE QUR'AN IN AN AGE OF NATIONALISM

Over the course of the past two centuries, the central text of Islam has undergone twin revolutions. Around the globe, Muslim communities have embraced the printing and translating of the Qur'an, transforming the scribal text into a modern book that can be read in virtually any language.

What began with the sparse and often contentious publication of vernacular commentaries and translations in the Ottoman Empire and South Asia evolved, by the late twentieth century, into widespread Qur'anic translation and publishing efforts in all quarters of the Muslim world, including Arabic-speaking countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This is remarkable given that at the dawn of the twentieth century many Muslims considered Qur'an translations to be impossible, impermissible and even impious. Nevertheless, printed and translated versions of the Qur'an have gained widespread acceptance by Muslim communities, and now play a central, and in some quarters, a leading role in how the Qur'an is read and understood in the modern world.

Focusing on the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, and following the debates to Russia, Egypt, Indonesia and India, this book addresses the question of how this revolution in Qur'anic book culture occurred, considering both intellectual history as well the processes by which the Qur'an became a modern book that could be mechanically reproduced and widely owned.

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Translating the Qur'an in an  
Age of Nationalism  
Print Culture and Modern Islam  
in Turkey

BY

**M. Brett Wilson**

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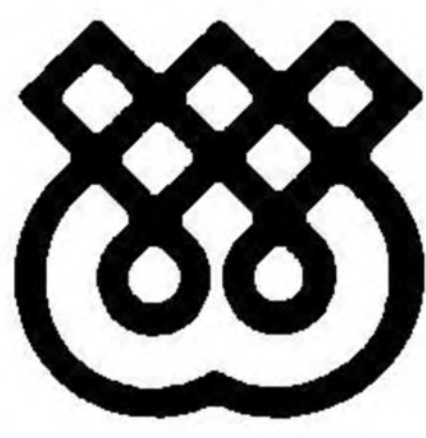
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Kara-Keui (Galata) bridge, Constantinople, Turkey, *circa* 1890–1900.  
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## The Institute of Ismaili Studies

THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES was established in 1977 with the objectives of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in historical as well as contemporary contexts, and fostering better understanding of Islam's relationship with other societies and faiths.

The Institute's programmes encourage a perspective which is not confined to the theological and religious heritage of Islam, but seeks to explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. The programmes thus *encourage* an interdisciplinary approach to Islamic history and thought. Particular attention is given to the issues of modernity that arise as Muslims seek to relate their heritage to the contemporary situation.

Within the Islamic tradition, the Institute promotes research on those areas which have, to date, received relatively little attention from scholars. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Shi'ism in general and Ismailism in particular.

The Institute's objectives are realised through concrete programmes and activities organised by various departments of the Institute, at times in collaboration with other institutions of learning. These programmes and activities are informed by the full range of cultures in which Islam is practised today. From the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and Africa to the industrialised societies in the West, they consider the variety of contexts which shape the ideals, beliefs and practices of the faith.

In facilitating the *Qur'anic Studies Series* and other publications, the Institute's sole purpose is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues, which often leads to diverse views and interpretations. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, the opinions expressed in these publications must be understood as belonging to their authors alone.

## **QUR'ANIC STUDIES SERIES**

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THE QUR'AN has been an inexhaustible source of intellectual and spiritual reflection in Islamic history, giving rise to ever-proliferating commentaries and interpretations. Many of these have remained a realm for specialists due to their scholarly demands. Others, more widely read, remain untranslated from the primary language of their composition. This series aims to make some of these materials from a broad chronological range – the formative centuries of Islam to the present day – available to a wider readership through translation and publication in English, accompanied where necessary by introductory or explanatory materials. The series will also include contextual-analytical and survey studies of these primary materials.

Throughout this series and others like it which may appear in the future, the aim is to allow the materials to speak for themselves. Not surprisingly, in the Muslim world where its scriptural sources continue to command passionate interest and commitment, the Qur'an has been subject to contending, often antithetical ideas and interpretations. The series takes no sides in these debates. The aim rather is to place on the record the rich diversity and plurality of approaches and opinions which have appealed to the Qur'an throughout history (and even more so today). The breadth of this range, however partisan or controversial individual presentations within it may be, is instructive in itself. While there is always room in such matters for personal preferences, commitment to particular traditions of belief, and scholarly evaluations, much is to be gained by a simple appreciation, not always evident today, of the enormous wealth of intellectual effort that has been devoted to the Qur'an from the earliest times. It is hoped that through this objective, this series will prove of use to scholars and students in Qur'anic Studies as well as other allied and relevant fields.

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For my parents,  
Elizabeth S. and Michael W. Wilson

# Note on Transliteration, Conventions and Abbreviations

ARABIC TRANSLITERATIONS follow a modified system based on the standard of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Names, terms and toponyms from non-Latin alphabets are transliterated unless common to English. The genealogical sequence Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, etc., is abbreviated with 'b.' for ibn (son) and 'bt.' for bint (daughter); the definite article on the *nisba* and the *laqab* is generally dropped after its first appearance, that is, from 'al-Khargūshī' to 'Khargūshī' or 'al-Jāḥiẓ' to 'Jāḥiẓ', and so forth. Definite articles, however, are by and large maintained for formal titles, that is, al-Ḥakīm. For Ottoman Turkish-language texts and names, the spelling conventions of modern Turkish have been used, but this is not a settled matter given that rapid changes in the Turkish language over the course of the twentieth century and the reintroduction of many Arabic and Persian terms have resulted in diverse methods of spelling. They have been transliterated here in a way that reflects widespread contemporary usage and there is minimal use of diacritical markings (e.g. â, î), since their use varies widely and also makes the text ungainly. Turkish-language works with Arabic titles are translated according to Turkish conventions. In regard to names, square brackets are used for two purposes. There were no surnames in Turkey until 1934, so when brackets are applied to a surname only, they indicate that the surname was not on pre-1934 publications, e.g. Eşref Edip [Fergan]. When square brackets are put around an entire name, they indicate that the article or book was published anonymously but that the name of the author became clear later, e.g. [Mehmet Akif].

## Dates

Three different dating systems were in use during the late Ottoman period and the early Turkish Republican period: the Islamic lunar calendar (*hijri*), the Ottoman Fiscal calendar (*Rumi*) and the

Gregorian calendar. For materials with *hijri* or *Rumi* dates, the *hijri* or *Rumi* dates are listed first, followed by the Gregorian year, e.g. 1301/1884. In cases where the Gregorian year is unclear due to the lack of a precise *hijri* or *Rumi* date, both possible years are provided, e.g. 1302/1884–5. Archival documents with full dates are given in a day–month–year format, with the *hijri* or *Rumi* date first, followed by the Gregorian date, e.g. 28 Şubat 1313/12 March 1898. The format of the dating of archival material follows that found in the Ottoman Archives, so that only the initial or, alternatively, the final letter of the name of the month is provided, and this date is separated from the Gregorian date by a dash instead of a forward slash, e.g. 5 C 1323—7 August 1905. In some cases, documents or books have only the Gregorian date; if not noted otherwise, the dates in the text are Gregorian.

Translations of the Qur'an have been taken from Arthur J. Arberry *The Koran Interpreted* (1955), unless otherwise noted.

### **Abbreviations**

<i>BOA</i>	<i>Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an</i> , ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Leiden, Brill, 2001–6.
<i>EI</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed. M. Th. Houtsma <i>et al.</i> Leiden, Brill, 1913–38.
<i>EI<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed. P. Bearman <i>et al.</i> , 2nd edition. Leiden, Brill, 1960–2009.
<i>EI THREE</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed., Kate Fleet <i>et al.</i> , 3rd edition. Leiden, Brill, 2007–
<i>TDVİA</i>	<i>Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi (Türk Diyanet Vakfı)</i> .

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ON A RECENT FLIGHT TO ISTANBUL, I ran into a former professor of mine who had been influential in sparking my interest in Turkish and Islamic studies. When I told him that his classes had inspired me to pursue these fields as a profession, he responded with a smile, 'Don't blame me.' From my days as an undergraduate exchange student in Turkey to my recent years as a faculty member, I have had the good fortune of being surrounded by exceptional people whose insight, generosity and humour have ushered me through the labyrinth of scholarly life; and, far from blaming them, as my professor joked, I would like to spill some ink here in gratitude for the variety of ways in which they and others have supported me and made this book possible.

A variety of Sufi teachings warn about the perils of pursuing 'the path' without a guide to lead the way, and the same warning could be applied to a scholarly career. Not one but a host of mentor-guides have steered me along the thin and narrow. Since my first days of graduate school, Bruce Lawrence and Ebrahim Moosa have been generous mentors, providing constant encouragement and invaluable guidance. I was fortunate to have Anne Blackburn, Carl Ernst, Erdağ Göknar, Charles Kurzman, Ken Perkins and Kevin Reinhart as guides as well, all of whom played important roles in shaping my scholarly career. My long-time advisor and friend Anne Blackburn lent me her brilliance yet again and read the entire manuscript, providing insightful feedback, as did Adeeb Khalid. Both are due special thanks. The two anonymous reviewers who recommended this work for publication provided invaluable comments and suggestions. Irvin Cemil Schick kindly shared his knowledge of calligraphy and print history as well as his good company. Over the years, Tony Greenwood has been a kind host at the American Research Institute in Istanbul, which is in many ways my scholarly home away from home. Additionally, he assisted with the translation of some difficult passages.

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