

# Shakir's Quran translation — blatant plagiarism of the first edition of Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation

## *Deception perpetrated on readers of the Holy Quran*

We provide here conclusive and irrefutable evidence to show that:

1. The English translation of the Quran purported to have been done by one **M. H. Shakir** has been plagiarised from Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation of 1917.
2. The Shakir to whom this translation is attributed could not possibly have done it.

The English translation of the Quran attributed to the name M. H. Shakir has been widely available in print since the 1980s. It is probably the most widely accessible on websites, including reputable academic websites such as the following:

- [University of Virginia Library](#) <sup>1</sup>
- [University of Michigan, University Library](#) <sup>2</sup>
- [University of Southern California, Muslim Students Association \(USC-MSA\)](#) <sup>3</sup>

A comparison shows the Shakir translation to be an entire and wholesale plagiarism of the first, 1917, edition of the English translation of the Holy Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali, with alterations in a few places to reflect more traditional interpretations. Even these alterations have not been made consistently and have obviously been forgotten to be done in some places. The main changes are as follows:

1. Translations of the titles of a few chapters have been changed in order to reflect certain traditional interpretations. For example, the title of chapter 5 is translated as *The Dinner Table* instead of *The Food*, and that of chapter 27 as *The Ant* instead of treating the original *An-Naml* as a proper noun as Maulana Muhammad Ali does.
2. The abbreviations in the Quran, known as *muqatta'at*, for example *Alif*, *Lam*, *Mim* in 2:1, are given verbatim, while Maulana Muhammad Ali translated into English the words that these letters are considered to stand for, as reported by some ancient authorities.
3. Names of prophets are given in Shakir in their Arabic form rather than the Biblical English form (for example, *Musa* for *Moses* and *Isa* for *Jesus* as in 2:87 etc.). Similarly, the word *shaitan* is not translated as devil but given in its Arabic form.

4. A few changes have been made in the stories of the prophets to reflect a traditional interpretation. Examples are the story of Harut and Marut in 2:102, the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in 27:20 and 27:44, and of course the death of Jesus in 3:55 and 4:157–158.

It is rather amusing to find that in certain places *similar changes have not been made*, due most likely to an oversight! For example:

- In 5:117 the death of Jesus has been retained by forgetting to change Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation: "but when Thou didst cause me to die". Such a change was made in the translation of 3:55 to reflect the belief that Jesus was taken up to heaven alive. On an Internet discussion forum someone has quoted 5:117 from a Shakir copy and thinks that the Shakir translation supports that Jesus died!
- As noted above, the title of chapter 5, *Al-Ma'ida*, is translated as *The Dinner Table*, instead of *The Food* as by Maulana Muhammad Ali. However, verse 112 of chapter 5, in which this word occurs, after which this chapter is named, is translated exactly the same as by Maulana Muhammad Ali: "will your Lord consent to send down to us *food* from heaven?".
- The title of chapter 27 has been changed to *The Ant* from Maulana Muhammad Ali's retention of *An-Naml* as a proper name. However, someone obviously forgot to carry this change through to 27:18 because that is left unaltered as: "Until when they came to the valley of the Naml, a Namlite said: O Naml! enter your houses..." and *not* changed to "when they came to the valley of the ants, an ant said: ..."

Plagiarised works usually show inconsistencies of this kind. Plagiarists often fail to find all the places in the text which need amendment to give the work their own identity.

### **Who was *Shakir*?**

The publication information of a recent edition of this translation states:

ISBN: 0940368560

Author: Mohammedali H Shakir (M H Shakir)

Publisher: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an (2004) US 9th Edition

(See, for example, [IslamicBookstore.com](http://IslamicBookstore.com))<sup>4</sup>

According to this, the *M* in *M.H. Shakir* stands for *Mohammedali*. We wonder if this has been done teasingly, as if to say that they are quite brazen and open about this plagiarism of Maulana Muhammad Ali's work. Mohammedali is not one word, but two. If that was his name, it would appear as M.A.H. Shakir.

In other sources his name is given as Mohammad Habib Shakir. Even a brief note about his life is found in some places, as follows:

Mohammad Habib Shakir (1866-1939)

Mohammad Habib Shakir was an Egyptian judge, born in Cairo and a graduate from Al-Azhar University. He occupied many prominent positions, such as: Sudan's

Supreme Judge for four years, Dean of Alexandria's Scholars, Al-Azhar Secretary General, and a member of its board of directors and Legislative Committee. He died in Cairo in 1939 AD. Some of his famous works include: an English translation of the Holy Qur'an and Explanation of the Primary Lessons in Religious Belief.

(See the [Islamonline.net](http://Islamonline.net) website [at this page](#).<sup>5</sup>)

The question arises here that if the man named here did actually produce this translation, then why did it not appear in print till *forty years after his death*?

We have been able to trace a mention of a Shakir matching the above biographical information. It is in a paper entitled *Muslim Discourse in The Early Twentieth Century on The Translation of The Qur'an* written by one Mohamed Abou Sheishaa of Al-Azhar University and [available online on the website www.quranicstudies.com](http://www.quranicstudies.com).<sup>6</sup> However, the context in which this paper mentions this Shakir is that in 1925 he wrote a lengthy article in an Arab newspaper arguing that:

“it is not lawful to make a translation of the Quran just as it is not lawful to proceed to change any single one of its sacred words and substitute another Arabic one for it”.

In another paper by Abou Sheishaa on the same website, entitled [A Study of the Fatwa by Rashid Rida on the Translation of the Qur'an](#),<sup>7</sup> it is stated that when the English translation of the Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali reached Egypt in 1925:

“... both Sheikh Rashid Rida and Muhammad Shakir ... labeled it as a ‘deviate’ translation of the Qur’an which contradicted the principles of Islamic belief and attempted to destroy Islam from within.”

This same Shakir is also mentioned by Marmaduke Pickthall in his account of his visit to Egypt in 1929 to have his translation of the Quran checked before publication. Pickthall writes:

“Next day, in *Al-Ahram*, appeared a notice of me and my work under the heading: ‘A Translation of the Quran.’ Two days later in the same newspaper and under the same heading appeared two columns of denunciation of translation and the translation of the sacred Book from the pen of Sheykh Muhammad Shakir, a retired professor of Al-Azhar, who (as I learnt) had been leader of the hue-and-cry against Muhammad Ali’s translation. The translator and all who read his translation, or abetted it, or showed approval of it, were condemned to everlasting perdition according to the learned writer ...” ([Read Pickthall’s full account](#).<sup>8</sup>)

That this is the same Shakir as the one who allegedly translated the Quran into English is clear by comparing:

- [the biographical note of the so-called translator, as quoted above](#)<sup>9</sup> from [www.islamonline.net](http://www.islamonline.net)

with

- [the note on Shakir](#)<sup>10</sup> given in the first paper mentioned above by Abou Sheishaa.

The dates of birth and death, studying at Al-Azhar, being Sudan's chief justice for four years, being a member of the legislative committee or society of Al-Azhar, are the same in both cases.

It is abundantly clear that the Egyptian Shakir to whom this translation is attributed could not possibly have translated the Quran as he was opposed on religious principle to translating the Quran into any language. Also, there is no evidence that he produced any writing in English.

## Conclusion

It is an established, undeniable fact that the so-called Shakir translation is a verbatim copy of Maulana Muhammad Ali's first edition, with alterations of the kind mentioned above. Moreover, it is most probable that M.H. Shakir is merely a fictitious name, and the name of the Egyptian judge Shakir has no connection with this translation.

The publishers of the Shakir translation since 1983 have been *Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc.* of Elmhurst, New York, U.S.A. If they wish to throw any light on the mystery of Shakir, or if they wish to refute my conclusions, I look forward to reading any such statement from them.

— Compiled by Dr. Zahid Aziz

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*The links in this document are listed as footnotes below for the convenience of printed copies of this document. In electronic copies the links in the document body are live.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/HolKora.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hti.umich.edu/k/koran/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://islamicbookstore.com/b6358.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.islamonline.net/surah/english/quran-c.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.quranicstudies.com/article39.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.quranicstudies.com/article84.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.wokingmuslim.org/pers/pickthall-quran.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.islamonline.net/surah/english/quran-c.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.quranicstudies.com/article39.html#\\_ftn3](http://www.quranicstudies.com/article39.html#_ftn3)