The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān and the Orientalist Terminology of Islam: The Imposition of Translated Equivalents to Avoid Translation. Terminological Analysis of Some Koranic Terms and Conclusions

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Abstract

The only scientific paradigm that Western scholars have created for Islam and its culture is orientalism, but this paradigm has certain shortcomings, particularly regarding the understanding of terms in Arabic and its translation in European languages. This deficiency is most evident when we talk about the studies on the Qur'ān. The article addressed some of the issues relating to the translation of the Quranic texts into Western languages. Likewise, the article presented how this understanding and translation constitute a fundamental element in creating and developing theories—whether orientalist or not— about any Arabic, Islamic or oriental topic. With this objective in mind, the article has used an example taken from the Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān by Brill publishers in Holland and compiled by Georgetown University in Washington. It showed Islamic terminology that could be considered orientalist. In addition, the article attempts to demonstrate the existence of a bibliographical gap in such an important topic, as the treatment and translation of Islamic terminology and, in particular, of the Koranic terminology, above all within the framework of orientalist studies.

Keywords: Qur'ān, encyclopaedia, Islam, orientalist, translation.

Introduction

For years, Islam is becoming the object of ever-growing interest due to politically and socially-related events and the influence these events have on western societies. Due to this, the media has tended towards a hesitant and imprecise use of the concepts related to the terminology of Islam and/or its radical tendencies, known in the press and in western studies as *Islamism*. Newspapers have been flooded with journalistic research and opinion chronicles and articles that have led to a more and more complex vocabulary. The publishing world has opened its doors to Islamic topics, however, given that the professionals directly linked to current Islamic topics (journalists, politicians, sociologists, historians, etc.) usually have limited knowledge Arabic as a language, nor the source of the Islamic lexicon, and faced with

the absence of sufficient works on Islamic terminology in Spanish, and other western languages, the use of journalistic sources and foreign essayists has triumphed, especially in the transliteration of terms. This, coupled with a lack of knowledge of the Islamic doctrine, has given rise to continuous misunderstandings and distortions that could spark greater misunderstanding and the rejection of the Islamic cultural universe.

The translator, as the *dragoman*, has, in general played an important figure as a cultural liaison and more specifically between the European and Islamic cultures. In the case of Arabic, in its relationship with Western languages, the translator becomes an essential instrument in the dialogue among the nations making up humanity and to establish a non-discriminatory world political and social balance.

It is therefore necessary to engage in an epistemological translation among civilizations that respond, in origin and configuration, to divergent epistemologies. Despite its complexity, this type of research is particularly important within academic realms, as it is vital for the mutual exchange of knowledge and experiences among civilizations, which is the only means of understanding between groups of people. If Islam is to be approached in any one of its areas or doctrines, this requires, prior to issuing scientific judgment, the understanding and assimilation of Islamic concepts to carry out this study; otherwise, we run the risk of altering or distorting the analysis and, therefore, reaching erroneous conclusions that are useless in every possible way and to anyone.

The language used in the Qur'ān translates individual systems and notions that cannot be interpreted, neither totally or exactly, with our own concepts based on Western categories of thought and analysis. When applied to a society formed under other influences and with a different religious background, this can give way, and in fact this is the case, to deceiving and non-scientific analogies.

Thus, Islamic doctrine and Koranic terminology, which requires major efforts in understanding such texts, should be understood by means of their own concepts with the help of a specific vocabulary. Because if the true sense of the words is lost, then the problem of assimilation and reception arises with its subsequent incomprehension or misunderstanding of a term. In the words of Muhammad Yūsuf 'Adas:

"The current enmity of the West against Islam […] originates in the individual experience of (the West) with religion and its inability to understand Islam for two main reasons: the single-minded nature of the European mentality and the inadequacy of European languages to assimilate the Islamic terminology. […] For the West to understand Islam, it must review its terminology referring to Islam" (Yūsuf 'Adas, *apud* 'izzat Bigovitch 1994: 19).

Having explained the above, our objective will be to clarify the role played by Arabic terminology and its understanding, as well as its translation into European languages. Likewise, we research how this understanding and translation constitute a fundamental element in creating and developing theories —whether orientalist or not— about any Arabic, Islamic or Oriental topic. With this objective in mind, we have used an example taken from the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* by Brill publishers in Holland and compiled by Georgetown University in Washington. It shows Islamic terminology we could consider *orientalist*.

The orientalist translation of Arabic terminology is only one of the elements, or one of the tools used in the creation of the "orientalist ideology" and of its vision of what is Arabian and Islamic. No doubt, the resulting translation is the least conflicting of the elements making up that orientalist ideology, in the sense that, if there are errors in the translation of the Arabic terminology, these can only be attributed to the ignorance of the Arabic language on behalf of the orientalist/translator who is using the terms incorrectly —without taking into consideration evil intentions or personal interest in a term or the would-be meaning. At the same time that the translation of Arabic terminology demonstrates the orientalist's degree of knowledge of the Arabic language, it also indicates their idea of Islam. In other words, how that particular orientalist understands Islam, and from there, by comparing the equivalent used for the terms in Arabic with the true meaning of the original, the degree of success or error in their understanding of Islam can be deduced, or rather, of the referred to Islamic texts of the translation.

The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (EOQ) and Its Use and Translation of Koranic Terminology

The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (EOQ) comes from the American academic environment and should respond to these expectations in terms of Arabic and Islamic centres with quality professionals and studies. Initially, it seemed that this encyclopaedia would be a useful and scientific instrument to assist both specialists and non-specialists in their research of the Qur'ān. However, after having analysed this encyclopaedia by means of terminological

research, and after having consulted the established lexicographical entries, we believe that this work fails to relate to expectations.

To start with, the entries have been selected and laid out according to Orientalist study criteria, ignoring the order and treatment that Muslim specialists have established with their efforts and knowledge of the topic. With respect to this matter, one of the most important mistakes that we have found in the EOQ is that the entries are determined by their translation into English, which they assign to the term in Arabic. This infringes upon one of the basic principles of translations and research: the original must always be the reference for the translation and not the translation the reference for the original.

This fact becomes a major obstacle for the reader/researcher consulting the EOQ, since when looking for a term in Arabic, it cannot be found; except for names of people or places that, occasionally, are of interest from the Orientalist perspective, but no Islamic or Koranic terms with any major importance in the Islamic doctrine. Therefore, when looking for a term, we must first consult the acyclic index where all the Arabic words that appear in the work can be found (transcribed into Latin letters) and then go to the pages indicated. Here we say 'pages' in plural, because every term appears indicated in more than one entry; and it is at this time that the task becomes even more complex if we want to know what the equivalent of a specific term is, since the reader is obliged to go searching for its equivalent, reference by reference. Moreover, in some cases, the actual term is not defined, but rather it is mentioned in a paragraph or certain section at random.

As stated, the terms are distributed in an acyclic order. Therefore, a person with certain knowledge of the Arabic language is able to search a specific term, but a newcomer will find it extremely complicated to find a term. However, most noteworthy is the inexactness of the translation and the analysis of the terms selected as the lexicographical content of the work provided by the EOQ. To demonstrate these shortcomings, we will present a few examples, as follows.

1.’Amr (أمر)

In the *Qur’ān*, this term is extraordinarily important because it appears no less than eighty-two times. However, in the *EOQ*, it is not worthy of an entry. It is truly surprising that such an important, from the doctrinal, legal and ideological point of view, lacks an entry in the

EOQ. This, in our opinion, seems to demonstrate arbitrariness and absence of scientific method in the selection of terms used.

However, in Spain, the term *'amr* has caught the attention of the arabists, since it is one of the most important chapters in Nicolás Roser Nebot's thesis on Islamic politics found in his book, *Religión y política: la concepción islámica (Religion and politics: the Islamic conception) (2002*). This thesis led to a "counter-thesis" presented by Vega Martín, Peña Martín and Feria García in their book, *El mensaje de las monedas almohades (The message of the Almohad Coins)* (2002), where they translate the term *'amr* as 'disposition'. This, in turn, sparked a counter-response by Doctor Roser Nebot in a article titled *La des-traducción del Corán: recurso sustitutivo de la traducción. El asunto de 'amr* (*The mistranslation of the* Qur'ān*: substitute translation resource: The case of 'amr)*. In this text, Roser Nebot definitively establishes the translation of *'amr* as 'issue' and 'order' in the context of the *Qur'ān*. Only in the *EOQ* entry *theology of the Qur'ān* (*EOQ* 2006: 266) does its author, T. Nagel, indicates the existence of *'amr,* and translates it, mistakenly, as *decree*.

The importance of the wording is reflected in the comment made by professor Felipe Maíllo in the entry dedicated to this word in his *Diccionario de derecho islámico (Dictionary of Islamic law*) (2005: 37), where he considers that "the usage of Koranic term *'amr* always held a series of connotations relating to the organization of the Muslim community". This entry shows the term within a historical context of political development and judicial institutions than within the context of the *Qur'ān*:

> We find the word in the expression *al-'amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (الأمر بالمعروف و النهي عن المنكر) -the structure of good and the prohibition of evil-, something that constitutes one of the bases of Muslim social ethics, and that materialized in the institutional development of the *ḥisba*, the duty involving all Muslims to work for good and to combat evil (Maíllo 2005: 37).

Nevertheless, this question is not covered in depth despite it being the major objective of Islamic law and Koranic Revelation. However, the equivalents offered by Maíllo for the word *'amr* (order, power, authority) preserve a logical and consequential correlation with the use of *'amr* in the *Qur'ān*, especially in the first meaning provided (order).

The *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2004) completely ignores the existence of this term, even though it is a text that embraces Islamic principles as a whole and not only and exclusively the *Qur'ān*. Therefore, the absence of the term *'amr* is of no greater importance than its non-

assignment. It is the very same case with the *Diccionario Islam e islamismo (Islam and Islamism Dictionary)* (2009) by Luz Gómez, which verses more on Islam as a whole, therefore the presence of *'amr* is not essential, although it would perhaps be convenient.

Interestingly, *'amr* appears in the *EOQ* with a certain degree of reflection, and as has been mentioned before, in the entry *theology of the Qur'ān,* by T. Nagel. In this entry, he proposes an equivalent different for 'order' and 'issue', which would be 'decree' (*EOQ* 2006: 266). This seems to indicate that the use of *'amr* in the context of the *Qur'ān* is not well understood. This is reinforced by the meaning given to the 'spirit manifest in the words of the Koranic revelation' by stating: "Part of this *'amr* is the 'spirit' manifest in the Word of the *Qur'ānic* revelation: they ask you about the spirit; say: 'The spirit belongs to my lord's *'amr* , but you have no knowledge bestowed upon you except a little" (*Qur'ān* 17:85) (*EOQ* 2006: 266). This statement seems to stem from the fact that Nagel does not have a clear notion of the etymology of *'amr.* The problem lies in the fact that failing to comprehend a term leads to a mistaken translation; consequently, erroneous judgements also arise. It seems evident that the reflections similar to those of Nagel reveal the fact that certain arabists do not fully understand Arabic terms, whether in the *Qur'ān* or in other texts. This is due to the fact that they come to an understanding after having tried to find an equivalent in the language they supposedly know and into which they are translating. Perhaps this is the main reason behind deviations in and misrepresentations of the Koranic terminology found in the *EOQ*. Stated differently, the analysis of the Koranic words does not proceed from their meaning in Arabic and from their understanding in that language, but rather from the interpretation given to the words that are proposed as equivalents of the Koranic words and not of the Koranic words as such. This fact could be extended to all the studies carried out on the *Qur'ān* in the West, or, at least to those that we have used in this article. In absence of further confirmation, this would mean that the judgements and opinions about the *Qur'ān* and Arabic texts are based on the hypotheses of their translations, but not on the body of terms and expressions of those specific Koranic and Arabic texts in general. Should this be the case, we would be faced with an absence of translation and with an analysis by representation rather than by translation; in other words, an analysis based on the mental representation that the arabists studying the *Qur'ān* imagine it to be and not on material reality, or if you prefer, the actual linguistics of the *Qur'ān*.

It is interesting to note that we find a flagrant contradiction between the translation of *'amr* as 'decree' in the entry *theology of the Qur'ān* and as 'authority' in the entry *kings and rulers* when speaking of the *Qur'ān* 4:59. In this latter entry and linked to the *Qur'ān* 21:73, the term *'amr* is translated as 'order' (*EOQ* 2003: 95), a more appropriate translation, because as Roser Nebot states (2010: 111), for verses similar to this, here *'amr* means 'order', or even 'plan' (of God), although without forsaking its relationship with 'issue' in any of these cases.

As a final example of the variety of translations and, therefore, of understandings of the various Koranic terms in the *EOQ*, we have the entry *politics and the Qur'ān* (*EOQ* 2004: 125) where the term *'amr* is translated, also in the *Qur'ān* 4: 59, as 'power', which is much closer to the meaning of 'order' or 'in command'. However, in this same verse, the meaning of *'amr* is 'issue': "Obey God and obey the Messenger, and those among you, who are the responsibility for these issues"[1] (2002: 93).

2. Ta'wīl (تأويل)

This term, used in the *Qur'ān* 17 times, is also unworthy of any entry in the *EOQ*, despite the importance of this term in the development of Islamic thought and in the comments of the *Qur'ān*; and, more specifically, in the explanation and interpretation carried out by the Shiites. This was pointed out by Luz Gómez García in her *Diccionario de Islam e islamismo* (Dictionary of Islam and Islamism) (2009: 332) and better still by Felipe Maíllo Salgado in his *Vocabulario básico de Historia del Islam* (*Basic Vocabulary for the History of Islam*) (1987:168). In the *Diccionario de derecho islámico* (*Dictionary of Islamic Law*), also by Maíllo Salgado, only the legal meaning of the term applied to inheritances is included. In both the *Diccionario del Islam e islamismo* and in the *Vocabulario básico de historia del Islam*, the equivalent proposed can be considered, to a certain extent, correct, 'hermeneutics' in the first one and 'interpretation' in the second. However, they stem from a slightly inappropriate explanation in the sense of being compared with *tafsīr* (تفسير) . In fact, *tafsīr* is not contrary to *ta'wīl*, but rather both designate two different moments of the apprehension of the Koranic text or of any other text. In this sense, *ta'wīl* means interpretation in the sense of understanding; that is to say, the specific understanding that one has of a certain fragment after having known its linguistic reality, while *tafsīr* is the comment made about a fragment after having fully understood it within the material reality of its linguistic components and of

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[1] The translation of the verses from the Qur'an used in this text were translated by Nicolás Roser Nebot.

its contextual connotations; it is independent of the interpretation of *ta'wīl,* which is part of the fragment in question and, generally, prior to the specific interpretation, *ta'wīl*. Thus, *tafsīr* corresponds better to *interpretation* (state and explain an issue, a proposition or a work of ingenuity) and *ta'wīl* to *elucidation* (clarification, explanation).

In any case, the *Qur'ān* itself (*Qur'ān* 12:100), indicates that *ta'wīl* refers not so much to conjectures and personal interpretive effort, but to the final meaning, to the initial meaning,[2] true and real reason of a statement or an action that only God knows in its true terms, but that it is possible for us to discover or to comprehend if we are attentive to reality. The *Qur'ān* points out this meaning of *ta'wīl* when describing the encounter between Joseph, his parents and his entire family in Egypt. The scene that unfolds is similar to the dream Joseph had years before when with his family and which caused, to a great extent, the aversion of his siblings towards him:

> And [Joseph] had his parents step up to him and sit on the throne and it was then that they all prostrated before him. Then [Joseph] said: 'This is, dear father, the interpretation [the explanation] - *ta'wīl* - of the vision I had. God has made it come true (*Qur'ān* 12: 100).

3. Tašābuh (تشابه)

Interestingly, the term *tašābuh* (likeness, similarity, figurative sense) has received the attention of the *EOQ* editors who have dedicated an extensive entry denominated 'ambiguous' (*EOQ* 2001: 70). This is wise due to the importance of the term in the *Qur'ān* and in the understanding of the Islamic message. However, they have missed the point by giving the word an incorrect meaning; they translate this term as 'ambiguity' based this on the flawed reading of Koranic verse 3:7. This verse (one of the most important from the doctrinal point of view and in understanding the *Qur'ān*) has not been understood in its true contextual meaning. This error is also repeated in practically every one of the translations of the *Qur'ān* into Spanish, since they coincide with the *EOQ* in proposing either 'ambiguous/ambiguity' or 'misunderstanding' as the equivalent translation. Likewise, in this same verse, they mistranslate the significance given to *tašābuh*. In this case, it is an error in understanding the text and, therefore, in the translation; it is a constant that we have verified in all writings on the subject in Spanish and in the case of this same verse, for example, in the

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[2] In fact, the verb *'awwala* (أول) means *return something or someone to their place of origin*. With regards to words or facts, it would be going back to the initial meaning or intention. In other words, elucidate the initial meaning of something.

Diccionario de Islam e islamismo (2009: 332) and in *Vocabulario básico de historia del Islam* (1987: 168), despite the fact that this root appears twelve times in the *Qur'ān*. On almost all the occasions which this word appears in the *Qur'ān*, as we have verified, its meaning is 'likeness' or 'similarity' and on only two occasions does it mean 'figurative' or 'metaphoric', without ever forsaking the main meaning of 'likeness' or 'similarity'. These two exceptions are found in the same verse:

> It is He who made the Text descend upon you. Therein are verses of the upright meaning (*muḥkamāt*). Those make up the body of the Text. And there are other verses that are figurative in meaning and are similar (*mutašābihāt*). Those, who in their hearts tend to stray away, are interested in the figurative and similarity (*ma tašābaha min-hu*) contained therein to create discord and seeking to interpret it as they see best. And the final interpretation is only known by God. Those who have solid knowledge of things state: 'We believe in it (the Text). The full (Text) comes from our Lord. But only those endowed with intelligence are able to understand these things (*Qur'ān* 3: 7).

Despite the fact that the entry brings up the authority of al-Zarkašī when mentioning Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nīsāb*ū*rī with regards to the fact that there are three opinions about the nature of the verses of the *Qur'ān* (that everything has a straight forward meaning, that everything has a figurative meaning or that there are sections of the *Qur'ān* with a straight forward meaning and others a figurative meaning), it appears that Leah Kinberg does not understand. Thus, she ignores the opinion of al-Zarkašī expressed prior to the mention of al-Nīsāb*ū*rī that verse 3: 7 only indicates a general characteristic of the Koranic text, but that it is not a matter of closed categories where all the verses can be placed. The fact that the opinion of al-Zarkašī (1985: II, 68) has been ignored is maybe because it does not serve the objectives the *EOQ* seemingly seeks. Thus, in addition to ignorance of the Arabic language, we must add the erroneous and biased selection of texts used to support of the theses of these *EOQ* entries. However, the real meaning of *tašābuh* is not totally overlooked by Leah Kinberg, the author of the entry: "Accordingly, *mutašābihāt* (متشابهات) are sometimes defined as verses in which the same words are used to mean different things or else as verses that use different words to express a similar sense" (*EOQ* 2001, i: 71). From here, there is a clear example of similar verses (*ambiguous* for the *EOQ* and most arabists), in other words, *mutašābihāt*, would be the similarities represented in the construction, but not in the meaning of the verses shown below. The example is in the next two verses of the *Qur'ān*.

First, *Qur'ān* 6: 151 says *"wa lā taqtulū awlāda-kum min 'imlāq. Naḥnu narzuqu-kum wa-ʾiyyā-hum "* (وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُم مِّنْ إِمْلَاقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكُمْ وَإِيَّاهُمْ). Translated, this would be: "And (do) not kill your children through poverty. We will provide for you and them".

Second, *Qur'ān* 17: 31 says *"wa lā taqtulū awlāda-kum jašyata 'imlāq. Naḥnu narzuqu-hum wa-ʾiyyā-kum "* (وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ) that is to say, "Slay not your children for fear of poverty. We will provide for them and for you".

Likewise, the *EOQ* entry incorporates *mutašābih* (متشابه: figurative in meaning or similar in form verse) in the arbitrary significance it assigns to *ambiguous* with the suspensed verses (*mansūḫ*= منسوخ) of the *Qur'ān*. However, to carry out this association, it now labels them as *ambiguous* verses, with the western equivalent, as if it had convinced us that *mutašābihāt* means *ambiguous*, when the fact that it is a suspensed verse (*mansūḫ* = منسوخ) or suspending verse (*nāsiḫ*=ناسخ) which has nothing to do with being a *mutašābih* (متشابه: figurative in meaning or similar in form verse) o *muḥkam* (محكم= upright meaning verse), but rather in the chronology of its revelation and, even more, in the practical conditions of its possible application. The aforementioned verses (*Qur'ān* 6: 151 and 17: 31) are a clear example of this.

And also we can see the same case of *tašābuh* in the next two Koranic verses. In "*kūnū qawwāmīna bi-l-qisṭ šuhadā'a li-l-lāhi*" (كُونُوا قَوَّامِين بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لله) (*Qur'ān* 4: 135): "Be responsible and act with justice as witnesses of God"; and in "*kūnū qawwāmīna li-l-lāhi šuhadā'a bi-l-qisṭ*" (كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ) (*Qur'ān* 5: 8): "Be responsible before God, testifying with justice".

When we speak of *tašābuh*, we must contradict the statement of the *EOQ* where it states that there is an intermediate category between *muḥkam* and *mutašābih*. In fact, if we refer to the *Qur'ān* itself and what Muslim scholars have contemplated on the topic, including al-Zarkašī (1985, II: 76-77), it would therefore not be a third intermediate category between two extremes or two opposites, but a third type of verses that could be considered *muḥkam* or *mutašābih* depending on our point of view when judging its form and content. The entry mentions, following *Qur'ān* 3: 7, that only God knows the meaning of the *mutašābih* verses. That is true, but not in an absolute sense; rather, it refers to whatever the interpretation that might arise from their contemplation. God will always attain a still greater and infinite number of possible interpretations —in the sense of reflections— in addition to knowing all

those that human beings could reach. The entry also states that there are some *mutašābih* verses that could be interpreted but not others. This has only been a position of some Muslim specialists, very possibly to settle ideological disputes with their opponents, since there is no Koranic prohibition in this regard. It also misunderstands the relationship established by the Muslim writers between the *mutašābih* and the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the *Qur'ān* (that we must understand, and perhaps translate, as 'inability'), because when supporting the fact that the meaning of *tašābuh* is *ambiguous*, and not figurative or metaphoric, this would mean that a great part of the *inimitability* of the *Qur'ān* would be based on its 'ambiguous' nature, when in fact it is based on its figurative and metaphoric nature. Such a conception by the *EOQ* leads to a totally inaccurate conclusion, both in the meaning of *tašābuh* and that of the 'inimitability' of the *Qur'ān*. Due to all these deviations and misrepresentations of the correct sense of the *Qur'ān* and the opinions of its commentators, the following erroneous conclusion is reached, at the end of the article of the entry:

> The *mutašābih,* on the other hand, can never be regarded as authoritative. Both the need of various streams in Islam to have their distinctive ideas anchored in the Qur'ān and the injunction to follow only the *muḥkam* verses may explain the variance in the identity of the verses which different groups view as *muḥkam* and *mutašābih* (*EOQ* 2001, i: 76).

This is despite the fact that only one sentence later recognizes that "as shown above, a verse defined by one scholar as *mutašābih* may be characterized as *muḥkam* by any other" (*ibidem*). This is totally true, but in contradiction with the previous asseveration from the *EOQ* entry. The reality of *tašābuh* is much more complex than presented by the *EOQ* entry. And the same holds true with *muḥkam*. To start with, there are several categories of *mutašābih* and not just a single category. In addition, and related with the *inimitability* of the Qur'ān, the existence of the *mutašābih* has, among others, its reason for being in the comment by Ibn 'Ãšūr, when he says that:

> When the Qur'ān talks about some signs of the Universe and its characteristics, it does so using expressions consistent with the nature presenting those phenomena. It is possible that this nature is misunderstood by some people who consider the verses mentioning those phenomena to be the *mutašābih*, without this hindering that at a later date, others come along who understand that those verses their predecessors considered to be *mutašābih* are, in reality, *muḥkam* (1997, ii: 157).

4. Ḥukm (حكم)

In the *EOQ*, this term appears in a general entry for the root *ḥakama* (حكم) with a brief allusion to *ḥukm,* which is given the meaning of 'arbitration' (*EOQ* 2001, i: 147). Despite being correct from the philological point of view, the meaning provided falls short from the standpoint of Koranic context. In the *Qur'ān*, it is not used with the meaning provided, but rather *ḥakam* (حكم) as 'arbitrator' and also in the sense of "to request and accept arbitration", in their second form *ḥakkama* (*Qur'ān* 4: 35).

The term *ḥukm* appears in the *Qur'ān* nineteen times. In all contexts where it is used, it has the meaning of willingness, ruling, decision or wisdom. It is significant that the *EOQ* fails to point out this contextual reality of the term *ḥukm* in the *Qur'ān* in the 19 verses where it is used and only makes a mere reference to the fact that it can mean 'wisdom' as this is the meaning of *ḥukm* in four of the Koranic verses (*Qur'ān* 3: 79; *Qur'ān* 6: 89; Qur'ān 19: 12; *Qur'ān* 45: 16). In the rest of passages where this word appears *ḥukm* has the meaning of 'disposition', 'ruling' or 'decision'.

Nevertheless, it is surprising that the *EOQ* does not indicate the importance of the two Koranic verses containing the word *ḥukm*. In the political history from Islam after Muḥammad, this word was the political maxim of such an important movement as was the *jawāriğ*, opponents of 'Alí and the Umayyad in equal portions. These two verses in where *ḥukm* appears are *Qur'ān* 12: 40 and *Qur'ān* 12: 67. The dictum of the *jawāriğ* is taken from the first part of these two verses: "*in al-ḥukma illa li-llah*"(إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ) that is to say, "The decision corresponds only to God."

The entry of *ḥukm* is not registered in either the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* or in the *Dictionary of Islam and Islamism*. The *Dictionary of Islamic law* by Maíllo, only includes, in fourth place, one meaning of *ḥukm* that agrees with its use in the Koranic context, when it states "[it means] judgment, in the philosophical sense of the word to order [another meaning] in the sense of putting a certain situation in order by means of a judicial verdict" (Maíllo 2005: 137).

But in the *Basic Vocabulary of the History of Islam*, this same author registers the entry *ḥakam* (arbitrator) used as a technical term of Islamic jurisprudence, although it has no problems in reflecting the meaning of this word used in the *Qur'ān*: "arbitrator who, before

beginning a process, if the parties agree, can intervene with a resolution, which has the same strength as a judicial sentence" (Maíllo 1987: 72).

Strangely, the correct development of the root *ḥakama* is included in the entry 'sovereignty' of the *EOQ* (*EOQ* 2006, v: 102), although it does confuse the Koranic context with the terminological development the terms have experienced throughout Islamic history. This translates in an absence of scientific method when establishing the objectives of an entry, which should be mean understanding Koranic terms in their context rather than from their historical derivations in Muslim societies.

5. *Mulk* (ملك)

In spite of the word *mulk* appearing 48 times in the context of the *Qur'ān*, the *EOQ* does not consider it worthy of an entry under that specific word. Nevertheless, it does appear in the entry *kings and rulers* in the *EOQ* (2003, iii: 90). In principle, the author is correct when seeking the correct equivalent to the Arabic word *mulk* (dominance, power or kingdom) although *mulk* is identified with *malakūt* (ملكوت). This is a mistake, since *malakūt* specifically means all the relationships between the created beings and all the nature or types of nature existent in the universe and that they are not perceptible using the senses or understood logically by the human being. It also means that the universe is the property of God, as well as the dignity and the power that surround God and from which the existence of created beings is deduced. Likewise, *malakūt* also means the developmental capacities of the actual existence of any creature, as in the case mentioned in the entry itself (*Qur'ān* 36: 83): "Glory to He, in whose hand is the development of the nature of all things and unto Him shall you return". The author of the entry is also correct when she explains that, with regards to the prophet and King David, this word suggests the government. Certainly it not only suggests, but rather it is the meaning of the word *mulk* when the *Qur'ān* relates it to certain prophets — according to the Islamic consideration— (for example, Joseph: *Qur'ān* 12: 101; and Salomon: *Qur'ān* 2: 102) and other human beings (*Qur'ān* 3: 26), including Nemrod (*Qur'ān* 2: 258), Saul (*Qur'ān* 2: 247-248), the Pharaoh and Moses (*Qur'ān* 43:51) and the Egyptians (*Qur'ān* 40: 29). Contrary to the opinion of Louise Marlow, the author of the entry, the *mulk* held by humankind is not negative in itself, depending on what that person is like; rather, it depends on the use made of that *mulk*. In fact —and this has been overlooked by Marlow— the *Qur'ān* distinguishes between Pharaoh in the episode with Joseph and the Pharaoh in the case of Moses, since it identifies the Pharaoh in the case of Joseph as the King (of Egypt) —

Qur'ān 12: 43/12:50/12:54/12:72/12:76— while Pharaoh in the case of Moses, who is identified as Pharaoh —*Qur'ān* 2: 49 (among many others)— states that he holds the dominance (*mulk*) of Egypt —*Qur'ān* 43: 51. Thus, the negative connotation given to the *mulk* used for the Pharaoh in the case of Moses and Nemrod, is its arbitrary use, not the simple possession of the *mulk*. It is also strange that in this entry, despite giving the words 'dominance', 'power' and 'kingdom' as equivalents for *mulk*; it is translated, incomprehensibly and in almost the whole article, as 'sovereignty', a word that is related to dominance, but only in the sense that it holds the supreme authority in a government, whatever its nature, since 'sovereignty' would better be stated as *siyāda* (سيادة).

The entry very correctly recognizes the existence of Prophet-Kings such as David and Solomon, but forgets that there were also other prophets and kings among the Hebrews and Arabs, both descendants of Abraham, as is established in verse 4:54 of the *Qur'ān*: "And we granted the descendants of Abraham the Book, wisdom, as well as a great political power (*mulk*)".

The only other meaning in the Koranic context, although exceptional, in which case, in reference to human beings, *mulk* does not mean political power, is when it is related to Adam, the first man, and the first Prophet, as established by the *Qur'ān*. When the Devil tempted Adam, he stated that God had forbidden him to eat the fruit from the tree of immortality only so that he would not be immortal and would not have exceptional dominion over all other created beings: "It was then when Satan suggested: Oh Adam, shall I indicate which is the tree of immortality and dominion (*mulk*) that will never know dissolution?" (*Qur'ān* 20: 120). It is evident that within the context in which Satan speaks to Adam, it is impossible to understand *mulk* as *political power*, in the context of political administration within the heart of humankind, but this meaning cannot be fully excluded, considering that the descendents of Adam would have to create an organization, whether short-term or long-term in the political sense, remembering how he had been created and the objective for which life was given to him. *Mulk* is mentioned in the entry *sovereignty,* but listing the opinion of Ibn Ḫaldūn (*EOQ* 2006, v: 103), forgetting that the meaning he attributes is not the meaning as used in the context of the *Qur'ān*. The term *mulk* understood by Ibn Ḫaldūn is enshrouded with the historical experience that he himself indicates and analyzes in his writings. This meaning also stems from his use of the hadith —the exact words of the Prophet Muḥammad— but not of the *Qur'ān*. In the hadith, *mulk* is applied to the "political apparatus sustained by the powers

that be and monopolising political activities" (Roser Nebot, 2002: 272). In this same entry, under "sovereignty" the verb *ḥakama* (حكم) is said to be equivalent to "to judge, decide order, exercise authority, rule and govern" (*EOQ* 2006, v: 102), when these prerogatives are only a part of the sovereignty. Nevertheless, these should be the meanings that should be elaborated upon in an entry for *ḥakama* and *ḥukm*.

Conclusion

After having seen all the above, what does seem to be 'ambiguous' is both the work plan of the *EOQ* and its result, when for one single term there are multiple translations and multiple understandings. Perhaps the Koranic verse 3:7 could be applied to the *EOQ,* although in the sense of *mutašābih*, that is to say, ambiguous. Moreover, the Koranic term *iḫtilāf* (اختلاف) could be applied —in other words, contradiction or discrepancy— because we have found multiple contradictions in the *EOQ* when defining a given Koranic term. Another reproach towards the *EOQ* is the relative disorganization in the lay-out of entry contents. On occasion, the correct explanation of Koranic terms is found in an unsuitable location and drift away from the linguistic equivalents that, although supplied arbitrarily by the *EOQ*, have a semantic link with correct explanations.

Another conclusion is that the entries and articles in the *EOQ* do not abide by the meanings of the *Qur'ān*, but rather they are constantly supported by diachronic meanings, which, to a certain extent, indicates a manipulation of the Koranic text. In this sense, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is more appropriate, where the terms have to do with the history of the Islamic civilization rather than a particular context of it, as the case of Koranic context.

It is known that the *Qur'ān* has been conserved intact, unaltered until today and, with regards to the authority of the Sacred Book, Muslims state that it was God who literally revealed the text to Muḥammad. The *EOQ* treats the *Qur'ān* as an independent body, with its own entity, without bearing in mind its authority, whether you believe that its author was Muḥammad or God himself. This aspect constitutes, in itself, a major success for *EOQ* authors.

However, the *EOQ*, as other encyclopaedias and glossaries about Islam and the *Qur'ān*, are mistaken from the analytic point of view of the *Qur'ān*. This error stems from analysing the Koranic text from a logo-centric perspective, which depends, in general upon the interest that a given term has for Western civilization, and more specifically, for the Orientalist works.

However, it fails to consider the criteria implicit in this object of study, or pay attention to the comments of the Muslim sages or study the *Qur'ān* at its macro textual and micro textual level. Also, in many cases, the authors treat the verses in a disjointed manner, having been taken out of context. All this indicates a gross error of comprehension, since the result of this analysis bears distortion and, therefore, manipulation of the Koranic text reality.

Additionally, the authors of the *EOQ* appear not to visualize the *Qur'ān* as an instrument for analysis, but as a substitute of the *Qur'ān*. That is; they are limited to speaking more about the hermeneutics of the object of study and its parallel texts rather than to the content of the *Qur'ān* itself. They do not approach the analysis of the Qur'ān as a whole, taking into consideration, for example, the historical characteristics of the time when the text was written, or as objective knowledge of the Islamic doctrine, but from the Orientalist perspective and budgets.

We would like to highlight, as mentioned previously, the existing bibliographical gap when it comes to the number of works referring to the terminological study of the *Qur'ān*. Specifically, in Spanish, we have used the Islamic encyclopaedias and dictionaries found these days on bookshelves and libraries without even finding a dozen copies. We believe that to know and fully understand Koranic terminology and, therefore, the Islamic doctrine, it is necessary to perform a meticulous and rigorous study on this topic in an effort to achieve a greater degree of knowledge about one of the most dynamic spiritual communities in the world.

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