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Challenging the Cairo Edition

The King Fahd Quran Complex, its Medina Quran and its Translations

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Arguably, the "Cairo Quran" (i.e., the Quran text printed in Giza in 1924 and conventionally called, with reference either to its presumed patron, scholarly milieu or place of production, the "King Fuʾād Quran" or the "al-Azhar Quran"/"Cairo Quran", respectively) has been commonly regarded as an extremely influential edition, if not even as unrivalled for almost a century, by much of the existing scholarship on the printed Quran. Apart from the fact that this conventional view of the influence of the edition as well as the different labels ascribed to it have been strongly critiqued by Schmitt,[1] it has been largely overlooked that the position and status of the "Cairo Quran" has been challenged in recent decades by the far-reaching publishing ventures of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Glorious Quran (*Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibāʿat al-Muṣḥaf al-Šarīf*, henceforth KFQC) and its "Medina Quran". As Brett Wilson has noted, the KFQC has so far received comparably little scholarly attention, although its activities "are rather significant for the current state of translations and the modern shape of the Qurʾān in general".[2]

* I would like to thank Arno Schmitt for his comments to an earlier version of this contribution.

1. See Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 4 sqq.; "Der 1924er, Gizeh".

2. Wilson, "Translations of the Qurʾan", p. 561. Early exceptions are Wild, "The Qurʾan Today", pp. 435–437; "Muslim Translators", pp. 166–167.

It goes without saying that, despite the acknowledged divergences between early *maṣāḥif* as well as between the various readings (*qirāʾāt*) of the text, there is—from a certain perspective—just one Quran and therefore, strictly speaking, no such thing as a distinctive Cairo or Medina Quran. For this reason, both labels have initially been put in quotation marks. Moreover, what is described in the following as the "Medina Quran" is clearly modelled to an important degree on its Cairene precursor. It is, however, a well-established academic practice to refer to the 1924 edition as the "Cairo Quran".[3] At least the second edition of 1952 is at times also simply described as such (i.e., *Muṣḥaf al-Qāhira*) by Arabic Quranic scholars.[4] More explicitly, the founding decree of the KFQC clearly stipulated that its future publications should be officially called *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya* (Quran copy of the Prophet's city, i.e., Medina). In addition, my own anthropological research has shown that the editions published by the KFQC are frequently described plainly as Medina Qurans in Muslim parlance. Accordingly, the highly successful Quran editions from Cairo and Medina will be understood in this contribution as material artefacts and, especially in the case of the latter, also as brand names, and will thus henceforth be written without qualifying quotation marks.

My own initial interest to study the relationship between the Cairo and Medina Quran editions was prompted by two personal encounters, one physical, the other material. These encounters have alerted me to the fact that—even in the sphere of texts accepted as divine revelations—various factors are at play for an edition to become widely accepted or quasi-canonical. These factors include not only scholarly and scientific ones, but likewise prominently social and institutional ones, which are clearly socially constructed and negotiated. Accordingly, the present contribution will, after briefly recounting the personal experiences that drew me to this field of research, go some way beyond the text and its respective editions under discussion, by enquiring into the socio-religious, political, and institutional dynamics, which have contributed to the rise of the Medina Quran as a major competitor to the Cairo Quran.

My first direct encounter with something referred to by interlocutors as the Medina Quran took place in the summer of 2012, as I was sitting in a predominantly Muslim suburb of the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh with

3. In addition, it has been labelled as the "official Cairo edition". See, for instance, Kandil, "Surennamen", pp. 44–45. Schmitt argues that, whereas the Quranic text was printed in 1924, the complete edition was perhaps only published in 1925. Schmitt, "Der 1924er, Gizeh".

4. See, for example, al-Ašqar, "Taqdīm", p. [ii].

a group of Islamic scholars from Vietnam and Cambodia. All of them were Chams, the ethnic group that makes up the great majority of Muslims in both countries.[5] It turned out that Abdul Halim Ahmed, one of the scholars with Vietnamese backgrounds in this illustrious group, had been involved—on different levels and in different capacities—in the first translation of the Quran into Vietnamese as well as in a translation into his native Cham language, which had just arrived from the printing press a few months prior.[6] In our conversation great emphasis was placed on the fact that the former had been published in 1423/2002 as a Medina Quran, i.e., by and in the distinctive format of the KFQC.[7] In addition, hopes were expressed that the only recently published first translations of the Quran into Khmer (the national language of Cambodia) and Cham, which were the fruits of a cooperative effort between Cambodian and Kuwaiti Muslim organizations,[8] would soon be republished in this form as well.[9] It thus became evident that some of those involved in the remarkable feat of producing the first translations of the Quran into three different languages of Indochina, were not merely content with just seeing these ground-breaking translations published, but also held specific attitudes about the most desirable format and institutional framework for their publication.

Far away from the tropical climate of Phnom Penh, I found myself, in the winter of 2019, in an unheated and unlit room of an Austrian monastic library, working on the legacy of a famous former inhabitant of that monastery, the Catholic priest and local pioneer of Islamic Studies, Hermann Stieglecker (d. 1975).[10] One part of this endeavor was to prepare a re-edition of the most encompassing book on Islamic doctrines in the German language to date, the latter's *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam* (1962), which reportedly even received official recognition by Cairo's al-Azhar University.[11] Hereby one of my main tasks was to check the hundreds of Quran citations of Stieglecker's work and, if necessary, align them with the verse count of the 1924 Cairo edition. Indeed, Stieglecker relied on the 1901 German translation of Max Henning, which

5. Bruckmayr, "Changing Fates of Islam".

6. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *Nūr al-ḍuḥā*. This Cham translation had been preceded by an earlier one published in 2011 (see n. 8 below).

7. Hassan, *Thiên Kinh Qurʾan*.

8. Yaḥyā, *al-Qurʾān al-karīm wa-tarǧamat maʿānīhi*; *al-Qurʾan al-karim lang tuei bahasa cam*.

9. Personal communication with Abdul Halim Ahmed, Harul Saleh, and Toun Him (Chrang Chamres, April 28, 2012).

10. Bruckmayr, "Großer Gelehrter".

11. Stieglecker, *Glaubenslehren des Islam*; Bruckmayr, "Großer Gelehrter", p. 48.

had been based on the Gustav Flügel edition of 1834 and its verse count. As the latter is often at variance with that of the Cairo Quran (and those of early Indian editions and dependent translations),[12] and, consequently, also with that of most printed Qurans and German (or English) translations available today, it would have been completely unfeasible to preserve Flügel's verse count in the re-edition of such a classical handbook of Islamic doctrine aimed at contemporary readers.

This second anecdote seems to support the common view that the 1924 Cairo Quran had brought a lasting degree of standardization and uniformity to printed Quran editions as well to the continuously expanding field of translations dependent on them. Contrarily, the first anecdote indicates that, whatever the actual legacy of the Cairo Quran, on a social and, arguably, emotional level, the most valued edition, and the one to aspire to, is nowadays—at least in certain regions and milieus—the Medina Quran. Accordingly, this contribution seeks to trace how and why the Medina Quran became authoritative and developed into a brand which challenges or even overshadows the prestige of the Cairo Quran in Muslim imagination. In this respect, also the Quran translations of the KFQC will form part of the enquiry. Indeed, the KFQC's activities in this sphere, and the educational institutions and scholarly networks behind them, have played a significant role in the process.

The institutional and national context of the Medina Quran

The KFQC was established in 1403/1982 as an endowment by King Fahd ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Saʿūd (d. 2005) through a royal decree, at the very beginning of his reign. Two years after King Fahd had personally laid the foundation stone, he formally inaugurated the institution in 1405/1984. Organizationally, the KFQC pertains to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Daʿwā and Guidance. The minister, currently ʿAbd al-Laṭīf ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl al-Šayḫ, acts as its supervisor general.[13] Its vision is to play "the leading role in the service of the Qurʾān and its sciences and in the translations of its meanings and in guarding the text of the Qurʾān against distortion (*taḥrīf*)".[14] Among the

12. Bergsträsser, "Koranlesung in Cairo", pp. 135–140; Rezvan, "History of Printed Editions", pp. 266–267.
13. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Iṭlāla ʿāmma ʿalā al-Muğammaʿ".
14. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Ruʾya".

policies to achieve its goals, the KFQC lists its continuous efforts in the spheres of publishing, of translating the meanings of the Quran and its interpretation (*tafsīr*) into different languages, of distributing its publications to Muslims across the globe, and of bestowing them as annual gifts of the "custodian of the two holy sanctuaries" to those performing the pilgrimage.[15]

Just as the 1924 Cairo edition is often associated with King Fuʾād, also the Medina Quran is therefore closely linked to the initiative of a king and to his kingdom. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and its rulers have framed the foundation and efforts of the KFQC as a way towards fulfilling its responsibility to distribute the Quran globally as part of their personified role as custodians of the two holy sanctuaries, the royal title revived and officially adopted by King Fahd in 1986.[16] In this regard, Medina was deliberately chosen as the most suitable site for the establishment of the KFQC. Moreover, tying its activities even more closely to Islamic sacred topography, it was decreed that its edition would be officially called *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya*, thereby endowing it with a priori religious prestige. This was also emphasiszed in King Fahd's inaugural speech, which referred to the history of Medina as the most distinguished (*aʿẓam*) city.[17]

In terms of size and output the KFQC represents one of the largest printing ventures in the world. It functions as a self-contained town with its own public facilities for the more than 1,000 employees.[18] By 2019 it had a capacity of printing around 18 million copies per year. Overall, the KFQC had by then produced around 317 million copies of the Medina Quran and translations built upon it,[19] as well as, to a much lesser extent, of other books, most notably a re-edition of the 37-volume collection of Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) works of the 1960s.[20] Undoubtedly, the KFQC and the Medina Quran were established as part of the Saudi Arabian project to assert its position of leadership within the Muslim world and among Muslims globally. Accordingly, the first official publication presenting an overview of the activities of the KFQC was released on the occasion of the centenary of the founding of modern

15. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Ahdāf al-Muğammaʿ wa-siyāsātuhu fī taḥqīq ahdāfihi".
16. Al-Rasheed, *History of Saudi Arabia*, p. 144.
17. Quoted in Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Iṭlāla ʿāmma".
18. Whereas the KFQC's website gives the number of 1,100 employees, other sources estimate the work force at about 1,700 people. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Iṭlāla ʿāmma"; Wild, "Muslim Translators", p. 167.
19. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Masīra wa-inğāzāt*, p. 37; "Bi-sawāʿid waṭaniyya".
20. Ibn Taymiyya, *Maǧmūʿ fatāwā.*

Saudi Arabia (i.e., of the third Saudi state under ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Saʿūd in 1319/1902), referring to the KFQC in its title as one of the fruits of the establishment of the kingdom.[21] As noted, it is among the chief objectives of the KFQC to distribute its Qurans on a world-wide scale. One key factor in this endeavor are the distribution lines maintained by the Muslim World League (*Rabīṭat al-ʿālam al-islāmī*, est. 1962) and its subsidiary organizations, such as the World Supreme Council for Mosques (*al-Mağlis al-aʿlā al-ʿālamī li-l-masāğid*, 1975–2017),[22] and other international Islamic charities and foundations. Through the combination of its massive production capacities and these transnational distribution channels, the KFQC "has fundamentally transformed global Qurʾān 'supply chains'".[23]

Besides the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Muslim World League also other official organs are involved in heightening the international reputation of the KFQC and its royal patrons. Thus, the year 1422/2001 witnessed the release of a documentary about the KFQC, in commemoration of King Fahd's 20th year on the throne. Subsequently, Arabic and English versions of the film were distributed to the kingdom's embassies and to Saudi Arabian Airlines.[24] Travel, especially in the form of the pilgrimage, is another major factor in the rise to prominence of the Medina Quran. Each pilgrim visiting the country receives a copy of it, either in Arabic or in combination with a translation, no matter whether arriving by air, land, or sea.[25] More than 1.8 million Medina Qurans are given directly to foreign pilgrims annually.[26] Subject to availability, the combined bilingual editions are handed out to pilgrims from countries in whose national languages the KFQC has published translations.[27]

The far-reaching publishing activities of the KFQC require major investments. In 2005 estimates of its annual working budget ranged at over 106 million US$.[28] As the globally most important publisher of the Quran and translations of its meanings into many different languages, the KFQC is now heralded by its general supervisor, Minister of Islamic Affairs

21. Al-Amāna al-ʿĀmma li-Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd*.

22. For an overview of these bodies up to the present day, see Schulze, "Transnational Wahhabism", pp. 93–113.

23. Mandaville, "Wahhabism and the World", p. 17.

24. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Iṭlāla ʿāmma".

25. Wild, "Muslim Translators", p. 167; "Bi-sawāʿid waṭaniyya".

26. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Masīra wa-inğāzāt*, p. 38.

27. Personal communication with Hassan Poklaun (Hassan Bin Abdul Karim) and Abdul Halim Ahmed (online, October 1, 2022).

28. Taji-Farouki, "Introduction", p. 49.

ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Šayḫ, as "one of the most important Islamic, cultural and developmental landmarks (*aḥad ahamm al-maʿālim al-islāmiyya al-ḥaḍāriyya al-tanmawiyya*) of the country", and as "the leading place and unique point of reference in the service of the Qurʾān".[29]

The Medina Quran

The KFQC's first Quran edition, which, as the Cairo Quran, followed the *Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim* reading, derived from a copy written by the noted Syrian calligrapher ʿUṯmān Ṭāhā (b. 1352/1934).[30] Ṭāhā was born in a rural village north of Aleppo and initially studied calligraphy with his father. Afterwards he continued his training with notable Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish calligraphers, such as Aleppo's Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Mawlawī (d. 1401/1981), the Syrian *šayḫ al-ḫaṭṭāṭīn* Muḥammad Badawī al-Dīrānī (d. 1387/1967), who had himself *inter alia* worked in the Prophet's Mosque at Medina under Ibn Saʿūd, Hāšim Muḥammad al-Baġdādī (d. 1393/1973), who wrote the master copy for the Iraqi state Quran of 1951, and Ḥāmid al-Āmidī (Hamid Aytaç, d. 1403/1982). One of the most eminent calligraphers of his day, one of al-Āmidī's master pieces is a copy of the Quran, which has been frequently reprinted by Turkish publishers. In 1973 he granted a license (*iǧāza*) to Ṭāhā.[31]

Ṭāhā finished his first *muṣḥaf* in his native village in 1970. By his own account, he thereby relied upon two copies from Turkey and the 1924 Cairo edition, eventually surpassing them in quality.[32] It was, however, his *muṣḥaf* of 1977, which combined an Ottoman model with the orthography and style of the 1952 Cairo Quran, that became extremely influential. From 1985 onwards, it came to dominate the Egyptian market.[33] In addition, it is, instead of the 1924 Cairo Quran, credited to have finally led to an actual standard form of

29. Āl al-Šayḫ, "Kalimat al-mušrif".

30. The following information on Ṭāhā's biography and his Medina Quran is based on the official biography provided by the KFQC, a newspaper interview with the calligrapher and other media coverage on his life and work. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "al-Sīra al-ḏātiyya"; Ġāwī, "ʿUṯmān Ṭāhā"; "Prominent Quran Calligrapher"; "Uthman Taha: 'I wish the verses'".

31. On these artists and their *maṣāḥif*, see al-ʿAṭṭārī, *ʿAbqariyyāt*, pp. 379–383; Ḫalaf, "Hāšim Muḥammad al-Baġdādī"; Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 55 sq., 65, 67; Ali, *Modern Islamic Art*, p. 168; "Hamid Aytac".

32. Ġāwī, "ʿUṯmān Ṭāhā".

33. Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 32 sq. The 1952 edition exhibits hundreds of changes to the 1924 edition, see p. 5 of the same book.

printed editions in the (Eastern) Arab world.[34] It was also this edition, which was initially published by the KFQC. This was, however, problematic: published by various Syrian and Egyptian publishers as well as in Istanbul and in Tehran, it could have hardly been claimed as a Saudi product, let alone as a distinctive Medina Quran.[35]

In 1988 Ṭāhā was appointed as the calligrapher of the KFQC. He was tasked with the production of its own edition. This eventually signified the actual emergence of the Medina Quran. By 2006 he had completed four *maṣāḥif* for the institution,[36] under the supervision of its scholarly committee. It is noteworthy that the latter is directed by no less than the imam and *ḫaṭīb* of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥuḍayfī (b. 1366/1947).[37] A lauded specialty of Ṭāhā's is his mastery of the late Ottoman *âyet-berkenar* style, in which each page ending coincides with the end of a verse.[38] This format, which was naturally initially very challenging for calligraphers but helpful for memorization, was popularized by a small circle of pioneering Ottoman calligraphers in the late 19th century, and became very widespread subsequently.[39] Even though the KFQC also offers prints of Quran copies written by Ṭāhā without this characteristic feature, the great majority of its *maṣāḥif*, namely ten out of fourteen, do exhibit it.[40] Thus, it is safe to say that, despite the multiplicity of versions of the Quran distributed by the KFQC under the *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya* label, it is the *âyet-berkenar* copy hand-written by Ṭāhā that came to epitomize the Medina Quran.

As such it is also the one accompanying the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, the KFQC's official book of Quranic commentary (see below), as well as the KFQC Quran translations. More importantly still, the handwritten 1422/2001 edition forms the basis of the recent digitally processed versions of the Medina Quran.[41] Contrary to the stereotype of the calligrapher as a technology-wary representative of a vanishing art, Ṭāhā has fully embraced the new opportunities for the transmission and lasting influence of his Medina Quran precipitated

34. Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 77, 150.
35. Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, p. 32.
36. Ġāwī, "ʿUṯmān Ṭāhā".
37. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "al-Taqsīmāt al-tanẓīmiyya". Al-Ḥuḍayfī was educated both in Saudi Arabia as well as at al-Azhar, where he received his master's and doctoral degrees. Al-Ġāmidī, *Aʾimmat al-masǧid*, pp. 466–469.
38. "Uthman Taha: 'I wish the verses'".
39. See Derman, *Letters in Gold*, pp. 130, 134.
40. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "al-Taqsīmāt al-tanẓīmiyya".
41. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Muʿālağat al-naṣṣ".

by digital technologies. Besides the wide distribution of the printed Medina Quran, this, assumingly, also partly explains his conviction that his *muṣḥaf* and the efforts of the KFQC will have a global impact for centuries to come.[42]

As far as the differences between Ṭāhā's model, the Cairo edition of 1952, and the Medina Quran are concerned, they are minimal. An important intervention is that the afterword clarifies that, in cases of divergence, it was "mostly" (*ġāliban*) the textual transmission of Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn Naǧāḥ (d. 496/1102–1103), rather than that of his teacher Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī (d. 444/1053), which has been relied upon. This qualifying *ġāliban* represents a latter addition to the 1952 afterword. Apart from that, only three minor departures in spelling, i.e., the positioning of a *hamza* in Q. *al-Baqara* 2:72 and Q. *al-Baqara* 2:264, and the insertion of a silent *nūn* in Q. *al-Muzammil* 73:20, have been detected, thereby confirming the Medina Quran's indebtedness the Cairo 1952 edition.[43]

Presently the KFQC offers fourteen different editions of the Quran, pivoting around those relying on the *Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim* reading, which is available in three versions (handwritten with and without the *âyet-berkenar* layout, and digitally processed) and eight different sizes and formats with divergent colorings for its floral decorations. Besides the dominant Ḥafs reading, which, as noted above, also serves—in the *âyet-berkenar* form—as basis and accompanying Arabic text for the KFQC's translations and exegetical works, the KFQC now, additionally, supplies editions of several other readings. Thus, al-Dūrī is likewise available in three versions (albeit not in different sizes and formats), and Warš and Qālūn in two, respectively (i.e., hand-written with "irregular" page/verse endings and digitally processed in *âyet-berkenar* form).[44] In addition, it offers *maṣāḥif* in accordance with the readings of Šuʿba, al-Sūsī, as well as—in digital format only—of al-Bazzī and Qunbul, all four again with the *âyet-berkenar* style.[45] In this regard, the KFQC has played a major part in the wider process of the unprecedented availability and accessibility of printed editions of different readings in recent decades.[46]

42. Ġāwī, "ʿUṯmān Ṭāhā".
43. Schmitt, "Unterschiede";"1924 nicht *der* Standard".
44. This is clearly spelled out only in the case of Warš, whereas in that of Qālūn the mode of production is not specified but most likely follows the same pattern.
45. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "al-Taqsīmāt al-tanẓīmiyya"; "Main Organizational Divisions". It should be noted that the information of the English page appears to be much more up to date than the Arabic one, which still only lists ten different editions.
46. Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 80 sqq.

In this way the KFQC seeks to respond to prevailing regional Quran reading traditions by meeting local demands with appropriate versions of its Medina Quran, while at the same time retaining the primacy of Ṭāhā's Ḥafs edition through the translations. The most glaring example of such a desire to meet regionally embedded tastes and conventions is the only KFQC edition not attributed to Ṭāhā's hand: a slightly modified version of a Ḥafs edition by the South Asian Taj publisher (est. 1929 in Lahore),[47] which features the traditional characteristic underlining of each line and is advertised as being in "Indo-Pak script" (*nasḫ indūbāk*).[48] This specific edition is attributed to the famous Pakistani calligrapher ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Kīlānī (d. 1995), who is reported to have produced fifteen different Quran copies for Taj and another Lahori publisher.[49]

Despite its diversity in formats and the reliance on variant readings, the Medina Quran, and most of the translations built upon and literally around it, are easily recognizable by its consistent corporate design. Thus, it is not only characterized by the elegant calligraphy of Ṭāhā and the decorations, but also by its naming as *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya* and its description on the opening pages as an endowment by the guardian of the two sanctuaries, which is therefore not for sale.[50] According to the royal decrees no. 136/8 of 1406/1985 and no. 9/B/46356 of 1424/2003, the KFQC is the only place allowed to print the Quran in Saudi Arabia, just as imports for commercial purposes are prohibited.[51] Whereas the KFQC has been critiqued in the past—even within Saudi Arabia—for withholding reproduction rights from other publishers from abroad, as this was perceived as constraining the possibilities for the global distribution of the Medina Quran,[52] this effect has been greatly alleviated through the institution's vast distribution networks and, especially, through its far-reaching efforts in the digital sphere. Most versions of the Medina Quran and many of the respective translations are freely available on the internet, including on the official KFQC site. What is more, recent ventures into the field

47. Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 48 sq.

48. See Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Safḥat al-mabīʿāt".

49. Khan, *Holy Qurʾān in South Asia*, p. 324.

50. Nowadays, however, the KFQC also offers copies for sale through its official website as well as through the well-known Saudi Salafi bookstore chain and publisher Darussalam in Riyadh. On the latter, see Hammond, "Salafi Publishing", p. 88.

51. Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-Nabawiyya li-Aʿmāl al-Ṭibāʿa, "Ḥuqūq al-istiḫdām".

52. This view was, for instance, expressed in 2010 by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Šihrī, professor of Quranic Studies at King Saud University in Riyadh. Al-Šihrī, "Mustaqbal 'muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya'".

of digital processing, and related policies of free usage, may make a lasting impact on Quran publishing in both the digital as well as the physical sphere.

Indeed, what has been described as the digitally processed editions of the Medina Quran, refers to the development of a purely digital Quran through a font generated on the basis of Ṭāhā's handwritten 1422/2001 edition by using advanced vector graphics. Usage of the latter for a digital Quran had been pioneered by Thomas Milo and his group of experts, in cooperation with a committee of al-Azhar scholars, for the interactive electronic *Muṣḥaf Masqaṭ* of the Omani Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, launched in 2018.[53] The latter was the first major attempt to overcome the manifold problems of encoding Quranic scripts and creating respective typefaces that are able to replicate the multi-layered formal features of prints derived from hand-written copies, and therefore of the historically developed tradition of Quran production, with its different levels of base letters as well as disambiguating, corrective and suppletive diacritics, and pausal signs.[54]

Relying—unlike the *Muṣḥaf Masqaṭ*—on established open font technology,[55] the KFQC went a step further by using vector graphics, to produce its digitally processed enhanced version, especially as far as the shape and position of small elements of the script (such as diacritical marks, nunation and stopping signs) are concerned, of the 1422/2001 Ḥafs edition and of its respective counterparts for the other seven abovementioned readings.[56] More importantly, particularly with regard to the aforementioned criticism, the goal of the KFQC's digitization project was not merely the production of improved Medina Qurans for printing and online use under its own supervision. Rather, the KFQC now offers its "blessed digital product" and a whole range of functions and applications developed alongside it, for free usage by "all Muslims".[57] Due to these pioneering efforts, it is not unlikely that the KFQC will be able to secure a dominant position for the Medina Quran in the digital sphere, which has hitherto been characterized by a high degree of diversity. What is more, the policy of free reuse is not restricted to the digital realm, as the

53. "Muṣḥaf Masqaṭ"; Wazīrat al-Awqāf wa-l-Šuʾūn al-Dīniyya, "ʿArḍ-muṣḥaf"; Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, p. 80.

54. For a brief overview of these hurdles, see Rezvan, "History of Printed Editions", pp. 269–270; and concerning specifically Unicode, Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 96–102.

55. Arno Schmitt, e-mail to the author (August 3, 2023).

56. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Dalīl al-aʿmāl al-tiqniyya*, pp. 9–14, 17–31; "Muʿālağat al-naṣṣ"; Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-Nabawiyya li-Aʿmāl al-Ṭibāʿa, "al-Taʿrīf bi-l-mašrūʿ".

57. Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-Nabawiyya li-Aʿmāl al-Ṭibāʿa, "al-Taʿrīf bi-l-mašrūʿ".

KFQC also grants government agencies and organizations and even private companies in various countries (except Saudi Arabia) the right to print the digitally processed Medina Quran.[58] The above clearly implies that the Medina Quran, which is already recognized as "the most wide-spread in the world",[59] may acquire a similar position also in the digital realm.

The Medina Quran and the Salafi mission

Even though research on the KFQC and its Medina Quran has so far been minimal, there is already a well-entrenched standard narrative that presents the global distribution of the Medina Quran as a major tool in the spread of Salafi Islam. While it has been rightfully suggested, as will be discussed below, that either deliberately relying on or rejecting the Medina Quran often tells us something about an individual's or a community's positioning vis-à-vis Salafi Islam,[60] this narrative is, nevertheless, problematic for two reasons. Firstly, assertions such as that the KFQC "continues to distribute every year millions of copies of the Qurʾan that perpetuate a distinct Wahhabi reading of the scripture",[61] are, apparently, conflating the Medina Quran as a specific edition of the Arabic text, with its function as a basis for translations. Secondly, the only available in-depth study of a small discrete sample of translations published by the KFQC, clearly shows that it is too reductive to treat them plainly and collectively as translations with a Salafi bent. Accordingly, it has been observed that "from some perspectives, there appears to be a kind of process of domestication at work rather than a simple promotion of Salafi hermeneutics".[62] The cursory analysis of several other translations below confirms this finding. Yet, it is indeed pertinent to interrogate the actual relationship between the KFQC and the Salafi mission at this point, *inter alia* as a necessary background to the following discussion of the Medina Quran as vehicle of and companion to translations.

As the Arabic Medina Quran cannot in and of itself function as a transmitter of a Salafi understanding of the text, it is first necessary to identify the avenues

58. Muǧammaᶜ al-Malik Fahd, "Muᶜālağat al-naṣṣ"; Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-Nabawiyya, "Ḥuqūq al-istiḫdām".
59. Rezvan, "History of Printed Editions", p. 270.
60. Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, pp. 119, 141, 143, 146.
61. Derbal, "Humanitarian and Relief Organizations", p. 127.
62. Yakubovych, "Qurʾan Translations", p. 108.

through which the KFQC and its output have been able to play such a role. Apart from its general association with Medina and Saudi Arabia, well-known for its preference for Wahhābī Islam as official doctrine, the Medina Quran has, from the outset, been closely tied to the Islamic University of Medina (IUM). This institution of higher learning was established in 1961 as a major tool of the kingdom's efforts to propagate Salafi doctrine and practice on a global scale.[63] The intimate relationship between the KFQC and the IUM becomes most apparent in the subsequent discussion of KFQC translations and their authors. What is more, the KFQC has devised certain mechanisms to ensure doctrinal purity or at least the affirmation and preservation of certain key aspects of Salafi hermeneutics. For this purpose, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has commissioned several texts, which were then published by the KFQC and are explicitly intended as guides to its general audience and specifically to translators.

Most importantly this concerns the KFQC's official Quranic commentary, *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, produced by a group of unnamed scholars under the direction of the former minister and supervisor general of the KFQC, Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl al-Shayḫ, and first published in 2008 as a marginal commentary to the Medina Quran. According to its introduction, the work was specifically designed in a format appropriate to the margins of the Medina Quran. In addition, the authors have taken into account that the text will be translated into other languages. Therefore, they have avoided to use terms which are difficult to translate. As far as doctrinal orientation and interpretative method are concerned, it is asserted that its explanations are in agreement with the school of the pious elders in matters of belief (*wafqa maḏhab al-salaf al-ṣālih fī al-iʿtiqād*) and are based on a prioritization of views authenticated through narration-based Quranic commentary (*al-tafsīr bi-l-maʾṯūr*) as well as limited to transmitting the sound or preponderant view (*al-qawl al-ṣaḥīh aw al-arǧaḥ*) in each instance.[64]

It is hereby important to note that the influence of the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* clearly extends beyond the Arabic language sphere. Indeed, the translation department of the KFQC envisioned it to serve translators of the Quran as a "companion" (*muṣāḥib*) during their efforts. Therefore, it regarded the production of translations of the commentary as part of its goals and responsibilities.[65]

63. Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, pp. 67–194.
64. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, p. ṭāʾ.
65. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ǧuhūd al-mamlaka*, p. 9.

Indeed, the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* has left its imprint on a number of Quran translations, both internal (i.e., ones published by the KFQC) and external ones. The KFQC's Tajik Quran translation is strongly dependent on the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* and renders portions of it into Tajik.[66] What is misleadingly advertised on the KFQC's website as a Swahili translation of the meanings of the Quran, is actually a translation of the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*. This is not only suggested by its Swahili title (in contrast to the Arabic one), but also clearly stated in the foreword by ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Šayḫ.[67] In 2008 a Russian abridgment of the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* was published in form of a Russian translation of the Quran based upon it, as an independent project by the Tatar scholar Abu Adel.[68] The first Khmer and Cham translations of the Quran, which were pursued independent of the KFQC but featured four IUM graduates in each translation committee, list the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* among their sources.[69] Since 2019, the *Tafsīr* is also in the process of being translated into English and published in the form of monthly installments on a website "dedicated to providing reliable translations from the works of tafsir written or recommended by our salafi scholars". In this context it is tellingly reiterated that the work had been "written to fit into the margins of the Madinah *Mushaf*".[70]

Besides the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, mention must be made of another publication of the KFQC, which is likewise designed as a guide to readers and translators, although it is not as directly linked to the Medina Quran. The work in question is entitled *Kitāb uṣūl al-īmān fī dawʾ al-kitāb wa-l-sunna* and can best be described as a comprehensive but still succinct compendium of Islamic belief from a Salafi viewpoint. Even though again only an anonymous committee of scholars is credited with its authorship, its members are, in contrast to the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, clearly identified in the foreword: Ṣāliḥ ibn Saʿd al-Suḥaymī (b. 1366/1947), ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-ʿAbbād, and Ibrāhīm ibn ʿĀmir al-Ruḥaylī (b. 1380/1961).[71] All three are closely tied to the IUM, and, as representatives of the loyalist and anti-Islamist Ǧāmī orientation of Salafi Islam,[72] rose to prominence in the early 1990s amidst the kingdom's

66. Yakubovych, "Qurʾan Translations", p. 98.
67. Abubakar & Abdurahman, *Tafsiri ya Maana ya Qurʾan*.
68. Kulieva, "Following the Saudi Trend".
69. Yaḥyā, *al-Qurʾān al-karīm wa-tarǧamat maʿānīhi*, pp. v, vii–viii; *al-Qurʾan al-karim lang tuei bahasa cam*, pp. viii, x.
70. Tulayhah, "al-Tafsir al-muyassar".
71. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Kitāb uṣūl al-īmān*, p. 6.
72. Named after the then head of the IUM's Faculty of Hadith, the Ethiopian Muḥammad Amān al-Ǧāmī (d. 1419/1998). See Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, pp. 211–220.

crackdown on the *Ṣaḥwa* (Awakening) movement, which was fiercely critical of the rulers. At the height of the tensions, al-ʿAbbād, the son of the IUM's third president, ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-ʿAbbād (b. 1353/1934),[73] and al-Suḥaymī were sent by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to preach in the *Ṣaḥwa*'s center of gravity, the city of Burayda. Al-Suḥaymī and al-Ruḥaylī were among those appointed to the IUM after the purges of faculty with *ṣaḥwī* leanings.[74] Presently, they are serving as associate and full professors, respectively.[75]

In the book's preface, the general secretariat of the KFQC emphasizes that "the whole Muslim world is in desperate need to acquire knowledge of this pure untainted creed, as it is [..] its everlasting salvation that is not subject to change".[76] Unsurprisingly, given the Salafi credentials of the authors, the book itself begins right away with a delineation of the tripartite division of *tawḥīd*,[77] a controversial key feature of Salafi doctrine.[78] Due to the centrality of this *taqsīm al-tawḥīd* in Salafi thought and its comparatively late emergence in Islamic intellectual history, Salafi authors have at times been forced to defend it against the charge that it represents an un-Islamic innovation akin to the Christian teaching of the Trinity.[79]

The same section also deals with the concept of major idolatry (*al-širk al-akbar*, i.e., associating other things with God). Apparently lashing out against the practice of supplication at the graves of the Prophet or Muslim saintly figures, the authors unequivocally state that "anybody calling upon a prophet, a king, a saint, a grave, a stone or anything else from among creation is an idolatrous unbeliever (*mušrik kāfir*)".[80] The important place accorded to this topic represents yet another key Salafi concern, which is traced back to Ibn Taymiyya, most notably to his differentiation between Islamic and un-Islamic practices of grave visitation (*ziyāra šarʿiyya* and *ziyāra bidʿiyya*) and his definition of *duʿāʾ* (supplicatory prayer) as the basis of worship.[81] Loyalty and disavowal (*al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ*), another key concept of modern Salafi

73. Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, pp. 80, 93.
74. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, pp. 214–217.
75. Islamic University of Medinah, ‹https://iu.edu.sa/›.
76. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Kitāb uṣūl al-īmān*, p. 6.
77. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Kitāb uṣūl al-īmān*, pp. 9–96.
78. Haykel, "Nature of Salafi Thought", pp. 38–40; Gharaibeh, "Glaubenslehre des Salafismus", pp. 110–112.
79. For such a defense, coupled with a delineation of the concept, in a Salafi commentary on a popular *ʿaqīda*, see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *Šarḥ al-ʿAqīda al-ṭaḥāwiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 38–42.
80. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Kitāb uṣūl al-īmān*, p. 61.
81. Ibn Taymiyya, *Maǧmūʿ fatāwā*, vol. 1, pp. 165–167.

Islam, is defined as "breaking off relations with unbelievers, and therefore not loving them, not helping them, and not staying in their houses, except in case of necessity".[82] Following in the steps of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's (d. 1206/1792) grandson, Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd Allāh Āl al-Šayḫ (d. 1233/1818), who had portrayed upholding *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ* as "a litmus test of true belief",[83] it is described as holding "an exalted place in Islam, as it is the firmest hold of belief".[84]

Also in this case, the KFQC seeks to have this guidebook translated into different languages. So far it has been made available in Sorani Kurdish, Azeri, Macedonian, Ukrainian, Russian, French, Chinese, and Maninka (in N'ko script). For this purpose, the KFQC has successfully recruited some of the scholars producing Quran translations for the institution, as in the case of the Azeri, Russian, Macedonian, and Ukrainian translations, or from among those entrusted with revising Quran translations, as in the case of Maninka and Chinese.

The Medina Quran and the KFQC's translations

Another crucial aspect of the prominence of the Medina Quran is its role as a basis and format for Quran translations, including into many languages for which such translations have been unavailable until recently. Until 2007 the KFQC had printed more than 24 million copies of its Quran translations.[85] Even though English translations have represented the largest share within this segment, the diversity of the institution's language portfolio has steadily expanded. To date (late 2022), it has produced Medina Quran-based translations into 39 Asian, 16 European and 19 African languages.[86] Initially, the shapes of these translations still varied, as some were only partly relying on the publisher's corporate design (i.e., in its opening and final pages). By now, however, each translation published by the KFQC comes with a faithful reproduction of the *Muṣḥaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya*, with each page of Arabic text invariably followed by its translation. Based on this model, many Islamic scholars involved in Quran translations are nowadays regarding it as their goal to see their work published in the form of such "Medina editions", which

82. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Kitāb uṣūl al-īmān*, p. 265.
83. Wagemakers, "Transformation of a Radical Concept", p. 87.
84. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Kitāb uṣūl al-īmān*, p. 266.
85. Wild, "Muslim Translators", p. 167.
86. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Tarǧamāt maʿānī al-Qurʾān".

they have come to view as the yard stick for such endeavors. Apart from the prestige attached to the Medina Quran, publication by the KFQC also guarantees high quality editions, large print runs, and wide distribution. Thus, for instance, the fact that pilgrims are receiving a Quran translation in their respective language has been highlighted by translators as an incentive for seeking to publish with the KFQC.[87]

Even though the publication of Quran translations was part of the KFQC's mission right from the beginning, this field of activity was initially still directed primarily by the Muslim World League (MWL), which had begun to publish translations from 1965 onwards, whereas the KFQC was only responsible for the publishing and printing process.[88] This changed with the establishment of the KFQC's translation center in 1415/1994–1995, which took over the prior functions of the MWL in this sphere.[89] The self-representation of the center, as encapsulated in an official report on "the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the area of translating the meanings of the Qurʾān", allows us some insights into the primary considerations informing its work. Thus, it describes the establishment of the center as owing to the fact that the global character of the Islamic mission compels Muslims to translate the meanings of the Quran into different languages.[90]

As the legitimacy of such translations has been a bone of contention in Islamic tradition, the document subsequently enumerates various prophetic traditions and scholarly opinions allowing or even mandating them. As far the former view is concerned, comments on hadiths by al-Buḫārī (d. 256/870), Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), and Ibn Taymiyya are conveyed. For the view that such translations are actually an obligation, the editors apparently had to turn to more recent authorities.[91] Thus, a fatwa by Ibn Bāz (d. 1999), the former grand mufti of Saudi Arabia and first president of the IUM, is quoted to the effect that already the companions of the Prophet had relied on translations during incursions into, and after the conquest of, Persian and Byzantine territories to familiarize the local population with the Islamic message. Especially in present times and among those foreign to Islam, who are all attached to

87. Personal communication with Hassan Poklaun (Hassan Bin Abdul Karim) and Abdul Halim Ahmed (online, October 1, 2022).

88. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ǧuhūd al-Mamlaka*, p. 8. On the MWL's translations, see Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus*, pp. 333–336; Mykhaylo Yakubovych, "Muslim World League".

89. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ǧuhūd al-Mamlaka*, p. 9.

90. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ǧuhūd al-Mamlaka*, p. 4.

91. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ǧuhūd al-Mamlaka*, pp. 4–6.

their own languages, there would be a dire need for translations as the only means by which *daʿwa* could be pursued. This position is further echoed in a quotation from the eminent Saudi scholar Muḥammad ibn ʿUṯaymīn (d. 2001), who likewise regarded the production of Quran translations as a chief way to comply with the obligation to spread Islam among non-Arabic speakers.[92]

The KFQC and its translation center thus endeavor to fulfill this obligation. In this capacity it sees itself as responsible for "spreading the word of God among the non-Arabic speaking peoples of the world" and to "draw attention to the distortions and changes to it" in the translations by deviant sects (*al-firaq al-munḥarifa*), Orientalists, and Christian missionaries.[93] Elsewhere, the Qādiyāniyya (i.e., the main Qadian-branch of the Aḥmadiyya movement) and the Bāṭiniyya (i.e., those engaging in esoteric interpretation of the Quran) are listed as examples of such deviant groups (*al-fiʾāt al-ḍālla*).[94] Contrastingly, the translations prepared by the KFQC are characterized as "correct translations in accordance with the method of the pious elders".[95] As noted, one of the KFQC's tools to achieve this goal was the translation of a simple and concise Quranic commentary (i.e., the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*) into the most important languages as a companion for translators. This should then be supplemented by a special dictionary of Quranic and Islamic terms for translators.[96] Another task of the translation center is to evaluate existing translations, in order to endorse the correct ones, reject the others, and identify the outstanding works. Other responsibilities include the collection of data on non-Arabic speaking Muslim regions and to assess the need for translations in the respective languages.[97]

A key role in the working of the translation center is played by the translation council, which consists of specialists in the Quranic sciences and sharia as well as experts for major languages. For the individual translations the council also relies on a specialized board of scholars proficient in the target language. These are usually native speakers, who are charged with assessing newly submitted or selected existing translations, including particularly from the perspective of *ʿaqīda* and sharia rulings. Based on this board's evaluation, the center decides on publication or non-publication of a given translation.

92. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ğuhūd al-Mamlaka*, pp. 7–8.
93. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ğuhūd al-Mamlaka*, pp. 8–9 (quotations from p. 9).
94. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ğuhūd al-Mamlaka*, p. 3.
95. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ğuhūd al-Mamlaka*, p. 23.
96. To my knowledge, such a work has not yet been published.
97. Muğammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ğuhūd al-Mamlaka*, pp. 9–11.

Once accepted the translator (or his heirs) is provided with comments to his work and asked for his agreement to the suggested revisions. Once the revisions have been completed the translation is ready for publication.[98]

According to the translation center, its assessment criteria, which can arguably be regarded as literalist and at times even clearly Salafi-oriented, are the following: 1) the absence of any subordination of the translation to *maḏhabī* opinions (i.e., of the schools of law and dialectic theology), personal interpretations, and philosophical views; 2) consistent reliance on a single translation of recurrent Quranic terms, instead of different renderings according to context; 3) the absence of arbitrariness in the understanding of individual verses through addition or reduction in the translation (*ziyāda aw nuqṣān*); 4) the avoidance of literal (i.e., word-by-word) translation; 5) the preservation of specific Islamic terms, which are difficult to translate, in their original form with explanations in footnotes (e.g., *zakāt* instead of alms-tax in English); 6) the reliance on Islamic terms and expressions and the concomitant avoidance of words and terms peculiar to other religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism; 7) a consistent system of transliteration for the rendering of untranslated Arabic words into the target language; 8) writing proper names according to their original Arabic form with indicators of their expression in the target language in the margin or in brackets (e.g., Sulaymān instead of Süleyman in Turkish); and, 9) employing contemporary language that is understandable to the majority of present speakers of the target language.[99]

Internal diversity in the KFQC's translation portfolio

Generally, the KFQC follows two different approaches towards producing and publishing Quran translations. Concerning languages in which translations are already available, it selects the one deemed most suitable for publication, according to the standards just outlined. Thus, even though faithfulness to the Arabic original is considered the main criterion, also doctrinal considerations are playing a role. In the case of translations into languages, in which hitherto no (full) translations of the Quran have been available, such are commissioned by or submitted to the KFQC. Due to this configuration, it cannot be said that its Quran translations are either generally or equally

98. Muğammaᶜ al-Malik Fahd, *Ğuhūd al-Mamlaka*, pp. 11–12.
99. Muğammaᶜ al-Malik Fahd, *Ğuhūd al-Mamlaka*, pp. 12–13.

of a Salafi bent. Nevertheless, the work of the translation boards, who are commonly staffed by graduates of the IUM, and the mechanisms described above and below, often serve to ensure the domestication process along Salafi lines identified by Yakubovych in the KFQC's translations into Central Asian languages.[100] One of the earliest translations published by the KFQC, already in 1986, was the 1950s Chinese translation of Ma Jian (Muḥammad Makīn, d. 1978), who had studied at al-Azhar and also completed a Chinese translation of Muḥammad ʿAbduh's *Risālat al-tawḥīd*.[101] The Persian translation is the classical one by the 18th-century Indian scholar Šāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762), originally entitled *Fatḥ al-Raḥmān*. This choice, certainly influenced by the comparably positive appraisal of the author in Salafi circles, his more literalist approach to the Quran, and the lasting popularity of the work in South Asia[102] flies in the face of the KFQC's directive to publish only translations written in contemporary language. Whereas both Makīn and Šāh Walī Allāh have, due to their reformist approaches, at least certain shared concerns and approaches with today's Salafi establishment in Saudi Arabia, this is much less so with other translations published by the KFQC, especially in cases, in which no alternatives are available. For instance, it has released the first partial Quran translation into Romani ("Gypsy") language, composed by Muharem Serbezovski, a North Macedonian-Bosnian singer and songwriter of Muslim Romani background.[103] Concerning the Turkish translation by a group of scholars around Ali Özek (ʿAlī Awzak, d. 2021), first published already in 1982 under the aegis of the MWL, it has been noted that it "seems to be promoting a specifically Turkish Qurʾanic culture rather than following contemporary Salafi exegetical discourse".[104] Regarding the KFQC's Kazakh translation by Halifa Altay (Ḫalīfa Ālṭāy, d. 2003),[105] it has been observed that it commonly adopts the established non-Salafi Sunni

100. Yakubovych, "Qurʾan Translations", p. 108.

101. On Ma Jian and his translations, see Ben-Dor Benite, "Taking ʿAbduh to China"; Ma, "Patriotic and Pious".

102. There are numerous editions of *Fatḥ al-Raḥmān*, including in early lithographies, combining it with Quranic commentaries and/or Urdu translations. Naḏīr Aḥmad al-Dihlawī (d. 1320/1902), himself a translator of the Quran into Urdu, proclaimed that "subsequent translators of the Qurʾān are not really translators of the Qurʾān but only translators of the translations of Shah Waliullah and his son". Quoted in Khan, *Holy Qurʾān in South Asia*, p. 237. On the influence of *Fatḥ al-Raḥmān*, see Zaman, "Shāh Walī Allāh".

103. Pink, "A Roma Singer".

104. Yakubovych, "Kurʾan-ı Kerim".

105. On this translation, see Yakubovych, "Qurʾan Translations", pp. 94–96.

metaphorical understanding of much debated expressions such as *istawā ʿalā al-ʿarš* (Q. *al-Aʿrāf* 7:54). Thus, Altay, renders it, in a clearly interpretative style of translation, as taking "possession over the throne of creation" rather than as ascending above/over the throne. The latter approach is the dominant one in Salafi-oriented exegesis and translations, including the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* and the KFQC's Kyrgyz and Tajik translations, both of which are much more Salafi-influenced than Altay's work.[106]

Other noteworthy examples of KFQC translations clearly outside of Salafi networks and their prevalent hermeneutical approaches are the Indonesian, Ukrainian and Spanish translations, each of which derives from a very specific background. The Indonesian translation distributed by the KFQC is the official Quran translation issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, first published in 1965 as the basis for a national *tafsīr* project. Since then, it has seen several revised reeditions, including in 1989, which is the edition relied upon by the KFQC.[107] In this case, the KFQC thus prolongates the Indonesian project of a "national" translation, which is deeply invested in local Šāfiʿī-Ašʿarī tradition. It is, however, in the footnote apparatus—by omitting and inserting notes—that the KFQC's edition pursues some streamlining of exegesis along Salafi lines. For instance, it argues for the literal rather than any metaphorical interpretation of Allah's throne (*kursī*), which is merely rendered as *kursi* in Indonesian.[108] Contrastingly, the KFQC's Ukrainian translation, which is also the first full translation from the original Arabic ever completed in this language, was written by Mykhaylo Yakubovych. A product of the secular university system, his research in the field has been cited several times in the preceding pages. In his personal account of his work experience with and at the KFQC, he notes that, as he deliberately avoided directly addressing theological issues in his commentary, he was able "to represent the different theological readings of Sunni Islam with some degree of balance".[109]

106. Yakubovych, "Qurʾan Translations", pp. 100–101. The Kyrgyz translation was written by Shamsuddin Hakimov, a key figure in the Kyrgyz Salafi community. As noted above, the Tajik one by Hujjamir Hujjamirov strongly builds on the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*. See Yakubovych, "Qurʾan Translations", pp. 96–99. For an example of a traditional Quranic commentary from Central Asia interpreting the phrase as referring to Allah's rulership over creation, see al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr al-Nasafī*, vol. 2, p. 83.

107. Pink, "Tradition and Ideology", pp. 23–26; "Literal Meaning", pp. 103.

108. For this and other changes to the official Indonesian edition, see Pink, "Tradition and Ideology", pp. 109–111.

109. Yakubovych, "Interpreting The Qurʾan".

The KFQC's Spanish translation can even be said to stem from a doctrinal opponent. First published in Grenada in 1994 and shortly thereafter in Medina (1417/1996–1997), it is not only the first modern Spanish translation by a Muslim. What is more, its author, Abdel-Ghani Melara Navío (ʿAbd al-Ġanī Mīlārā Nābyū, b. 1957), is a member of the Murabitun World Movement, a Western branch of the Šāḏiliyya-Darqāwiyya Sufi brotherhood established by ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ṣūfī (Ian Stewart Dallas, d. 2021), who had introduced Melara to Islam. Among the KFQC's translation editions, this work also holds a special place for another reason: Due to the Murabitun's strong orientation towards Maghrebi and Andalusian Islamic tradition, it is the only one based on the Warš and not the Ḥafs reading.[110] In this respect, the KFQC's endorsement of Melara's work furthered the entrenchment of a translation project by a Western Muslim movement that regards itself as the continuation of Andalusian-Maghrebi Sufi tradition and actively proselytizes among Spanish and English speakers in Europe, the Americas and South Africa.[111]

Another special case is the two-volume Pashto translation. First published in 1414/1993 and attributed to an unspecified committee of Afghan scholars, it is apparently not a direct translation of the Arabic Quran at all.[112] In his foreword the Minister of Islamic Affairs rather refers to the text as *Tafsīr-i Kābulī* and describes it as a rendering into Pashto from Urdu.[113] This not only suggests a rather complex genesis of the text but also indicates once again a willingness of the KFQC to comply with established local traditions. Indeed, the original *Tafsīr-i Kābulī* was a Persian/Dari translation of the Urdu exegetical Quran translation of Maḥmūd Ḥasan Diyūbandī (d. 1339/1920), one of the key figures of the Deoband movement.[114] The Dari version was produced by a group of Afghan scholars under the patronage of the last Afghan monarch Muḥammad Ẓāhir Šāh (d. 2007).[115]

As an outgrowth and specific claimant and interpreter of the Deobandi tradition, the Ṭālibān of the reestablished Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), have recently commissioned a new Pashto translation of the work. The fruit of this endeavor, completed in 2022, is envisioned to function as the quasi-national translation of the IEA, which presents the *Tafsīr-i Kābulī*

110. Pink, "Spanish Qurʾan Translation".
111. Bocca-Aldaqre, "A *ṭarīqa* for the West".
112. A similar case will be discussed below.
113. Āl al-Šayḫ, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, "Muqaddima", vol. 1, p. [i].
114. On Maḥmūd Ḥasan, see Hartung, "Praiseworthiness of Divine Beauty".
115. Zaman, "Shāh Walī Allāh", pp. 290–292.

as "approved by the country's ulamas and scholars" but considers the Saudi edition (and others) to be deficient.[116] This critique is most probably not based on linguistic grounds, but rather reflective of different approaches towards the translation and interpretation of anthropomorphic expressions in the Quran. Whereas the KFQC's edition of *Tafsīr-i Kābulī* was checked and revised by three Salafi scholars of Pashtun background, it can be assumed that the original version at times relied on the method of *tanzīh* (abstraction) in translating or interpreting anthropomorphic expressions, as commonly employed—although with some reservations—within the Māturīdī-influenced Deobandi tradition.[117] At least two other KFQC translations were produced by authors with a Deobandi background: first, the Kashmiri translation by Mīrwāʿiẓ Muḥammad Yūsuf Šāh (d. 1968),[118] and, second, the Dari translation of Muḥammad Anwār Badaḫšānī. The latter is presently the president of the *Jāmiʿah-yi ʿUlūm al-Islāmiyyah* in Karachi (Pakistan), an institution which is closely associated with the emergence of, and with support for, the Ṭālibān. In addition, it has been regarded as deeply involved in the sectarian violence plaguing Pakistan since the 1980s.[119]

Returning to languages of the Balkans, a region often associated in media reports with an alleged process of Wahhabization, it is noteworthy that the Bosnian, Albanian and (North) Macedonian translations were all penned by representatives of local Islamic scholarly tradition rather than by any adherents of the Salafi movement that has taken roots among certain segments of the region's Muslim population since the 1990s.[120] Thus, the Bosnian Besim Korkut (Basīm Kūrkūt, d. 1975), the Kosovar Sherif Ahmeti (Šarīf Aḥmadī, d. 1998), and the North Macedonian Ḥasan Dzilo (Ḥasan Ǧīlū) all received their Islamic education in the Balkans and—in Korkut's case—at al-Azhar. All three translations are impressive examples for the vast outreach generated by the combination of endorsement of a given translation by the KFQC and the efforts of Saudi Arabian organizations on the ground. Thus, Sherif Ahmeti's translation, first published in 1987, initially went through modest print runs of 30,000 to 50,000 copies in Tripoli and Cairo. Contrastingly, one million copies were

116. "Work on Translation".
117. On Salafi denunciations of Deobandi tradition, including its Ṭālibān expression, see Bruckmayr, "Salafi Challenge", pp. 296–297, 306–313, 322–323.
118. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, *Ǧuhūd al-Mamlaka*, p. 15; Rizvi, *History of the Dar al-Ulum*, vol. 2., pp. 102–103.
119. Gayer, *Karachi*, p. 174. On the Taliban's religious history see Hartung, *Pashtun Borderland*.
120. Karčić, "Arab Brothers"; Krasniqi, *Islamist Extremism*.

produced at the KFQC for distribution in post-Communist Albania in the early 1990s.[121] The relevance of the first Medina edition of the work from 1413/1992 also for the other countries in the region with Albanian populations was highlighted by an official delegation from the Kosovo to the KFQC in 2022.[122] Indeed, already in the first year after the Kosovo war of 1999, 200,000 copies were distributed in the country.[123] Half a million copies of Korkut's Bosnian translation were distributed in Bosnia between 1992 and 1998.[124]

KFQC translations and Salafi orientation

Despite the above counter-cases, of which there are, arguably, certainly numerous more, the Salafi inclinations of many of the authors of Medina Quran translations published by the KFQC are abundantly clear. The Hausa translation, for instance, is the work of Abu Bakar Gumi (Abū Bakr Ġūmī, d. 1992), the founding father of Salafi Islam in Nigeria.[125] Apart from the fact that traditionally oriented West African scholars were appalled by Gumi's literalist approach towards the anthropomorphic expressions, it must be noted that the de-legitimation of Sufism is one of the main themes in the translator's explanatory notes.[126] Another instructive case is the KFQC's Urdu translation, produced by Muḥammad Ǧūnāgarhī (d. 1941) of the pioneering South Asian Ahl-i Hadith Salafi movement. Ǧūnāgarhī also completed the first full Urdu translation of Ibn Kaṯīr's (d. 774/1373) *tafsīr*, one of the most highly regarded Quranic commentaries within the Salafi spectrum. Indeed, his Quran translation first appeared together with the *tafsīr* translation.[127]

Indeed, despite the contributions of Deobandi scholars to the translation portfolio of the KFQC, as outlined above, South Asia is one of the regions in which translators with a clear Salafi background are particularly well represented. Thus, the Nepali translation was produced by the Central Ahl-i Hadith Association of Nepal (*Ǧamīʿat Ahl al-Ḥadīṯ al-Markazī fī Nībāl*), whereas

121. Grundmann, *Islamische Internationalisten*, p. 91.
122. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Ziyārat faḍīlat raʾīs al-mašiyaḫa".
123. Krasniqi, *Islamist Extremism*, p. 39.
124. Karčić, "Arab Brothers", p. 281.
125. On Gumi's background and his translation, see Brigaglia, "Two Hausa Translations", pp. 428–431, 433–443.
126. Brigaglia, "Two Hausa Translations", pp. 437 sq., 440.
127. Khan, *Holy Qurʾān in South Asia*, pp. 344–346.

the Kannada translation, is the work of Muḥammad Ḥamza Battūr (Pattur), a member of the Karnataka Salafi Association, who also translated the key work on prayer by Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999).[128] The Malayalam translation stems from two representatives of the Nadwat al-Muǧāhidīn, Cheriyamundam Abdul Hameed (ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ḥaydar al-Madanī, d. 2018) and Kunji Mohammed Parappore (Kunhī Muḥammad Babūr al-Madanī). The Nadwa is the institutional embodiment of Kerala's reformist/Salafi current, which has for decades strongly advocated—against the fierce opposition of the majority of traditionally oriented local scholars—for translations of the Quran and the Friday sermons into the vernacular.[129] It is hardly coincidental that both translators are bearing the *nisba* "al-Madanī", as is the case with many of the leaders of the Nadwat al-Muǧāhidīn and the Karnataka Salafi Association, which are enjoying cordial relations.[130] The Brahui translation, first published already in 1413/1990 as an interlinear translation with explanatory notes in the margin, was composed by ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Lāhūrī al-Aṭarī (d. 2007), a noted Pakistani Salafi scholar (see below).[131]

One of the most widely distributed and, arguably, the most controversial Medina Quran translation is the English one by the Moroccan Salafi stalwart Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī (d. 1987) and the Pakistan-born Pashtun physician Muḥammad Muḥsin Ḫān (d. 2021).[132] Due to the often clearly Salafi-oriented and at times polemical exegetical comments, especially in its earlier KFQC editions, where they are often inserted in parantheses in the running translation rather than as footnotes, the work has drawn fierce criticism.[133] In the US, a contending Islamic scholar has even recommended to remove it "from every mosque in the country".[134] The most frequently expressed point of criticism, however, i.e., the parenthetical explanation of Q. *al-Fātiḥa* 1:7's references

128. "Kuwait: Kannada Version", 2010.

129. Osella & Osella, "Islamism and Social Reform", pp. 326–328.

130. At the official presentation of the third edition of the Kannada translation, Mohammed Parappore was the book's first recipient. Pereira, "The Miracle Exhibition".

131. Khan, *Holy Qurʾān in South Asia*, pp. 105–106.

132. Al-Hilālī is the main figure studied in Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*.

133. Mohammed, "Assessing English Translations", pp. 63–64; Wild, "Muslim Translators", pp. 173–174. On the influence of Salafi doctrine on the translation, see Mustafa, "Ambiguity, Ideology, and Doctrine", pp. 27–30. On the genesis of the work and its different editions, see Yakubovych, "Interpretation of the Meanings".

134. Khaleel Mohammed quoted in Wild, "Muslim Translators", p. 174. Mohammed was hereby primarily thinking about the adverse effects public attention on the translation could have on Muslims in the US in general.

to those who have earned God's anger and who have gone astray, as Jews and Christians, is somewhat one-sided or, arguably, reflective of historical amnesia. The prominent place given to this denigration of the adherents of other religions, right within the first verses of the translated Quranic text, is certainly questionable in present times, as are the motives for this apparently unnecessary intrusion into the text.[135] Nevertheless, it must be noted that this understanding of the meaning of Q. *al-Fātiḥa* 1:7 and its placement into a running translation is hardly peculiar to modern Salafi translators. Thus, for instance, the twelfth-century Māturīdī luminary Naǧm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142) provided the same explanation in his influential Persian Quran translation, commonly known as *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, while adding—undoubtedly due to his Persianate context—the Zoroastrians to the list.[136]

Due to the perceived association with Salafi expressions of Islam and their status as most widely distributed translations, some of the Medina Quran translations, such Hilālī/Ḫān or Gumi, have sparked major intra-Muslim controversy and even political interventions. A prominent example of the latter is the Russian translation by the Azerbaijani Salafi scholar Elmir Kuliev (Ilmīr Kūlīyif, b. 1975).[137] Denounced as extremist, it was temporarily banned by a Russian court in 2013.[138] The trail of the Medina Quran, however, inadvertently also intersects with other political cleavages, entirely unrelated to intra-Muslim debates. Thus, the author of the Uyghur KFQC Quran translation, Muhammad Salih Hajim (Ṣāliḥ al-Kāšǧarī), died in 2018 in a Chinese "re-education" camp.[139]

KFQC translations and the Islamic University of Medina

Just as the production of the Cairo edition had been closely tied to the contemporary institutional and national context in Egypt, the KFQC and the Medina Quran are strongly connected to Saudi Arabia's intended counterpart

135. Whereas this reference to Jews and Christians has been removed from the more recent editions, it is still contained in the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, which —as noted— is intended as a guide to translators. Nuḫbat al-ʿulamāʾ, *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, p. 1.

136. Quoted in Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾan*, p. 284.

137. Gasimov, "Examining Salafism in Azerbaijan", p. 114; Aliyev, "Situating Salafī Islam", pp. 272–273.

138. Laruelle & Yudina, "Islamophobia in Russia", pp. 49–50.

139. Yakubovych, "Qurʾan in Uyghur".

to al-Azhar University, the Islamic University of Medina (IUM). In this regard, the prestige attached to the Medina Quran, and the translation work associated with it, often has an important educational and social component as well. Many of the scholars producing Quran translations for the KFQC are (former) teachers or graduates of the IUM. Gumi, who was awarded the King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam for his Hausa translation, served as a member of both the MWL's constitutive council and the IUM's high council.[140] Al-Hilālī served as a professor there, and Muḥsin Ḫān, a doctor by training, as the director of the IUM clinic.[141] The translator of the aforementioned Brahui translation, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Aṭarī, was likewise a teacher at IUM.[142] The author of the Azeri Medina Quran translation, Alikhan Musayev (ʿAlī Ḫān Mūsāyīf), the most prolific and widely published Salafi scholar in Azerbaijan, is an IUM alumnus.[143] The two Kenyan translators of the aforementioned Swahili edition of the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, were likewise both educated in Saudi Arabia. Both reared in the Swahili reformist/proto-Salafi scholarly tradition, Nassor Khamis Abdurahman (Nāṣir Ḫamīs ʿAbd al-Raḥmān) additionally studied at IUM and Abdallah Mohamed Abubakar (ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Abū Bakr) at King Saud University in Riyadh.[144] A thorough study of the educational backgrounds of KFQC translators would certainly yield many more such cases.

Yet, the example of the Swahili *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* also brings some of the obstacles faced by the KFQC in trying to produce theologically streamlined or domesticated versions of popular Quran translations into focus. Originally it had planned to prepare such an edition of the locally initially controversial but still highly successful and influential Swahili translation published in 1969 by the East African Islamic reformer and former Chief Qadi of Kenya, Abdalla Saleh Farsy (ʿAbd Allāh Ṣāliḥ al-Farisī, d. 1982).[145] Even though Farsy, just like other reformist scholars of the day, had shared concerns—especially regarding

140. Anzalone & Qadhi, "From Dirʿiyya to Riyadh", p. 64; Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus*, p. 227.

141. Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith*, p. 95.

142. Khan, *Holy Qurʾān in South Asia*, pp. 105–106.

143. Gasimov, "Examining Salafism in Azerbaijan", p. 114; Aliyev, "Situating Salafī Islam", pp. 276–277. On his translation, whose present prominence reflects the shift from Russian (as represented by his compatriot Kuliev) to Azeri as dominant language of Salafi *daʿwa* in the country, see Yakubovych, "KFQPC's Azerbaijanian Translation".

144. Kresse, "Swahili Enlightenment", p. 281; Mraja, "Reform Ideas", p. 272.

145. On this translation and its reception, see Lacunza-Balda, "Translations of the Quran", pp. 108–116; Topan, "Polemics and Language", pp. 480–488.

widespread ritual practices—with the present Salafi movement,[146] he clearly fell short of translating certain anthropomorphic expressions in the Quran in the literalist fashion espoused by the Salafi spectrum. As in the case of Altay's abovementioned Kazakh translation, Farsy translated *istawā ʿalā l-ʿarš* in Q. *al-Aʿrāf* 7:54 in the sense of Allah reigning on his throne.[147] Consequently, the KFQC saw the need for some revisions of Farsy's translation before publication in the Medina Quran format. Yet, the committee of Swahili scholars charged with assessing and revising the text, which most probably included Farsy's former student Nassor Khamis, refused to make interventions into his work.[148] Thus, the publication of Khamis and Abubakar's Swahili translation of the *Tafsīr al-Muyassar* apparently represents a consensual solution for this dilemma.

Even though this still needs to be verified, the share of IUM alumni is most probably even greater among those entrusted with evaluating translations and suggesting revisions, i.e., the activity commonly denoted as *rāǧaʿa*, in the sense of reviewing or critically assessing draft translations or already externally published ones, in the standardized forewords to KFQC translations. This applies, for instance, to the reviewers of the Vietnamese and Kyrgyz translations, Abdul Halim Ahmed Nguyen (ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Aḥmad Nǧūyin) and Muḥammad Afandī ibn Muḥammad Yūsuf, and Aydarbek Kabulov (Aydarbīk Kābūlūf) and Nematulla Kadaev (Niʿmat Allāh Kādāyif), respectively.[149] What is more, many of the younger non-Arab scholars working as translators or reviewers for the KFQC have acquired their requisite skills in Arabic under the same teacher: the South Asian scholar Vaniyambady Abdur Rahim (F. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, b. 1933), who taught at IUM for thirty years.[150] During that time, he also designed his famous textbooks for learning Arabic as a foreign language, now simply known as the "Medina books".[151] After leaving IUM, Abdur Rahim became the director of the KFQC's translation center. In this capacity he drew extensively on the linguistic skills of his former students from

146. See Kresse, "Swahili Enlightenment"; Mraja, "Reform Ideas".

147. Loimeier, "Translating the Qurʾān", pp. 415–416.

148. Mazrui, *Cultural Politics*, pp. 32–33.

149. Personal communication with Hassan Poklaun (Hassan Bin Abdul Karim) and Abdul Halim Ahmed (online, October 1, 2022); Yakubovych, "Qurʾan Translations", p. 96.

150. Personal communication with Abdul Halim Ahmed and Harul Saleh (Chrang Chamres, April 28, 2012). Abdur Rahim also prepared the first KFQC edition of Hilālī/Ḫān. See Yakubovych, "Interpretation of the Meanings".

151. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, *Durūs al-luġa al-ʿarabiyya*. Tellingly, the edition distributed online by the UK Islamic Academy advertises it as "originally devised and taught at" IUM on its title page.

around the globe.[152] Unsurprisingly, for many individuals and communities personally tied to such Medina-centered networks, it is nowadays clearly the Medina Quran that is perceived as the most authoritative. Similarly bonds of mutual trust guarantee that the assessments and decisions of Medina educated reviewers for the respective languages are usually not put into question. For instance, as a former student of Abdur Rahim's with already many years of work experience for the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Abdul Halim Nguyen's suggestion to the KFQC to publish Hassan Poklaun's (Ḥasan ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm, b. 1939) Vietnamese Quran translation was immediately considered. This despite the fact, that the work, which has taken the autodidact nine years to complete, is not a direct translation from the Arabic but rather based on Yusuf Ali's English translation.[153]

Cultural assertiveness in KFQC translations

What makes the situation even more complex is that, in contrast to the perceived (linguistic) Arabo-centricity of globally oriented Saudi Islamic policies,[154] some of the translations of the KFQC could, contrarily, be seen as symbols of non-Arab cultural assertiveness and preservation. What is more, some of them are explicitly envisioned as tools for such endeavors by the respective translators. This is most pronounced in several African and Asian languages, but arguably likewise applies to the above-mentioned Romani translation of Serbezovski. The KFQC's "N'ko translation" is a revealing case in point. N'ko is not a language but a script employed to write various languages of the West African Mande group. It was newly designed from 1949 onwards by the Guinean scholar Sulemaana Kantè (Fawdī Sulaymān al-Kāntī, d. 1408/1987) after he had concluded that borrowed scripts, such as Arabic and Latin, were unsuitable for African languages.[155] The script and its founder

152. See Abdur Rahim, "Our Shaykh".

153. Personal communication with Hassan Poklaun (Hassan Bin Abdul Karim) and Abdul Halim Ahmed (online, October 1, 2022).

154. AlKroud, for instance, assumes the all-Arabic front covers of the KFQC translations to reflect "a belief in the supremacy of the Arabic language as the language of the Qur'an – irrespective of the language into which the Qur'an is translated". AlKroud, "Renarrating the Berbers", p. 116.

155. Oyler, "Re-Inventing Oral Tradition", pp. 78–81.

are therefore regarded as a strong modern expression of African Muslim vernacular tradition.[156]

In the late 1960s Kantè finished his translation of the Quran into Maninka using N'ko.[157] This proved to be a major factor in the growing acceptance and spread of the script.[158] It is this translation, that has been published by the KFQC, which advertises it as an "N'ko translation" (*luġat al-unkū*) on its title page and describes it as a Bambara one in the foreword by the minister.[159] Whereas previous editions of Kantè's translation were in the range of 1,000 copies, the first print run at the KFQC was 50,000, thereby greatly boosting its outreach. This edition, however, could only be released after many years of wrangling between the KFQC and the translator's heir over the inclusion of Kantè's extensive postface. The conflict eventually ended not with the postface's removal (as desired by the publisher) but with its relocation to the beginning of the book.[160] Meanwhile, the KFQC edition has seen several print-runs and continues to be distributed in large numbers via official Saudi Arabian channels to African nations as part of the country's foreign policy. On a visit by a ministerial delegation from Guinea in 2022, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Šayḫ gifted 50,000 copies of it to the country.[161]

Of similar interest are the Tamazight (Berber) and a Cham translation recently submitted to the KFQC. The Tamazight translation was written by the Kabyle Se Hajj Mohanned Tayeb (Sī Muḥannad Muḥannad Ṭayyib, b. 1934), whose scholarly stature in Algeria has been greatly enhanced due to the publication of his work in Saudi Arabia and his demonstrated cordial relations to the KFQC.[162] Indeed, Tayeb himself stressed the importance of the revisions suggested by the KFQC scholarly committee to "release the translation in the most accomplished form possible".[163] It is, however, important to note that the translation, first published in 2007, is introduced to readers as a Tamazight translation in Kabyle dialect: *al-luġa al-amāzīġiyya (al-lahǧa al-qabāʾiliyya)*.[164] Whereas the choice to write a (Kabyle) Tamazight translation

156. Donaldson, "Role of Islam".
157. Davydov, "Souleymane Kanté's Translation", p. 3.
158. Oyler, "For 'All Those Who Say N'ko'", p. 182.
159. Āl al-Šayḫ, Ṣāliḥ, "Muqaddima", p. [i].
160. Davydov, "Souleymane Kanté's Translation", p. 3; pp. 1–63.
161. "Dr. Al Al-Sheikh Gifts".
162. AlKroud, "Renarrating the Berbers", pp. 23–25, 131, 225.
163. Ṭayyib, *al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, p. [v].
164. For a more thorough discussion of the work, see AlKroud, "Renarrating the Berbers", pp. 115–133.

of the Quran could be read as an expression of cultural assertiveness or even as a challenge to the cultural hegemony and longstanding Arabization policies of the Algerian state, Tayeb has been known as an ardent defender of Arabo-Islamic heritage.[165] It has been by and large religious scholars such as Tayeb and the representatives of the Tamazight Islamist spectrum, which have opposed the adoption of either the non-Arabic based (Neo-)Tifinagh (*tīfīnāġ*) script and Latin script to write Tamazight.[166]

Based on an old but almost forgotten Tuareg script, Neo-Tifinagh was developed among the Kabyle diaspora in France from the 1960s onwards. It has afterwards achieved official recognition in Morocco, but still has to compete with both Arabic and Latin script as preferred medium for the writing of Tamazight.[167] Tayeb, for instance, made a conscious choice to write his translation in Arabic script.[168] Moreover, he recently argued that Tamazight must be written in Arabic letters and warned vehemently against writing it in Latin script.[169] Against this background, it is particularly noteworthy that the KFQC has produced a Latin edition (*bi-l-ḥarf al-lātīnī*) of Tayeb's translation as well. The publisher's desire to maximize its audience has thus trumped the translator's convictions.

Whereas N'ko and Tamazight (in either Latin or Neo-Tifinagh) are recently devised scripts, the case is different with ancient Cham script. Derived from South Indian scripts, it has been largely supplanted by the Arabic-derived *jawi* script among the great majority of Muslim Cham-language users. Thus, also the first two published Cham Quran translations (published in 2011/2012) are in *jawi*. Contrastingly, the Cham script has only been preserved among comparably isolated communities in Cambodia and Vietnam. These are holding on to a strongly localized Islamic tradition, which exhibits many particularities, and is doctrinally and ritually linked to an old Cham manuscript tradition.[170] Hasan Poklaun, the author of the Vietnamese translation published by the

165. AlKroud, "Renarrating the Berbers", pp. 129–130.
166. AlKroud, "Renarrating the Berbers", p. 52.
167. Aïtel, *We Are Imazigen*, pp. 114–117; Pouessel, "Writing as Resistance", pp. 378–381, 389; AlKroud, "Renarrating the Berbers", pp. 50–52.
168. AlKroud, "Renarrating the Berbers", pp. 132 sq.
169. "Uktubū al-amāzīġiyya bi-l-ʿarabiyya".
170. Bruckmayr, "Changing Fates of Cambodian Islamic Manuscript Tradition".

KFQC, has recently submitted his Cham translation of the Quran, the first full translation in Cham script, to the KFQC for approval.[171]

Through this work, he hopes to lead the last users of Cham script, whose beliefs and practices are regarded as syncretic or deviant by other Muslims, to a true understanding of the Quran. What is more, he additionally envisions his translation as a mechanism to guard against the loss of Cham language among the Cham diaspora as well as in the homeland in Vietnam, where Chams are making up less than 1% of the population. Furthermore, he desires it to make a decisive contribution to the preservation of Cham script as "a treasure of knowledge and literature".[172] Thus, whereas, in the case of the KFQC's Latin Tamazight edition, the institution lent support to a contested vehicle of non-Arab cultural re-assertiveness against the wishes of the translator, Poklaun intends his Cham translation to function as much as a device for religious predication as for cultural preservation.

Conclusion

Considering the reverence shown to the Medina Quran, its wide distribution, and its success as a brand, the prevailing view of the Cairo Quran's ongoing unrivalled position needs to be qualified. Notwithstanding the standardizing effect of the second (1952) Cairo edition, which also served as the model for its Saudi Arabian counterpart, it is by now clearly overshadowed in global Muslim consciousness by the Medina Quran. The KFQC has succeeded in closely tying its product to sacred Islamic geography through its association with Medina and by entwining it with the pilgrimage. It has also generated a certain degree of standardization through the wide transmission of its ʿUṯmān Ṭāhā *muṣḥaf*, as the epitome of the Medina Quran. Through its efforts in the sphere of digital processing and its license for free reuse, the KFQC attempts to extend the influence of this format into the digital realm.

Contrarily, the KFQC has, through the different versions of the Medina Quran according to different readings, contributed to the present unprecedented diversity of available Quran editions. Its greatest standardizing effect

171. As a first step, an exclusively Cham edition, without the Arabic text, but providing the translation in both ancient Cham script and Latin script, has been published in late 2022. Tu, "Translating the Qurʾān", p. 34.

172. Personal communication with Hassan Poklaun (Hassan Bin Abdul Karim) (online, October 1, 2022).

thus lies in the branding of its diverse products as equally representing the Medina Quran. This latter perception has been greatly facilitated by the large number of Medina Quran translations and their simultaneous entrenchment in local Islamic traditions and in global Salafi networks centered on Medina. The reliance on Salafi scholars, many of them educated and/or active at the IUM, is particularly marked among those tasked with correcting translations before publication, but also, although to a lesser degree among translators themselves. Nevertheless, as shown above, due to the absence of Salafi-oriented translations in many languages and the prestige attached to specific translations in others, the KFQC was forced to include many translations produced by non-Salafi authors into its portfolio. The sample of thirty translations surveyed for this study includes twelve works by scholars with Salafi backgrounds, five that could be described as reformist, with at least certain agendas and approaches shared by Salafi translators,[173] and thirteen with a traditional non-Salafi orientation. Even though this sample should not be taken as representative, it clearly suggests that, at least as far as educational background, school or group affiliation and scholarly orientation are concerned, many of the KFQC's translators are not from the Salafi camp. Still, the mostly locally educated scholars fluent in the vernaculars, who are tasked with assessing the translations and suggesting revisions, are presumably instrumental for the domestication of KFQC translations of diverse character.

Ironically, the association of the Medina Quran with Salafi Islam, although—particularly in the field of translations—at times less pervasive than is often assumed, represents both a basis as well as one of the limitations of its outreach. An instructive perspective on the former aspect is provided by one of the first (or perhaps the first) works published outside of the KFQC to include the Medina Quran. The book in question is an abridgement of *Fatḥ al-qādir*, the Quranic commentary of the among Salafis highly valued Yemeni scholar Muḥammad al-Šawkānī (d. 1250/1834), by the Palestine-born Muḥammad Sulaymān al-Ašqar (d. 2009),[174] an erstwhile teacher at IUM in its early years.[175]

173. I am including the translators with Deobandi credentials in this category. That even the work of a reformist translator such as Farsy prompted long-drawn debates about revisions desired by the KFQC's scholarly committee testifies to the fact that works of this category may still include exegetical translations shunned by Salafi scholars, even though certainly to a lesser degree than those authored by translators endorsing more traditional understandings influenced by the tradition of the established legal and theological schools.

174. Al-Ašqar, *Zubdat al-tafsīr*.

175. Birjas, "Sh. Mohammad Sulayman Al-Ashqar".

In his original introduction from 1985, the author praises al-Šawkānī for following the method of the *salaf* in practice and belief, and "for calling people to clear truths, turning them away from superstition and distancing them from *taqlīd* [i.e., the practice of emulation within the schools of law]".[176] He then emphasizes that his engagement with *Fatḥ al-qādir* dates to his time at the IUM. In his foreword to the new edition from 2000, he notes that the original edition had appeared in the margins of the "Cairo Quran" (*Muṣḥaf al-Qāhira*, i.e., the 1952 edition). Yet, many scholars subsequently desired to see it published together with the Medina Quran, which was eventually made possible by a special license from the KFQC.[177]

Even though al-Ašqar explicitly links the perceived superiority of the Medina Quran to its greater precision and perfection, the author's orientation, which is mirrored in his choice of *tafsīr* and his description of the commentator, and his institutional background, strongly suggest that also other factors were at play in this switch from the Cairo to the Medina Quran. Conversely, certain segments of the global Muslim population simply refuse to endorse a perceived Saudi Quran. For the latter as well as for those opting for the Medina Quran primarily for concerns of identity and doctrine, Schmitt's saying holds true: "Tell me which *muṣḥaf* you are using, and I will tell you to which orientation you belong."[178]

Yet, as shown in the foregoing, the reasons for using or privileging the Medina Quran are diverse and often multiple. On the institutional level, the weight of the KFQC as prime locus of Saudi Arabian religiously framed soft power was recently brought into focus during a visit by Muḥammad Muḫtār Ǧumʿa (b. 1966), the Egyptian Minister of Endowments. On this occasion, Ǧumʿa, who is also the dean of al-Azhar's Faculty of Islamic Studies, emphasized "the Egyptian resolve to take advantage of the kingdom's experience with this great complex, which serves the world's Muslims".[179] In this respect he also highlighted the signing of an executive program between his ministry and the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs to serve the cause of Islam and to spread the teachings of the middle-way and moderation (*našr al-wasaṭiyya wa-l-iʿtidāl*). Even if such reports perhaps primarily reflect the current Egyptian dependence on Saudi Arabia in the political and economic sphere, it is beyond

176. Al-Ašqar, "Muqaddima", p. [i].
177. Al-Ašqar, "Taqdīm", p. [ii]. The number of the special license is provided directly after the title page of the work.
178. Schmitt, *Kein Standard*, p. 119.
179. Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd, "Wazīr al-awqāf al-miṣrī".

doubt that the KFQC's Medina Quran has acquired a prominent place among Muslims worldwide and has become the first major brand in Quran publishing on a global scale. If the KFQC and its Medina Quran are primarily understood as Saudi tools to weaken the authority of contending religious centers, such as Cairo and the al-Azhar, then this strategy, which needs to be viewed in a broader geopolitical perspective, seems to have been a success for the time being.

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Abstract / Résumé / ملخّص

In contrast to the 1924 Cairo edition, the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Glorious Quran (Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibāʿat al-Muṣḥaf al-Šarīf, KFQC) and its so-called Medina Quran have so far received comparably little scholarly attention. Established in 1982, the KFQC had produced over 300 million copies of its Medina Quran by the year 2019. What is more, due to its wide distribution, including as a gift for pilgrims, and its association with Islamic sacred geography, the fame of the Medina Quran overshadows that of the Cairo edition among Muslim audiences by now. The present contribution traces the emergence of the Medina Quran as a global brand in Quran publishing. In this regard, it discusses its institutional context within Saudi Arabia and the KFQC, and its relationship to the Salafi mission. Finally, it highlights the role of translations in the rise to prominence of the Medina Quran.

Keywords: Medina Quran, King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Glorious Quran, Quran translations, Salafi Islam, Islamic University of Medina.

Contrairement à l'édition du Caire de 1924, le Complexe du roi Fahd pour l'impression du glorieux Coran (Muǧammaʿ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibāʿat al-Muṣḥaf al-Šarīf, KFQC) et son « Coran de Médine » ont jusqu'à présent reçu peu d'attention de la part des chercheurs. Créé en 1982, le KFQC avait produit plus de 300 millions d'exemplaires de son Coran de Médine en 2019. De plus, en raison de sa large diffusion, y compris comme cadeau pour les pèlerins, et de

son association avec la géographie sacrée de l'Islam, la renommée du Coran de Médine éclipse désormais celle de l'édition du Caire dans les milieux musulmans. La présente contribution retrace l'émergence du Coran de Médine comme « marque mondiale » dans l'édition du Coran. À cet égard, elle examine son contexte institutionnel en Arabie saoudite et au sein du KFQC, ainsi que sa relation avec la mission salafiste. Enfin, il souligne le rôle des traductions dans la montée en puissance du Coran de Médine.

Mots-clés : Coran de Médine, Complexe du roi Fahd pour l'impression du Coran glorieux, traductions du Coran, Islam salafiste, Université islamique de Médine.

على النقيض من طبعة الملك فؤاد بالقاهرة عام ١٩٢٤، فإنّ «مُجمّع الملك فهد لطباعة المصحف الشريف» وما يسمّى بـ«مصحف المدينة» لم يحظَ حتّى الآن سوى بالقليل من الاهتمام الأكاديميّ. تأسّس «مُجمّع الملك فهد» في عام ١٩٨٢، وقد طُبع أكثر من ثلاثمائة مليون نسخة من «مصحف المدينة» بحلول عام ٢٠١٩. وعلاوةً على ذلك، نظرًا لتوزيعه على نطاقٍ واسع، بما في ذلك كونه هديّة للحجّاج، وارتباطه بالمدينة المنوّرة، فقد اشتهر هذا المصحف أكثر من مصحف الملك فؤاد بين جماهير المسلمين. يتتبّع هذا المقال ظهور «مصحف المدينة» كـ«علامةٍ عالميّة» في نشر المصاحف. في هذا الصدد، يناقش المقال السياق المؤسّسيّ داخل المملكة العربيّة السعوديّة وفي «مُجمّع الملك فهد»، وعلاقته بالدعوة السلفيّة. أخيرًا، يسلّط المقال الضوء على دور الترجمات في ظهور «مصحف المدينة».

الكلمات المفتاحيّة: «مصحف المدينة»، «مُجمّع الملك فهد لطباعة المصحف الشريف»، ترجمات معاني القرآن، السلفيّة، الجامعة الإسلاميّة بالمدينة المنوّرة.