

A Critical Study of Rodwell's Translation of the Qur'an

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Abstract

The Holy Qur'an has been translated by many scholars both Muslims and orientalisists. Latin was the first Western language in which the Holy Qur'an was translated. In 1143, an Englishman Robert of Ketton completed his Latin translation of the Muslim Scripture which was published in 1543 by Theodore Buchmann from Basel. Andre du Ryer rendered the Holy Qur'an into French and published it in 1647. Alexander Ross was the first English translator who published his translation in 1649 that was actually based on du Ryer's French Translation. In 1734, George Sale translated the Holy Qur'an directly from Arabic. This article introduces the English rendering of the Holy Qur'an by John Meadow Rodwell who claimed to rearrange Quranic Surahs according to chronological order. In this article his translation and chronological order have been analysed and some of lacunae have been pointed out.

Keywords: Rodwell, Orientalists, Quranic Translation

John Meadow Rodwell was born on April 11, 1808 at Barham Hall in the County of Suffolk. He was educated at Bury school under Dr. Malkin. He received his B.A. from Caius and Gonville College Cambridge in 1830 and M.A. in 1834. From the Reverend W. Kirby Rector of Barham, the celebrated naturalist and father of English Entomology he derived great knowledge and in 1833 became his curate. Rodwell used to express a debt of everlasting gratitude to the memory of his maternal uncle the Rev Robert Kedington M.A. of Babergh Hall the County, who took an unceasing interest in his education. He instilled in J.M. Rodwell sound church principles – a love for natural science - and a taste for learning generally, especially in the field of languages. According to Gemma Jamieson and Najat Douslimane, he entered Caius College in Cambridge in the autumn of 1825 as a Scholar. Rodwell was ordained Deacon at Norwich on 5 June 1831 and was priested in London on June 17th 1832. In 1834, he married Elizabeth the eldest daughter of the Reverend William Parker, Rector of St Ethelburga's. Two sons from this marriage survived him. Elizabeth died in 1857 and was buried at Broxbourne in Hertfordshire. Two years later he married Louisa Rohrs at Hampstead Parish Church.¹

According to Rodwell's own account "In the year of our Lord 1843 I was appointed to the rectory of St Ethelburga Bishopsgate on the Collation of the Right Reverend Charles James Bloomfield DD Lord Bishop of this Diocese. I had previously laboured for nine years in the charge of St Peter's Saffron Hill as the first incumbent of that populous and poor district containing 13,000 souls – and the Bishop was good enough to say that he presented me to St. E's in acknowledgement of what he was pleased to term "my arduous and earnest labours in that anxious sphere of duty".²

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He was a busy parish priest but kept up his scholarly interests which were not confined to linguistics. As a Cambridge friend of Charles Darwin, he accompanied the great scientist on botanical excursions. His correspondence manifests his talent as a naturalist. His suggestions were appreciated by Darwin and he also informed him about reaction of Church on his writings pertaining to evolution. Unlike many of his clerical brethren, Rodwell continued to take a sympathetic interest in Darwin's researches and the latter highly valued Rodwell's views on naturalism.³

While reading Hebrew from an early age with his uncle, he acquired the rudiments of Arabic with the help of one Joseph Catafago. It is hard to tell how Rodwell acquired his profound linguistic learning which included not only Arabic and Hebrew but Coptic, Ge'ez or Ethiopic as well.⁴ He published the following translations of some books from Hebrew and also material from Ethiopic and Coptic liturgies:

1. The Book of Job⁵
2. The Prophecies of Isaiah⁶
3. Aethiopic liturgies and hymns, Part I⁷ & Part II⁸

In 1861, John Meadow Rodwell (d.1900) published a new translation of the Qur'an. It was unusual in that, for the first time in a translation of the Qur'an, the surahs were arranged by taking into consideration their chronological order. Rodwell could refer to the prior works of Gustav Weil, William Muir and Theodore Noldeke; he nevertheless followed his own ideas about arrangement, compiling the older surahs according to thematic consideration rather than historical allusion. Particularly noteworthy is Rodwell's perception of the significance of the originally oral character of the Qur'an.

After his death in 1900, Edward Sell (1839—1932) compiled "Selections from the Qur'an" that was published by Christian Literature Society for India in 1910.⁹ In 1922, it was edited by Herbert Udney Weitbrecht Stanton and republished.¹⁰

Richard John Carew, the bishop of London, said in "The Inaugural Rodwell Lecture" about his translation of the Holy Qur'an:

"He made a significant contribution to scholarship in a translation of the Qur'an which did more justice to the beauty of the original and so contributed to the growing appreciation of Islam in Europe..... Similarly in his great work of translation he gives evidence of sympathy and admiration for Islam which was anything but universal among his contemporaries. "The more insight we obtain from undoubted historical sources into the actual character of Muhammad the less reason do we find to justify the strong vituperative language poured out upon his head by Maracci, Prideaux and others in recent days." He also notes, in manner reminiscent of Carlyle, that the Qur'an was responsible for transforming the wandering Bedouin of Arabia "as if by a magician's wand into the founders of Empires, the builders of cities, the collectors of more libraries than they at first destroyed, while cities like Fostat, Baghdad, Cordova and Delhi, attest the power at which Christian Europe trembled."¹¹

G. Margoliouth, who revised the translation for the "Everyman's Library" in 1909, has praised it in his introduction in the following way:

"One is happy to be able to say that Rodwell's rendering is one of the best that have as yet been produced. It seems to a great extent to carry with it the atmosphere in which Muhammed lived, and its sentences are imbued with the flavour of the East. The quasi-verse form, with its unfettered and irregular rhythmic flow of the lines, which has in suitable cases been adopted, helps to bring out much of the wild charm of the Arabic. Not the least among its recommendations is, perhaps, that it is scholarly without being pedantic that is to say, that it aims at correctness without sacrificing the right effect of the whole to over-insistence on small details."¹²

According to Palmer, "Rodwell's version approaches nearer to the Arabic, but even in that there is too much assumption of the literary style."¹³ Hāfiz Ghulām Sarwar thinks that Rodwell's translation is a most careful piece of work done in an extremely scholarly way, and although there are many mistakes, they are not of such a nature as to call for adverse criticism.¹⁴

At an other place, Hāfiz Ghulām Sarwar says about the Rodwell's rendering, "As to Rodwell's translation, I have not words enough to praise its literary beauty or its painstaking accuracy. There are occasionally slips.... His work first inspired me with the idea of translating the Holy Qur'an into English."¹⁵

'Abdullah Yusūf 'Alī, a famous translator and commentator of the Holy Qur'an remarked, "The Rev. J.M. Rodwell arranged the suras in a rough chronological order.... Though he tries to render the idiom fairly, his notes show the mind of a Christian clergyman, who was more concerned to "show up" the Book than to appreciate or expound its beauties."¹⁶

A.J. Arberry says, "Rodwell's rendering is, to my taste at all event, more tolerable."¹⁷ Stanley Lane-Poole acknowledged that he had benefited from J.M. Rodwell's translation while compiling his "The Speeches & Table-Talk of the Prophet Mohammad".¹⁸

Professor Abdel Haleem thinks, "His perspective on the Qur'an was a strongly biblical one. One oddity is his disregard for the traditional Muslim arrangement of the *sūras*, rearranging them into what he thought to be the chronological order; moreover some of the footnotes include material that is incorrect and offensive to Muslims. Nonetheless he had a linguistic talent that enabled him to come up with innovative solutions to previously intractable problems. It is easy to perceive the influence of Rodwell's work on many subsequent translators. Rodwell also instigated the practice of partial numbering of Qur'anic verses, providing some help to those wishing to cite passages from his translation."¹⁹ Charles Darwin remarked to Rodwell in one of his letters referring to his translation by saying, "What a linguist you must be to translate the Koran."²⁰ According to Harmut Bobzin, Rodwell's translation is "one of the best that have as yet been produced. It seems to great extent to carry with it the atmosphere in which Muhammed lived, and its sentences are imbued with the flavour of the east."²¹

Dr. Muhammad Mohar Ali (1932-2007) opines about Rodwell's work, "He produced this translation by arranging the surahs in a chronological order ... In thus arranging the surahs in a new order Rodwell followed the lines indicated by Muir and Noldeke. The obvious purpose was to give a confused view about the Qur'an and to show that it consisted only of fragments of disjointed truth derived from Judaism and Christianity. Another intention was to prove that Muhammad, peace and blessing of Allah be on him, was its author. All the previous orientalist had had of course uniformly asserted this; but Rodwell's rearrangement of the surahs was aimed at proving this from the contents of the Qur'an. In this design also he was influenced by Muir. In many of his notes Rodwell even suggested that the Prophet revised and recast the ayahs and inserted them into the surahs as he thought proper and as the occasions demanded." ²¹a

According to Samuel M. Zwemer, this version has many inaccuracies, especially in the use of tenses and particles. ²² Like his predecessors Rodwell alleged that the Prophet of Islām (peace be upon him) borrowed from earlier scriptures.

"It is quite clear that Muḥammad borrowed in several points from the doctrines of the Ebionites, Essenes, and Sabeites. Epiphanius (H'r. x.) describes the notions of the Ebionites of Nabath'a, Moabitis, and Basanitis with regard to Adam and Jesus, almost in the very words of Sura iii. 52. He tells us that they observed circumcision, were opposed to celibacy, forbade turning to the sunrise, but enjoined Jerusalem as their Kebla (as did Muḥammad during twelve years), that they prescribed (as did the Sabeites), washings, very similar to those enjoined in the Koran, and allowed oaths (by certain natural objects, as clouds, signs of the Zodiac, oil, the winds, etc.), which we find adopted in the Koran. These points of contact with Islam, knowing as we do Muhammad's eclecticism, can hardly be accidental." ²³ He further says, "And we may be quite certain that whatever materials Muḥammad may have derived from our Scriptures, directly or indirectly, were carefully recast. He did not even use its words without due consideration. For instance, except in the phrase "the Lord of the worlds," he seems carefully to have avoided the expression the Lord, probably because it was applied by the Christians to Christ, or to God the Father." ²⁴

He acknowledged, "We (orientalists) have no evidence that Muhammad had access to the Christian Scriptures, though it is just possible that fragments of the Old or New Testament may have reached him through Chadijah or Waraka, or other Meccan Christians, possessing MSS. of the sacred volume." ²⁵

About borrowing from Judaism he says, "From the Arab Jews, Muḥammad would be enabled to derive an abundant, though most distorted, knowledge of the Scripture histories. The secrecy in which he received his instructions from them, and from his Christian informants, enabled him boldly to declare to the ignorant pagan Meccans that God had revealed those Biblical histories to him. But there can be no doubt, from the constant identity between the Talmudic perversions of Scripture

histories and Rabbinic moral precepts, that the Rabbins of the Hejāz communicated their legends to Muḥammad.”²⁶

This formula—Bismillahi 'rrahmani 'rrahim—is of Jewish origin. It was in the first instance taught to the Koreisch by Omayah of Taief, the poet, who was a contemporary with, but somewhat older than, Muḥammad; and who, during his mercantile journeys into Arabia Petr'a and Syria, had made himself acquainted with the sacred books and doctrines of Jews and Christians. (Kitāb al-Aghānī, 16. Delhi.) Muḥammad adopted and constantly used it, and it is prefixed to each Sūra except the ninth.²⁷

As he did not believe in the Qur'an as a revealed book, therefore, he wrote, “About verse 74:42, He wrote, “As the word *sakar* disturbs the rhyme, it may have been inserted by a mistake of the copyist for the usual word, which suits it.”²⁸ About the chronological order of sūras used in his translation Rodwell writes:

“The arrangement of the Sūras in this translation is based partly upon the traditions of the Muhammadans themselves, with reference especially to the ancient chronological list printed by Weil in his Mohammed der Prophet, as well as upon a careful consideration of the subject matter of each separate Sūra and its probable connection with the sequence of events in the life of Muhammad. Great attention has been paid to this subject by Dr. Weil in the work just mentioned; by Mr. Muir in his Life of Mahomet, who also publishes a chronological list of Suras, 21 however of which he admits have “not yet been carefully fixed;” and especially by Nöldeke, in his Geschichte des Qōrans, a work to which public honours were awarded in 1859 by the Paris Academy of Inscriptions. From the arrangement of this author I see no reason to depart in regard to the later Sūras.”²⁹

Again he is inclined to prove that the Qur'an was the result of the Holy Prophet's contemplation. He observes:

“The Sūras, viewed as a whole, strike me as being the work of one who began his career as a thoughtful enquirer after truth, and an earnest asserter of it in such rhetorical and poetical forms as he deemed most likely to win and attract his countrymen, and who gradually proceeded from the dogmatic teacher to the politic founder of a system for which laws and regulations had to be provided as occasions arose. And of all the Sūras it must be remarked that they were intended not for readers but for hearers—that they were all promulgated by public recital—and that much was left, as the imperfect sentences shew, to the manner and suggestive action of the reciter.”³⁰

By changing the order of sūras Rodwell placed *al-'Alaq* or *Iqra'* (Sūra 96 in original order) in his translation and placed it in the beginning of his mission. But the whole sūra was not revealed during the first revelation. According to a hadīth narrated by Imām Bukhārī first five verses were revealed when the angel came to him for the first time³¹ and the later part of this sūra was revealed at a later period after revelation of several other complete sūras and portions of some other sūras.³²

It has been acknowledged even by Rodwell in his footnote added to the rendering of verse 6 that reads as follows:

“This and the following verses, may have been added at a later period, though previous to the Flight, and with special reference, if we are to believe the commentators Beidhawī, etc., to the opposition which Muḥammad experienced at the hands of his opponent, Abū Jahl, who had threatened to set his foot on the Prophet’s neck when prostrate in prayer.”³³

The opposition from Abū Jahl started when the Prophet started preaching his religion and even initiated praying in *Masjid al-Harām*. So it can be said with certitude that the first five verses were revealed during first *wahy* and the remaining 14 verses were received by the Prophet after some years. Between these two revelations some other extracts of the Qur’ān were revealed by Almighty Allāh.

There is no consensus of orientalists regarding chronology of sūras. William Muir has placed this sūraat number 19 in chronological order devised by him.³⁴

According to Rodwell the second sūra in chronological order is Sūrat al-Mudaththir that is at No.74 in the order followed by Muslims. This Sura is placed by Muir in the “second stage” of Meccan Suras, and twenty-first in chronological order, in the third or fourth year of the Prophet’s career. According, however, to the chronological list of Suras given by Weil (*Leben M.* p.364) from ancient tradition, as well as from the consentient voice of tradionists and commentaries (v. Nöld. *Geschichte*, p. 69; Sprenger’s *Life of Mohammad*, p. 111) it was the next revealed after the *Fatrah*, and the designation to the prophetic office. The main features of the tradition are, that Muḥammad while wandering about in the hills near Mecca, distracted by doubts and by anxiety after truth, had a vision of the Angel Gabriel seated on a throne between heaven and earth, that he ran to his wife, Chadijah, in the greatest alarm, and desired her, perhaps from superstitious motives (and believing that if covered with clothes he should be shielded from the glances of evil spirits—comp. Stanley on I Cor. xi. 10), to envelope him in his mantle; that then Gabriel came down and addressed him as in v. I. This vision, like that which preceded Sūra xcvi., may actually have occurred during the hallucinations of one of the epileptic fits from which Muhammad from early youth appears to have suffered. Hence Muḥammad in Sūra lxxxi. appeals to it as a matter of fact, and such he doubtless believe it to be. It may here be observed, that however absurd the Muslim traditions may be in many of their details, it will generally be found that where there is an ancient and tolerably universal consent, there will be found at the bottom a residuum of fact and historical truth. At the same time there can be no doubt but that the details of the traditions are too commonly founded upon the attempt to explain or to throw light upon a dark passage of the Koran, and are pure inventions of a later age.³⁵

Rodwell himself believes that this sūra too was not revealed during a single revelation. On the verse 31, his footnote reads, “This and the three following verses wear the appearance of having been inserted at a later period to meet objections respecting the number of the angels who guard hell, raised by the Jews; perhaps at Medina, as the four classes of persons specified are those whom Muhammad had to

deal with in that city, viz., the Jews, Believers, the Hypocrites, or undecided, and Idolaters. These are constantly mentioned together in the Medina Sūras.”³⁶

According to Watt there seems to be little connection between different sections of this sūra.³⁷ So this was also not revealed in a single revelation .

Sūrat al-Fatiḥah is placed at No.8 with the following note: “This sūra, which Nöldeke places last, and Muir sixth, in the earliest class of Meccan Sūras, must at least have been composed prior to Sūra xxxvii. 182, where it is quoted, and to Sura xv. 87, which refers to it. And it can scarcely be an accidental circumstance that the words of the first, second, and fifth verses do not occur in any other sūras of the first Meccan period as given by Noldeke, but frequently in those of the second, which it therefore, in Noldeke, opinion, immediately precedes. But this may be accounted for by its having been recast for the purposes of private and public devotion by Muḥammad himself, which is the meaning probably of the Muhammadan tradition that it was revealed twice. It should also be observed that, including the auspicious formula, there are the same number of petitions in this sūra as in the Lord's Prayer. It is recited several times in each of the five daily prayers, and on many other occasions, as in concluding a bargain, etc. It is termed "the Opening of the Book," "the Completion," "the Sufficing Sūra," the Sūra of Praise, Thanks, and Prayer," "the Healer," "the Remedy," "the Basis," "the Treasure," "the Mother of the Book," "the Seven Verses of Repetition." The Muhammadans always say "Amen" after this prayer, Muḥammad having been instructed, says the Sonna, to do so by the Angel Gabriel.”³⁸

According to W. Montgomery Watt it is difficult to date because of its special character, but the probability is that it is fairly early, about the fourth year of Muḥammad's mission, AD 613.³⁹

About its revelation Muḥammad Asad says, "The Opening" was one of the earliest revelations bestowed upon the Prophet. Some authorities (for instance, 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib) were even of the opinion that it was the very first revelation; but this view is contradicted by authentic Traditions quoted by both Bukhārī and Muslim, which unmistakably show that the first five verses of sūra 96 ("The Germ-Cell") constituted the beginning of revelation. It is probable, however, that whereas the earlier revelations consisted of only a few verses each, "The Opening" was the first sūra revealed to the Prophet in its entirety at one time: and this would explain the view held by 'Alī.⁴⁰

Efforts pertaining to re-arrangement of sūras of the Qur'ān according to chronological order have always been reprehensible to by Muslims. Rightly did S.Paevez Mansoor say, “The reasons for the orientalist obsession with dating and chronology are not far to seek. At its most obvious, the theme of chronology which itself is a category of history, provides a chain of temporal, and hence causal, ‘explanations’ for the ‘phenomena’ of the Qur'ān. Not only does such a ‘natural’ order of events obviate the need for any supernatural and transcendental agency, which is the claim of the Muslim perception, but with the introduction of the category of ‘sequential time’ in the working of the Sacred, the notions of historical

relativity or relative truth are also reinstated at the heart of our cognition. If the Qur'ān itself may be understood as a chronological sequence of events, then whatever truth that it proclaims cannot be but temporal, and hence fallible.”⁴¹

About his sources Rodwell has told in his preface⁴² and in various footnotes A list of these sources in a compiled form is given below:

1. Life of Mohammed by Sprenger
2. Life of Mohammad by Guatav Weil
3. Life of Mahomet by Sir William Muir
4. Decline and Fall by Gibbon
5. Modern Egyptians by Edward William Lane
6. Selections from the Kur-'an by E.W.Lane
7. Geschichte des Qorans by Noldeke
8. The Koran by George Sale
9. Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani by Father Louis Marrassi

10. Le Coran: traduit de l'arabe, accompagné de notes, et précédé d'un Abrégé de ... by Claude Etienne Savaryparp par Claude Etienne Savary

11. Le Coran traduit par Kasimirski

12. Historia Arabum by Edward Pococke Senior
13. German translations by Wahl (Halle, 1828), L. Ullmann (Bielefeld, 1840, 4th ed. 1857), and parts by Hammer von Purgstall (in the Fundgruben des Orients), and Sprenger (in Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad).
14. Versuch einer Darstellung der Christologie des Koran by C. F. Gerock:
15. Essai sur l'histoire des Arabes by Caussin de Perceval
16. La vie de Mahomet by Jean Gagnier
17. Personal narrative of a Pilgrimage to El Medinah and Meccah by Rich. F. Burton
18. Travels in Nubia; Travels in Syria and Palestine; Notes on the Bedouins Joh. Ludwig Burckhardt
19. Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthum aufgenommen? By Abraham Geiger
20. Fluegel, Gustavus. Corani text us Arabic us

Rodwell has referred to some Muslim writers like Ibn Hishām⁴³, Abul Fidā' Ibn Kathīr⁴⁴, Tabarī⁴⁵, Waqidī⁴⁶, Suyūti⁴⁷, Baiḍāwī⁴⁸, Zamakharī⁴⁹, Jalālyn⁵⁰, Waḥidī⁵¹, Ibn Batoūta⁵² and Sharastanī⁵³. But such references are not from original books but either from secondary sources or from the translations of these authors' books into European languages. He has alluded to the Talmud⁵⁴, and different books of Old Testament and New Testament.⁵⁵

An extract (49:2-5) is quoted here as an example of his simple rendering that is Consider his rendering of first six verses of Sūrah Ash-Shams:

“By the Sun and his noonday brightness!
By the Moon when she followeth him!
By the Day when it revealeth his glory!
By the night when it when it enshroudeth him!
By the Heaven and Him who built it!
By the Earth and Him who spread it forth!”⁵⁶

This translation is very plain and easily intelligible. It is almost similar to the translations by later Muslim scholars. For instance, Pickthall translated these verses as follows:

“By the sun and his brightness, and the moon when she follows him, and the day when it reveals him, and the night when it enshrouds him, and the heavens and Him Who built it, and the earth and Him who spread it.”⁵⁷

The following rendering of Rodwell(49:2-5) is very near to the original and can be regarded as a good effort by an orientalist :

“O Believers! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, neither speak loud to him as ye speak loud to one another, lest your works come to nought, and ye unaware of it. They who lower their voices in the presence of the Apostle of God, are the persons whose hearts hath inclined to piety. Forgiveness shall be theirs and a rich reward. They who call out to thee while thou art within thine Apartments, have most of them no right perception of what is due to thee. But if they wait patiently till thou come forth to them, it were far better for them. But God is indulgent, Merciful.”⁵⁸

There are some errors or lacunae in Rodwell's translation, some of which have been pointed out below:

1. Like Sale, he has translated verse 108:2 as: “Pray therefore to the Lord, and slay the victims.”⁵⁹ This is an inaccurate rendering and wilful endeavour to prove Islam as intolerant to other religions. Secondly, he ignored adjoining pronoun in *li-Rabbi ka* meaning “to your Lord”. Actually he relied on Sale who has rendered it as: “Wherefore pray unto thy Lord; and slay the victims”⁶⁰. Its translation is easy and simple. For example, Pickthall has translated it as: “So pray to your Lord and sacrifice.”⁶¹
2. Like some other orientalists, he has translated verse 106:I in the following way: “For the union of the Koreisch”⁶² but it should be translated in any of the following ways:
“So that the Quraysh might remain secure”.....Asad⁶³
“For the taming of Quraysh”Pickthall⁶⁴
3. He has rendered verses 103:1-2 as follows: “I swear by the declining! Verily Man's lot is cast amid destruction.”⁶⁵ It can be translated simply as “By the time or by the declining day, verily man is in loss.”⁶⁶
4. Rodwell has translated *al-qāri'ah* as “The Blow”⁶⁷ but two European Muslim scholars Pickthall⁶⁸ and Asad⁶⁹ have used “The Calamity” and “The Sudden Calamity” as its equivalent respectively.
5. In the beginning of verse 22:1, he has translated *yā ayyuhannās* into “O men of Mecca”⁷⁰ which is incorrect. Its literal meaning would be “O mankind” or “O men”. He has followed Sale⁷¹ blindly without taken into consideration the Arabic text.
6. In the translation of verse 67:1, he strictly followed Sale without any slightest change: “Blessed be He in whose hand is the Kingdom.”⁷² He has wrongly used ‘the kingdom’ as equivalent of *al-mulk*. It has been translated into

‘sovereignty’ by Pickthall⁷³ and ‘dominion’ by ‘Abdullah Yūsūf ‘Alī⁷⁴ and Muḥammad Asad.⁷⁵

7. He has translated verses 30:2-4 into English as follows:

“The Greeks have been defeated in a land hard by: but after their defeat they shall defeat their foes, in a few years. First and last is the affair with God and on that day shall the faithful rejoice.”⁷⁶

The words “in a few years” need explanation either in the rendering or in footnote but Rodwell did not do so; rather tried to veil the truth of the Qur’ān by adding the following sentence: “The whole passage was probably constructed with the view of its proving true in any event.”⁷⁷ The word “*Bid’un*” in the text means a short period---a period of from three to nine years.⁷⁸ Some translators have been very careful in its translation. Pickthall has translated “*fī bid’i sinin*” as “within ten years”.⁷⁹ Hāfīz Ghulām Sarwar renders it as “within less than ten years (between 3 and 9)”⁸⁰ and Dr. Muḥammad Tāhir al-Qadrī uses “in less than a decade”.⁸¹ According to ‘Abdullah Yūsūf ‘Alī, this sūra was revealed in 614-15 A.D. The period between the loss of Jerusalem (614-15) by Romans and their victory at Issus (622) was seven years, and that to the penetration of Persia by Heraclius was nine years.⁸² Rodwell footnote reads, “But it should be borne in mind that the vowel points of the consonant of the Arabic word for *defeated* in verse 1, not being originally written and depending entirely on the speaker or reader, would make the prophecy true in either event, according as the verb received an active or passive sense in pronunciation. The whole passage was probably constructed with the view of its proving true in any event.”⁸³ Aḥmadī translator Muḥammad ‘Alī has refuted Rodwell who ‘contrives to mitigate the force of the prophecy by saying that the vowel-points were given later and therefore the prophecy could be read either way’. If the word is read *sayaghlībūn* then its meaning would be “And they, after being vanquished, shall overcome,” or reading *sayaghlābūn*, “And they, after being vanquished, shall be vanquished.” Apart from the apparent absurdity of the words becoming quite meaningless, what would be the significance of *on that day the believers shall rejoice?* for, adopting Rodwell’s reading, we should have grieve instead of rejoice, and vowel-points cannot change *yafraḥ al-mu’minūn* into *yahzan al-mu’minūn*. But there is no doubt that the actual ignorance of the manner in which the revelation of the Qur’ān was propagated is the only excuse we can offer for such an absurd suggestion. Every portion revealed was committed to memory by many men and was repeated over and over in prayers in congregation, and the vowel-points could not be left undecided. Moreover, there is clear evidence that when this verse was revealed Abū Bakr asserted in a public assembly that the Romans would overcome (the correct rendering *sayaghlībūn*) their enemies within three years, and Ubayy bin Khalf, an unbeliever, denied this, and ten camels were betted on the issue. This coming to the Holy Prophet’s knowledge, he told Abū Bakr that the time-limit of three years was not correct, for the *bid’un* signifies *from three to ten years*. The time-limit was accordingly extended and the bet raised to a hundred camels. This shows how sure were the companions and the Holy Prophet himself of the fulfillment of the prophecy.⁸⁴

He has retained some Arabic words in his translation and elucidated them in footnotes. For instance, the word *talḥ* in verse 56:29 is explained as "Probably the banana---according to others, the *acacia gummifera*"⁸⁵ Al-sidrah in verse 53:16 is elucidated as follows: "The Sidrah is a prickly plum, which is called Ber in India, the *zizyphus jujuba* of Linnaeus. A decoction of the leaves is used in India to wash the dead, on account of the sacredness of the tree."⁸⁶

The names of some Muslim personalities and places have been wrongly transliterated like Chadijah⁸⁷ (Khadījah), Ibn Hisam⁸⁸ (Ibn Hishām), Uhlemas⁸⁹ ('ulāma' meaning religious scholars), Chalif⁹⁰ (Caliph)

Apart from his chronological order and footnotes, Rodwell's translation is better than the rendering of Sale. That is why, Ghulām Sarwar wrote, "I do sincerely wish that someone who is capable of doing the work may rearrange Rodwell's translation according to the order of sūras in the original and reprint it, with Rodwell's comments left out of the translation."⁹¹ But the material of footnotes, preface and chronological order of sūras introduced by him first time in any translation of the Holy Qur'an have concealed some good qualities of his rendering.

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Letter 2976: Darwin, C. R. to Rodwell, J. M., 5 November 1860
Letter 3012: Rodwell, J. M. to Darwin, C. R., 6 December 1860
Letter 8063 Rodwell, J.M. to Darwin, C.R., 11 November 1871
Letter 10981 Rodwell, J.M. to Darwin, C.R., 01 June 1877
Letter 10981f Darwin, C.R. to Rodwell, J.M. 03 June 1877
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