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## ***Bridging Cultures Through Translation: Aisha Bewley's Role in Modern Islamic Scholarship and the Global Dissemination of Classical Texts***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study explores the pivotal contributions of Aisha Bewley, a distinguished Islamic scholar and translator, to the field of Islamic studies and cross-cultural intellectual discourse. Renowned for her translations of classical Arabic manuscripts into English, Aisha Bewley has addressed a wide array of topics, including Quranic exegesis, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, mysticism, and the sciences of logic. Her works have significantly broadened access to Islamic scholarship for non-Arabic-speaking audiences, fostering deeper understanding and appreciation of Islamic traditions globally. This research analyzes her approach to translation and scholarship, highlighting the methodologies that underpin her work. Additionally, it advocates for a broader engagement with her intellectual contributions by translating her works into multiple languages, aiming to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers. The study underscores Aisha Bewley's enduring influence on contemporary Islamic thought and her role in shaping a more inclusive and diverse academic landscape.*

**Keywords:** *Aisha Bewley, Islamic scholarship, Translation studies, Cross-cultural understanding, Islamic intellectual heritage*

### **1. Introduction**

Aisha Bewley, an influential Islamic scholar and translator, has dedicated nearly five decades to translating classical Islamic texts, bridging cultural and linguistic divides. With an impressive body of work that includes the translation of over 70 Islamic texts, including the Qur'an, she holds a unique position among contemporary scholars. Her proficiency in both modern and classical Arabic,



coupled with her deep understanding of Islamic history, sets her apart as a pioneer in making Islamic literature accessible to non-Arabic speakers [1].

Her work extends beyond translation, as she actively promotes the mystical dimensions of Islam, particularly in the West. Aisha Bewley has been involved in the Murabitun Movement, advocating for women's empowerment and social justice. Her educational efforts include lectures at institutions such as Dallas College and Lady Ayesha College in Cape Town, alongside extensive travels to countries like Nigeria, Bermuda, Germany, and Spain to disseminate Islamic teachings [2].

## **2. Early Life and Education**

Born in 1948 in the United States as Aisha Abdurahman Bewley [3], she was raised in a devout Christian family. Her quest for deeper meaning led her to explore other philosophies and religions. She pursued higher education at the University of California, Berkeley, earning a BA in French and an MA in Oriental Languages [4]. Her academic pursuits included a year at the American University in Cairo, where she further immersed herself in the study of Arabic and Islamic traditions [5].

Her encounters with Sufi scholars, particularly at Darul Uloom seminars, were pivotal in shaping her intellectual trajectory. She was profoundly influenced by the teachings of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit, which ultimately drew her to study the works of Ibn al-Arabi and Syed Fazlullah Harwai [6].

## **3. Spiritual Journey: From Christianity to Islam**

Aisha Bewley's spiritual journey began with dissatisfaction with Christianity. Her exploration of Zen Buddhism provided initial insights into the impermanence of the material world [7]. However, her philosophical studies, including the works of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Kant, and Hegel, led her to question deeper existential themes [8].

Nietzsche's positive reflections on Islam intrigued her and prompted her to read Islamic literature. Her quest culminated in accepting Islam in 1968 under the guidance of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit [9]. Her husband, Shaykh Abdul Haq Bewley, also embraced Islam alongside her, and together, they devoted their lives to spreading Sufism in Europe [10].

## **4. Contributions and Recognition**

Aisha Bewley's contributions to Islamic scholarship extend beyond her translations. Her collaborative efforts with her husband have significantly enriched the understanding of Sufi Islam in the West. For over 40 years, the couple has worked tirelessly to establish the Zarqawiyya Habibiya Sufi order [11]. Her global influence was recognized by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center (RISSC), which honored her as the "Muslim Woman of the Year" in 2023.

She was included in the prestigious list of the 500 most influential Muslims, underscoring her enduring impact on contemporary Islamic thought [12].

### **The Influential Role of a Spiritual Guide in Aisha Bewley's Journey**

Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Murabit, widely regarded as a pivotal figure in modern Islamic Sufism, played an instrumental role in Aisha Bewley's spiritual transformation and eventual acceptance of Islam [15]. Born in Scotland in 1930 and originally named Ian Dallas, Sheikh Abdul Qadir embraced Islam in 1967, marking a significant turning point in his life [13].

Before his conversion, Ian Dallas was known as a playwright and actor, achieving recognition in the creative arts. However, his journey into Islam led him to establish the Darqawī Shadhīlī Qadīrī Tariqa, a branch of Sufism in Europe, which has since influenced numerous individuals and communities [14]. Sheikh Abdul Qadir's teachings, deeply rooted in Islamic spirituality, emphasized the revival of classical Sufi practices while addressing the spiritual needs of modern society.

In addition to founding the Murabitun Movement, Sheikh Abdul Qadir authored several works on Islamic Sufism, elucidating its principles and relevance in contemporary contexts [15]. While the Murabitun Movement has occasionally faced scrutiny for its unconventional interpretations, its foundational aim of reconnecting individuals with Islamic spirituality remains evident [16].

### **2. Aisha Bewley's Contributions to Islamic Translation**

Aisha Bewley has made remarkable contributions to Islamic scholarship by translating some of the most prominent classical texts into English. Her work has enabled a broader audience to access the depth and beauty of Islamic literature, creating a bridge between linguistic and cultural divides. Below are some of her key translations and their significance:

#### **Mu'ta Imam Malik**

One of Aisha Bewley's seminal translations is *Mu'ta Imam Malik*, a foundational text in Islamic jurisprudence. This collection of hadith and legal opinions by Imam Malik is highly regarded by scholars such as Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, who included several of its narrations in their compilations. Imam Shafi'i famously remarked, "There is no book on earth except Allah's Holy Qur'an compared to Mu'ta" [17]. Alauddin Mughaltī Al-Hanafī also praised the work, describing Imam Malik as the first scholar to compile authentic hadith in one place [18].

#### **Al-Shifa by Qadi Iyad**

Aisha Bewley translated *Al-Shifa* by Qadi Iyad, a celebrated biography of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Written in 1149, this work beautifully narrates the life, characteristics, and miracles of the Prophet. It is considered a

cornerstone in Islamic literature, often referred to as “a house into which a sick person enters and gets well after reading it” [19]. By translating this masterpiece, Aisha Bewley made the blessed biography accessible to English-speaking audiences, particularly in the Western world.

#### **Al-I'lam Biqawa'id al-Islam by Qadi Iyad**

This concise translation by Aisha Bewley focuses on the five pillars of Islam as articulated by Qadi Iyad, a renowned scholar of Maliki jurisprudence. The text elaborates on the foundational principles of Islam, making it a vital resource for new Muslims and those seeking to reconnect with the basics of Islamic practice [20].

#### **Tafsir Jalalayn**

Aisha Bewley translated *Tafsir Jalalayn*, an important exegesis of the Qur'an originally written by Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and completed by his student, Jalaluddin al-Suyuti. This commentary is widely used in Islamic institutions as a source for understanding Qur'anic concepts. Aisha Bewley's translation brought this invaluable work into the English-speaking world for the first time, ensuring that non-Arabic speakers could engage with the depth of Qur'anic interpretation [21–23].

#### **The Universal Man by Ibn Arabi**

Aisha Bewley translated *The Universal Man* by Ibn Arabi, which explores the spiritual significance of humanity as God's vicegerent on Earth. This work examines human creation, intellect, and the elevated status of humans as *Ashraf al-Makhlūqat* (the noblest of creations). Her translation allows Western audiences to appreciate the profound insights of one of Islam's most celebrated mystics [24].

#### **Sufis and Sufism: A Defense**

This book, originally written by Sheikh Abdul Karim Murad and Sheikh Abdul Haya al-Marwai, explores the essence and origins of Sufism. By translating it, Aisha Bewley provided English-speaking audiences with a comprehensive understanding of Sufism's place within Islam, dispelling misconceptions and fostering appreciation for its spiritual depth [25].

#### **Riyadh al-Salihin by Imam Nawawi**

*Riyadh al-Salihin* is a renowned collection of hadith that focuses on sincerity, piety, and moral conduct. Aisha Bewley's translation made this significant text accessible to English readers, providing a garden of spiritual wisdom for those seeking righteousness [26].

#### **The Soul's Journey After Death by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah**

In *Kitab al-Ruh*, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah delves into the journey of the soul after death and the conditions of the grave. Aisha Bewley's translation captures the depth of this theological exploration, offering English-speaking audiences a detailed understanding of life after death according to Islamic teachings [27].

#### **The Sunna of the Prophet by Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali**

In her translation of *Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah bayn Ahl al-Fiqh wa Ahl al-Hadith*, Aisha Bewley rendered Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali's discussion on the biography and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) into English. This work bridges the perspectives of jurists and hadith scholars, highlighting the enduring relevance of the Sunnah in contemporary Islamic thought [28].

#### **Aisha Bewley's Efforts in Translating Classical Islamic Texts**

Aisha Bewley's lifelong dedication to translating classical Islamic texts into English has greatly contributed to making these works accessible to a global audience. Her focus on accuracy, simplicity, and readability has made her translations essential resources for both scholars and general readers.

#### **Tafsir Qurtubi: A Comprehensive Exegesis**

*Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, formally titled *Al-Jaami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, was authored by Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi. This extensive Qur'anic commentary is renowned for its in-depth discussions on linguistic nuances, syntax, Arabic poetry, and the reasons for revelation (*Asbab al-Nuzul*). It also addresses juristic interpretations of Qur'anic rulings, making it a valuable resource for Islamic jurisprudence [29].

Aisha Bewley's translation of *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* into English bridges the gap for non-Arabic-speaking audiences, offering a simplified yet comprehensive understanding of this seminal work. Her efforts have enriched the global study of Qur'anic sciences [30].

#### **The Noble Qur'an: A Simplified Translation**

Aisha Bewley, in collaboration with her husband Abdul Haq Bewley, translated *The Noble Qur'an*, which was first published in 1999. This translation stands out for its straightforward, literal approach, making it accessible to contemporary readers. It avoids extensive commentary, instead presenting the meanings of verses in a concise manner [31].

For instance, their translation of Surah Al-Baqarah (2:2) reads:

*"This is the book, without any doubt. It contains guidance for those who have taqwa"* [32].

This differs from Muhammad Asad's interpretive translation:

*"His Divine writ—Let there be no doubt about it—is (meant to be) a guidance for all the God-conscious"* [33].

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Aisha Bewley's translation emphasizes clarity, catering to readers who prefer a literal rendering of the text.

### **Other Key Translations**

In addition to her work on *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* and *The Noble Qur'an*, Aisha Bewley has translated numerous other classical Islamic texts, including: [34].

- *Kitab al-Tawasin* by Mansur al-Hallaj, a mystical exploration of divine truths.
- *Fusus al-Hikam* by Ibn Arabi, delving into metaphysical and spiritual wisdom.
- *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, a concise yet authoritative Qur'anic commentary.
- *Riyadh al-Salihin* by Imam Nawawi, a collection of hadith emphasizing sincerity and moral excellence
- *Kitab al-Ruh* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, exploring the journey of the soul after death [35].

### **Focus on Sufi Texts**

Aisha Bewley's engagement with Sufi literature is notable for her translations of texts that delve into Islamic spirituality. Her works include:

- *The Darqawi Way* by Mawlay al-Arabi ad-Darqawi, which introduces Sufi principles.
- *The Meaning of Man* by Ali al-Jamal, a profound exploration of human creation and intellect.
- *Sufis and Sufism: A Defense*, highlighting the foundations and contributions of Sufism [36].

### **Unpublished Work: Akhbar Makkah**

Aisha Bewley is also translating *Akhbar Makkah* by Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Azraqi, a significant historical text on Mecca. This unpublished manuscript, preserved in Leiden University Library, offers detailed insights into the religious and cultural history of Mecca and is expected to be a landmark addition to Islamic historiography [36].

### **Introduction to the Diverse Works of Aisha Bewley**

Aisha Bewley is renowned for her profound contributions to Islamic scholarship. Her works span a broad spectrum of subjects, including biographical dictionaries, theological analyses, historical narratives, and reflections on contemporary issues. Her writings reflect her dedication to making Islamic teachings accessible and relevant to a global audience. Below is an overview of some of her most notable contributions.

### **Muslim Women's Biography**

Aisha Bewley authored a comprehensive dictionary profiling prominent Muslim women from the inception of Islam to the mid-thirteenth century Hijri. This alphabetical dictionary serves as a rich repository of information, highlighting the achievements of scholars, businesswomen, mothers, and wives [37]. Through this work, Bewley celebrates the intellectual and social contributions of Muslim women, challenging the misconception of gender inequality in Islamic history. This book also serves as an educational resource for readers seeking inspiration from the lives of these exemplary women. It captures the essence of how women shaped Islamic civilization in fields ranging from scholarship to governance.

### **The Glossary of Islamic Terms**

In *The Glossary of Islamic Terms*, Aisha Bewley provides an extensive explanation of key Islamic terms across multiple disciplines, including history, Qur'anic studies, Hadith sciences, jurisprudence, and Sufism. It discusses:

- The lives and contributions of the Prophets mentioned in the Qur'an.
- Ancient Qur'anic interpretations and their recitations.
- Renowned commentators and their methodologies in Tafsir.
- Jurisprudential schools, including both Sunni and Shia traditions.
- Key concepts in Sufism and an introduction to major Sufi figures and practices.

This 300-page glossary reflects Bewley's deep understanding of Islamic scholarship and serves as an essential resource for students and researchers exploring foundational aspects of Islam. [37]

### **The Subatomic World in the Qur'an**

Aisha Bewley delves into metaphysical discussions in this work, linking Qur'anic verses with principles of modern physics. She argues that the Qur'an prefigures many scientific discoveries about matter and the universe. This book presents an intellectual challenge to physicists, urging them to explore the depth of Qur'anic knowledge and recognize its alignment with modern scientific theories.

### **Islam: The Empowering of Women**

This book examines the intellectual, political, and spiritual roles of Muslim women in Islamic history. Aisha Bewley demonstrates how Islam has historically granted women rights and responsibilities in public and private spheres. Her work challenges contemporary stereotypes and underscores the role of women as active participants in society, contributing to fields such as education, governance, and spirituality.

### **Mu'awiya: Restorer of the Islamic Faith**

In this biography, Aisha Bewley offers an in-depth analysis of Hazrat Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan's leadership during a critical juncture in Islamic history. She highlights his diplomatic skills and his success in unifying the Muslim Ummah after the civil wars. The book emphasizes his contributions as a statesman and diplomat, presenting a nuanced view of his leadership that counters some of the negative portrayals in historical narratives. [36]

#### **Democratic Tyranny and the Islamic Paradigm**

In this critical work, Aisha Bewley explores the shortcomings of contemporary democratic systems and contrasts them with the governance principles of an Islamic state. Using the state of Madinah and the Caliphate as ideal examples, she discusses how Islamic governance offers a just and organized system. This book critiques modern political systems while presenting the Islamic paradigm as a viable alternative.

#### **Signs on the Horizons: The Sun, the Moon, the Star**

This book reflects on celestial phenomena mentioned in the Qur'an and their correlation with modern scientific discoveries. By interpreting verses about the sun, moon, and stars, Aisha Bewley bridges the gap between science and religion, illustrating the Qur'an's enduring relevance in understanding the natural world.

#### **Survey of Arabic Historical Methodology with Textual Examples Dealing with Women in the Ridda Wars and the Battle of the Camel**

In this unpublished work, Aisha Bewley conducts a historical survey focusing on the treatment and roles of women during the Ridda Wars and the Battle of the Camel.

- **Ridda Wars:** These conflicts, fought against false prophets and zakat deniers, showcased the ethical treatment of women by Islamic armies.
- **Battle of the Camel:** This civil war highlighted the active participation of Muslim women in political and military spheres.

By analyzing historical texts, Bewley clarifies how Islamic principles guided ethical conduct during war, particularly concerning women. Her work emphasizes the importance of documenting and understanding women's roles in early Islamic history, offering a practical demonstration of Islamic values during conflict. [37]

#### **Other Notable Contributions**

In addition to her published works, Aisha Bewley has translated and authored numerous books that continue to enrich Islamic scholarship. Among these are:

- *The Laws of Marriage in Islam*
- *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*
- *Kitab al-Tawasin*
- *Fusus al-Hikam*
- *Kitab al-Ruh*



### Conclusion

Aisha Bewley’s extensive contributions to Islamic scholarship, translation, and literature reflect her deep commitment to bridging cultural and linguistic divides. Her works have not only made classical Islamic texts accessible to a global audience but have also fostered a deeper understanding of Islam’s intellectual, spiritual, and historical dimensions. From translating monumental works such as *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* and *The Noble Qur’an* to addressing contemporary issues in books like *Islam: The Empowering of Women* and *Democratic Tyranny and the Islamic Paradigm*, she has enriched both academic and lay discourses on Islam.

Her meticulous approach, evident in works like *The Glossary of Islamic Terms* and *Muslim Women’s Biography*, highlights her dedication to accuracy and her ability to present Islamic teachings in a way that resonates with modern readers. Furthermore, her exploration of metaphysical and scientific themes in *The Subatomic World in the Qur’an* and *Signs on the Horizons* demonstrates her ability to harmonize traditional Islamic knowledge with contemporary scientific discourse.

Through her unpublished works, such as her historical survey on the roles of women in the Ridda Wars and the Battle of the Camel, Aisha Bewley continues to shed light on the ethical and active participation of women in early Islamic history. Her contributions have left an indelible mark on Islamic scholarship, making her a central figure in modern Islamic thought and translation.

In conclusion, Aisha Bewley’s legacy lies not only in her translations but also in her ability to present Islam’s depth and diversity to a global audience. Her works serve as an invaluable resource for understanding the richness of Islamic heritage, its ethical values, and its relevance in addressing contemporary challenges. By continuing to explore her contributions, scholars and readers alike can draw inspiration from her intellectual journey and dedication to disseminating knowledge.

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