

𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰  
𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰

# The Titiviline Verses

A. A. A. Hartvisen

# *The Titiviline Verses*

A. A. A. Hartvisen

Copyright © 2017 by A. A. A. Hartvisen

Cover art by A. A. A. Hartvisen

Genre: Nonfiction—The Holy Qur'ān, Translation, Arabic.

High Desert Ventures LLC  
608 East Madison  
Burns, Oregon

Other titles by A. A. A. Hartvisen:

Expo '99

*Auróra*

The Ring

Canada Vs America

Damage

Jutice & Liberality at Istifan's House

Fred's Place

Brain Farm

Catnip Dream

Hungry for Love

# The Titiviline Verses

Analysis and comparison of 6 English translations of *sūra 66 'āya 12*

Can Muslim translate the Holy Qur'ān without fucking up?

by

A. A. A. Hartvisen

I'm often confronted by English translations of passages from the Qur'ān, which don't seem to make any sense and don't necessarily correspond in very many particulars with the Arabic. So I decided to do a brief survey and see how universal is this problem in English translations of the Qur'ān.

I'm not cherry picking here. I picked the last verse that I happened to be reading when I first thought of this idea, which was *'āya 12* of *sūra 66*, "*at-Taḥrīm*". I selected the

first six English translations that I happened upon.

So, the six translations. I'm a go at them in order of maturity. The first is the Muḥammad 'Ali translation, by Maulana Muḥammad 'Ali, dated 1917 for the original and 1951 for the recentest revision. It's called *the Holy Qur'an*. The second translation is the Pickthall translation, by Muḥammad Marmaduke Pickthall, dated 1930. This was called *the Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*. The third is the Yūsuf 'Ali translation, by 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Ali, dated 1934, entitled *the Holy Qur'an: Text and Commentary*. The fourth translation I will compare is the Muḥsin Khan translation from 1977, translated by Muḥammad Muḥsin Khan and Muḥammad Taqi-ud-Dīn al-Hilālī, entitled *the Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an*. The fifth translation is the Ghāli translation. This was translated by Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ghāli in 1997, entitled *Towards Understanding the Ever-Glorious Qur'an*. The sixth and final translation is the Ṣaḥīḥ International translation from 1997, *the Holy Qur'an*.

Now I'm going to break this verse down into four statements of coherent meaning and compare them across translations. We'll go one statement at a time. Let's start with the first of these. This is, in the Muḥammad 'Ali translation, "And Mary, the daughter of Amran, who guarded her chastity..."

Then the Pickthall: "And Mary, daughter of 'Imran, whose body was chaste..."

Yūsuf 'Ali: "And Mary the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity..."

Muḥsin Khan: "And Maryam (Mary), the daughter of 'Imran who guarded her chastity..."

Ghāli: "And Maryam (Mary) daughter of Imran, who kept safe her private parts, (i.e., safeguarded)..."

Finally, the Ṣaḥīḥ International translation: “And [the example of] Mary, the daughter of ‘Imran, who guarded her chastity..”

So, what’s going on here? Well, there’s Mary the daughter of ‘Imrān, and something’s going on with her chastity or private parts or something: “who guarded her chastity”, “whose body was chaste”, or “who kept safe her private parts”. It is fairly clear in all of these except the Muḥsin Khan translation that the person who is guarding her chastity is Mary herself. In the Muḥsin Khan translation there’s no comma ( , ) after ‘Imran, so it appears there that ‘Imrān is guarding Mary’s chastity. So is it “guarding her chastity”, “keeping safe her private parts”, or is it that “her body was chaste”? “Whose body was chaste” is very different from the others. It’s a very different sense and suggests no particular action or virtue on her part.

So, then, the next clause.

In the Muḥammad ‘Ali translation: “... so We breathed into him Our inspiration...”

Pickthall: “... therefor We breathed therein something of Our Spirit.”

Yūsuf ‘Ali: “... and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit...”

Muḥsin Khan: “... and We breathed into (the sleeve of her shirt or her garment) through Our Ruh (i.e. Jibrael (Gabriel))...”

Ghāli: “... so We breathed in it of Our Spirit...”

Ṣaḥīḥ International: “... so We blew into (her garment) through Our angel...”

It’s not clear at all looking across translations what’s going on here. Muḥammad ‘Ali says, “so we breathed into him our inspiration.” *Into him*. Who is *he*? “We breathed into him our inspiration” is very different to the others. None of the others say *inspiration*, or *into him* for that matter. Then we have Pickthall saying “we breathe therein”—so, into

something or other. Into what? I don't know. Something. So something or other "of our spirit" was breathed into something or other. We could probably assume from the Pickthall that *her body* is that into which something got breathed: "We breathed into [her body] something of our spirit". This agrees for the most part with Yūsuf 'Ali, which explicitly says "we breathed into her body of our spirit." It gets stranger with the Muḥsin Khan translation. There we have, "and We breathed into (the sleeve of her shirt or her garment) through Our Rūḥ (i.e. Jibrael (Gabriel))". "We breathed into the sleeve of her shirt or her garment". That's completely different from *him* or *her body*. How about "through Our Rūḥ"? "So we breathed through Our Rūḥ." What does that mean? *Through*? I don't understand this *through Our Rūḥ, Rūḥ* meaning "spirit" or "breath". So "we breathed into it through our spirit", not "of our spirit". Then in parentheses here, in brackets after *Our Rūḥ*: "(i.e. Jibrael (Gabriel))". So they're saying that this phrase means "through the angel Jibrael" or "through the spirit Jibrael". It's not clear from Qur'ānic texts, whether Jibrael be an angel or some other type of entity. Jibrael is here further equated with "Gabriel", so we've got Allah breathing through "Gabriel" into the sleeve of Mary's shirt. It's impossible to make sense of this translation in any way that permits it to be reconciled with the others. In Ghāli we have, "and so we breathed in it of our spirit": And in Muḥammad 'Ali: "We breathed into him". What is "it"? Who is "he"? There's nothing in the preceding statement to which the pronoun may be attached, in either version. We can't know what "it" is nor who "he" is.

Then the Ṣaḥīḥ International says, "We blew into (her garment)," agreeing with the Muḥsin Khan translation, "into her garment", though not specifically a sleeve or a shirt. Ṣaḥīḥ International: "We blew into (her garment) through Our angel" "Through Our angel". The Ṣaḥīḥ International and Muḥsin Khan may agree in this part as well: "through Our

Rūḥ”, *through our breath* (i.e., Jibrael, who may be *Our angel* in some sense). These two translations may be reconcilable with one another. What’s going on? Are we—“we” being, we assume, Allah—breathing something of Our inspiration, something of Our spirit or are we breathing *through* an angel? What does it mean? I don’t know. None can say!

On to the third clause, which in the Muḥammad ‘Ali translation is, “... and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord and His Books...”

Pickthall: “And she put faith in the words of her Lord and His scriptures...”

Yūsuf ‘Ali: “... and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations...”

Muḥsin Khan: “... and she testified to the truth of the Words of her Lord (i.e. believed in the Words of Allah: ‘Be!’ and he was; that is ‘Iesa (Jesus) - son of Maryam (Mary); as a Messenger of Allah), and (also believed in) His Scriptures...”

Ghāli: “... and she sincerely (believed) in the Words of her Lord, and His Books...”

Ṣaḥīḥ International: “... and she believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures...”

We have a much lengthier statement in the Muḥsin Khan translation than in any of the others. There’s much more information. How is it missing from the other versions? If they’re all being translated from the one perfect and æternal holy Qur’ān, how do we get translations that are so incompatible with one another? They all begin by saying she (Mary) did something or other, that is, she “accepted the truth”, “put faith in”, “testified to the truth of”, “sincerely (believed) in”, or “believed in” the words &c. In the Muḥsin Khan translation it seems like they’re hedging their bets in which way they translate it. It’s got both: “she testified to the truth of



the Words of her Lord (i.e. believed in the Words of Allah)”.

Now, “believed” and “testified to the truth of” are not the same. The Muḥammad ‘Ali translation lands something half between. They can’t make up their minds. This is strange, as Arabic has very clear terms for all these ideas. So why is there such ambiguity in the translation? And there’s in the Muḥsin Khan translation all this about “believed in the Words of Allah: ‘Be!’ and he was; that is ‘Iesa (Jesus) - son of Maryam (Mary); as a Messenger of Allah”. What does it mean? What’s this all on about? She “believed in the truth of the words”, she “testified to the truth”, “believed in the words”. It may be—maybe—saying here that her belief somehow facilitated the conception of Iesa, which rather makes her a sort of partner with Allah, as it suggests that Allah would not have been able to create Iesa if Mary had not testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and believed in the words of Allah. Notably, none of this is conveyed by any of the other translations. In the others, we don’t really know what’s being talked about, except that a woman named Mary, the daughter of ‘Imrān, who guarded her chastity, really believed the words of the Lord and his books or testified to the truth of the words of the Lord and his books, one of the two.

There’s a curious variant in the Yūsuf ‘Ali translation: “the words of her Lord and of his revelations”. *Revelations*. This is rather different to *books* or *scriptures*. There’s not that much middle ground among these translations. It’s hard to imagine any particular phrase which might be translated all these different ways.

On to the final statement! We have in the Muḥammad ‘Ali translation: “... and she was of the obedient ones.”

Pickthall: “... and was of the obedient.”

Yūsuf ‘Ali: “... and was one of the devout (servants).”

Muḥsin Khan: "... and she was of the Qanitīn (i.e. obedient to Allah)."

Ghāli: "... and she was one of the devout."

Ṣaḥīḥ International: "... and was of the devoutly obedient."

These are all fairly similar. In the Muḥsin Khan they give first the Arabic *Qānitīn*. "Devout", "devout (servants)", "the obedient ones", &c.—these are all reasonable translations of the Arabic word. So the final statement agrees in all of them, in contrast with the first three statements are very confusing and no particular sense is well conserved across translations.

In the second clause there's also a matter of the initial conjunction. In Muḥammad 'Ali, we have, "so We breathed." In Pickthall we have, "therefore, We breathed." Ghāli and Ṣaḥīḥ International both have "so We" either "breathed" or "blew"; and in Muḥsin Khan we have, "and we breathed". Now, *and*, *therefore*, and *so* have rather different meanings. *So* and *therefore* are similar. *Therefore* implies stronger causal relation with the preceding phrase, which may suggest that the breathing was dependent upon her having guarded her chastity. In others, there's no real connexion, other than being two adjacent lines in the same *ʾāya*.

So what's going on here? They don't agree. The only thing to do is to go back and look to the Arabic. It starts out with:

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتِ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا

This means: "And Maryam, the daughter of 'Imrān, who"—and here it's clear since *who* takes the feminine form *llati* that *who* refers to Maryam—"who guarded, protected or fortified," and the last word *farġahā* refers specifically to the female genitalia. In plain English we would say "her cunt". So, "And Maryam, the daughter of 'Imrān, who safeguarded her

cunt...” It’s very clear in the Arabic. I don’t see any way to tease another sense from it. The variants in the English translations are unjustified. Perhaps they’re trying to find ways to get around saying “her cunt” or something similar. The closest to the Arabic is Ghāli, in which it reads, “And Maryam (Mary) daughter of ‘Imrān, who kept safe her private parts, (i.e., safeguarded).” That’s pretty close to the Arabic. The others are not clear about exactly what’s going on there. One might say they employ fairly understandable euphemisms of the Arabic, but they break the chain of meaning linking this statement to the next. Pickthall’s “whose body was chaste” doesn’t fit at all. It implies no action nor virtue on the part of Maryam, and it’s clearly not what we see in the Arabic. Apt translation of the final term here is very important, as the whole meaning of the next statement hangs powerlessly thereon.

So let’s look at the next statement of the ’āya:

فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا

This means, “so we blasted into it of our spirit or our breath.” “So we blew into it something of our breath.” Now this is very clear. *Fihi*, masculine, “into him”, certainly referring to *farǧahā* of the preceding statement, a masculine word, as seems to be common in many languages. So it’s clear enough what is being blown into here and it is not a “garment”. It is not a “shirtsleeve”. Nor is it “the body”. It is the cunt. Quite clear. And it is “something of our spirit”, *mir rūhinā*, “of our spirit”. There’s nothing to suggest an “angel”, or “Jibrael”, or “inspiration”. “Inspiration” seems particularly absurd and wrong. That’s the Muḥammad ‘Ali translation. *Inspiration?* No. That translation also says, “We breathed into him”. So that one phrase was translated more literally, without regard for whether it conserved meaning. It’s almost as though Muḥammad ‘Ali were out to intentionally obscure

the meaning.

Let's move on to the third phrase which is

وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ

This means: “and she believed in the words of her Lord and his Scriptures”. Why is there so much ambiguity in the English translations here? It's very strange. Some of them go for “and she believed in”, but others go off in other direction. “She testified to the truth.” “She accepted the truth.” And then we've got the Muḥsin Khan translation, which includes all this additional information about “the Words of Allah: ‘Be!’” and the coming of Iesa and whatnot, which makes little sense in the absence of an accurate reading of the preceding statement. Still, there's ambiguity. Why? It occurs to me that it's because in the original unpointed Arab script of the Qur'ān one could also read this line as follows:

وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ

That's just a small change in the first word. *Waṣadaqat* versus *waṣaddaqat*.

*Waṣadaqat* means “and she accepted the truth or testified to the truth of or witnessed the truth of”, whereas *waṣaddaqat* means “and she believed in”. Muḥammad 'Ali won't go all the way and say “and she believed in” nor “and she witnessed to the truth of”, but instead goes with “and she accepted the truth of”, which is something in between. In Pickthall we have “she put faith in the words”. That's closer to “she believed in”. The Yūsuf 'Ali is unambiguously on the *waṣadaqat* side with “and she testified to the truth of”. In the context of the verse, “and she testified to the truth of” makes much more sense than “and she believed in”. So why is it that every pointed version of the Arabic Qur'ān that I have handy

reads *waṣaddaqat* rather than *waṣadaqat*? No one knows the right reading, and the text is so inherently confusing and ambiguous in most respects that it's easy for confusion to seethe therein, since no one can really tell what's going on anyway without recourse to the Sīra and the commentary and whatnot.

The last statement of the 'āya:

وَكَاثٌ مِنَ الْقَانِتِينَ

That's fairly clear. It means, "and she was of the devout ones" or "of the *Qānitīn*". This is translated fairly well in all versions. It's a very simple phrase: and she was of the *Qānitīn*. It seems that only when it is impossible for the translators to engender confusion and ambiguity do they then fail to do so. We can see that the English translations are almost universally unreliable in most areas. None of them are clear. Even when the Arabic text (Very often, I've found, it is not.) is clear as fuck, the translations are unclear. Why are all the English translations so wrong? Maybe it's just English. And maybe there's some peculiarity of Muslim Arab to English translation that gets problem. As you'll notice, all these translators are Muslim. The English translations were done by Muslims who should speak Arabic, know the Qur'ān and the Sīra of Muḥammad, and still they get it so wrong. So, I thought, well, let's look at some translations other than English.

First, we have here the Norwegian translation of 1980 by Einar Berg, called *Koranen*.

It reads:

*Og Maria, Imrans datter, som bevarte sitt legemes kyskhet, og Vi blåste inn i det av Vår ånd, og hun bekreftet Herrens ord og skrifter. Hun var av de ydmyke.*

Which translates to: "And Maria Imran's daughter who protected her body's chastity,

and we blew into it of Our spirit, and she sincerely believed in the Lord's word and scriptures. She was of the meekly obedient." So how's this compare? "And Maria Imran's daughter": that's the same. "Who guarded her body's chastity". That's another bizarre euphemism for the original Arabic. "And we blew into it of our spirit". Much better than English translations, I think, but "and we" instead of "so we" as in the Arabic. "And she sincerely believed in the words of the Lord and scriptures. She was of the meekly obedient". It's pretty close to the Arabic. It's not that bad.

So let's look at another. How about French? We have the 1959 translation by Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh and Michel Leturmy called *le Coran*:

*De même, Marie, la fille d'Imran qui avait préservé sa virginité; Nous y insufflâmes alors de Notre Esprit. Elle avait déclaré véridiques les paroles de son Seigneur ainsi que Ses Livres : elle fut parmi les dévoués.*

This means: "Likewise, Marie, the daughter of Imran, who had preserved her virginity; We blew into it of Our Spirit. She had declared true the words of her Lord and also his books: she was of the devout." While "preserved her virginity" is a fair euphemism, better than those in the English translations, it makes the following statement less intelligible. When it says "We blew into it of Our Spirit", it's not clear what we're blowing into. Note also the lack of any conjunction corresponding to the Arabic *fa* meaning "and so" or "so". The third statement follows the *waṣadaqat* reading, with "She had declared true the words of her Lord and also his books".

Let's go on to the Spanish. We have *el Corán*, translated by Julio Cortés in 1996, last revision 2007. It reads:

*Y a María, hija de Imran, que conservó su virginidad y en la que infundimos de*

*Nuestro Espíritu. Tuvo por auténticas las palabras y Escritura de su Señor y fue de las devotas.*

Which is, being translated, “And María, daughter of Imran, who preserved her virginity and into whom (or which) we infused something of Our Spirit. She accepted as authentic the words and Scripture of her Lord and was of the devout.” It’s not clear at all here what’s going on. She conserved her virginity and we infused into it (or her) some spirit. Okay, great. “She took the words and the scriptures of the Lord as authentic and was of the devout.” Unclear translation for the most part.

What about German? We have the German. It’s the translation by Muṣṭafā Māhir and der Azhar-Universität from 1999, entitled *der Qur’ān*:

*Desgleichen von Maria, ‘Imrāns Tochter, die ihre Keuschheit bewahrte. Wir hauchten ihr von Unserem Geist ein. Sie glaubte an die Worte Gottes (Seine Gebote und Verbote) und an Seine Schriften und gehörte zu den Gott demütig ergebenden Gläubigen.*

So, “And also of Mary, ‘Imrān’s daughter, who protected her chastity. We blew into it of Our spirit. She believed in the Word of God (His commandments and His prohibitions) and in His scriptures and belonged to the devout and meekly obedient to God.” She “protected her chastity”. Again, it’s alright in itself but renders the next statement unintelligible. Again, there’s no conjunction linking the two statements: “We blew into it of Our spirit.” Okay. Into what? Into her chastity? It doesn’t make sense. “She believed in the Word of God (His commandments and His prohibitions)”. That’s nowhere in the Arabic or in any of the other translations. “And belonged to the devout and meekly obedient to God,” takes a bit of liberty.

We see here that the Norwegian translation is *alright*, though not as clear as it should

be. The way that it's worded one could read it as, "she protected her body's chastity and we blasted into the body, her body, of our spirit". It's unclear what's going on. The other translations are worse. What we see is that this increment of ambiguity with translation (by huge margin) is typical of all translations. English seems a bit worse, perhaps? The others are bad enough. It's a problem, especially if one were to argue about Islam or what it teaches or something in the Qur'ān. He may put forth quotations or citations and other people read their Qur'āns and they say, "It's not in here. What are you talking about? That's not here. It doesn't say that." And he says, "What does it say?"

I don't know what it flipping says. It's a colloquy of words that makes no meaningful sense together. The English translations, especially, read like they were translated from the original Arabic to English by someone who did not speak either language. It's uncanny. It's otherworldly, perhaps *underworldly*. Perhaps it's some supernatural intervention at work that Muslim can't translate the Qur'ān without fucking it up. I don't suggest it rise to the level of Our Father Below, but perhaps to that of some lesser infernal spirit or genie? If one means to recur to Muslim translations of the Qur'ān, he certainly has his work cut out for him. Let him gird up his loins and turn himself to Sisyphean untangling of the words of Allah from the perverted and disconsolate legerdemain of the Titiviline Verses.



For more newer, purer works, visit  
this gentle writer's webpage and check it out:

<https://chrestomathyoferrors.com/>