R. Blachère’s clear and useful translation of the Qurʾān, published in three volumes in the years 1947–1951, seems to have opened the door to a flow of re-translations of the Muslim Holy Book into various languages.

Almost contemporary with Blachère’s version is the first volume of an English translation of the Qurʾān prepared by the qādīyāni Ahmadiyyas of Pakistan, with a long introduction by the Chief of the Ahmadiyya Community and very abundant footnotes. In 1953 the indefatigable and prolific English orientalist A. J. Arberry produced an Anthology of the Qurʾān, followed in 1955 by a complete translation in two volumes. In 1954 the Ahmadiyya Mission in Europe published (in Holland) a German translation. The following year saw the publication of my Italian translation with introduction and notes: another Italian translation, not yet published, had been entrusted by another publisher to a remarkable personality in Italian orientalism: M. M. Moreno, presently Italian Plenipotentiary Minister in Khartum. At last, in 1956 a Dutch translation of the Qurʾān was published, as the posthumous work of the great Dutch orientalist J. H. Kramers.

All this work of re-interpretation has been accompanied by studies and “Introductions” into the religious world of the Prophet of Arabia, of which I only mention R. Bell’s Introduction to the Qurʾān (1953), W. Montgomery Watt’s Muhammad at Mecca (1953), G. Widengren’s study on Mohammad the Apostle of God and his Ascension (1955). I leave apart the more technical articles appeared on various scientific journals concerning this and that Qurʾānic problem.

We are now very far from the times when the Qurʾān was a book sealed with seven seals for the Christian world!

The books mentioned above contain nothing extremely new for what concerns philology stricto sensu: actually Qurʾānic philology does not present those complicated problems implied in the interpretation, e.g.,

of the Avesta or other religious Books of the antiquity. We can freely say that — with some minor exceptions — we substantially know pretty well what the Qur'ān means, at least what it meant for centuries to the Muslim world. The only originality that the new translations may offer is an originality of approach. For a really new interpretation, whose interest would however remain purely philological and probably affect more the Muslim world than the Western, we have to wait the final results of the preliminary works for an editio critica of the text, begun already in 1930-34 by Bergsträsser and Pretzl and continued by others: particularly interesting in this aspect are the painstaking and extremely accurate studies of P. E. Beck 2).

The translations made by Muslims, on the other hand, are further examples of tentative solutions of the central problem of Muslim modernism: i.e. to justify modern trends, though remaining attached to the traditional and antiquated idea of the verbal inspiration of the Holy Book. As it is well known — quite differently from what happened in the history of Christian theology — Islam, and even its most modernistic representatives, always considered the Qur'ān as the literal dictation of the actual words of God to the Prophet. In a way all the attempts of modernism in Islam could be defined as attempts to give modern meanings to words spoken by God directly to solve problems of an Arab community of thirteen centuries ago, whereas even orthodox Christian moderns — with the now widely accepted idea of a non-verbal inspiration of the “holy” authors, — simply try to imagine what those holy persons would have said when faced with our present problems: a task, perhaps, more colourful and phantastic, but no doubt easier!

But let us return to our books, beginning with the Ahmadiyya translations.


b) *Der Heilige Qur'ān. Arabisch-Deutsch. Versehen mit einer ausführlicher Einführung, unter der Leitung von Hazrat Mirza Bashi-