

Sūrat al-Ṭāriq (Q. 86) Translated into Cadenced, Rhyming English Prose

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I am pleased to offer a translation of Q ṬĀRIQ 86. As with my previous attempts, I have tried to respect the Qur'an's *sajʿ* (cadenced rhythmic rhyming prose) and sound.¹ I also provide some notes on the process of translation.

Translation of Q ṬĀRIQ 86

In the name of God, Full of compassion, Ever compassionate

¹By the Sky and the *Night-Star!* ²What will explain for you the *Night-Star?* ³It is a piercing Visitor from *afar!* ⁴And there is no soul without a *Sentinel!*

⁵Let Humanity ponder its *start:* ⁶a start from a flowing *spurt,* ⁷issuing from between loin and *breastbone!*

⁸God has full power to *resuscitate,* ⁹that Day when secrets are *made known,* ¹⁰when Humanity shall have no strength, no *support.*

¹¹Yea, by the Sky's resuscitating *torrents,* ¹²by the Earth's bursting *plants,* ¹³these words are decisive *Pronouncement,* ¹⁴not idle *merriment!*

¹⁵Let them scheme and *wile* – ¹⁶I will scheme and *wile.* ¹⁷And grant the Disbelievers respite – grant them respite a short *while.*

Notes

My choice of 'Night-Star' to render the title and first two end-words rested principally on my preference for a word that contains the letters/sounds N, T, S, ST, and R. I then also used those very sounds, especially S, R and T, to render the end-words in verses 3, 5, 6 and 8, all of which are connected to verses 1 and 2 and to each other by the presence of a dominant sound, *qāf*. The correspondences are:

1. <i>ṭāriq</i>	1. Night-Star
2. <i>ṭāriq</i>	2. Night-Star
3. <i>thāqi</i>	3. afar

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| 5. <i>khuliq</i> | 5. start |
| 6. <i>dāfiq</i> | 6. spurt |
| 8. <i>qādir</i> | 8. restore |

In rendering (not translating) the end-word in verse 3 (*thāqib*), I opted for a rhyme, placing ‘*afar*’ immediately after ‘*Night-Star*’. I also interpolate ‘*piercing Visitor*’, which allows me to redeploy N, T, S and R, and to gesture toward *al-tāriq*’s literal meaning (rendered by translators as ‘*Night-Comer*’, ‘*Night-Intruder*’ and ‘*Night-Visitant*’, for example).²

The end-word of verse 4 (*hāfiḥ*) shares no letters with the three preceding end-words, but it does share morphology as a Form I active participle (*fāʿil*). To evoke this too, I relied on the deployment of S, T and N, in ‘*Sentinel*’. As with ‘*Night-Star*’, I capitalise ‘*Sentinel*’: capitalisation draws attention and can produce emphasis, both, it seems to me, desirable when translating this particular sura. I also capitalise Sky (*al-samāʾ*, verses 1 and 11), the interpolated *Visitor* (verse 3), *Humanity* (*al-insān*, verse 5), *Day* (*yawm*, verse 9), *Pronouncement* (*faṣl*), and *Disbelievers* (*al-kāfirīn*).

The ‘spurt’ of verse 6 echoes preceding end-words through S, R and T, but also the repeated active participle morphology. That morphology recurs in the end-word of verse 10 too (*nāṣir*), which I render with ‘support’.

Verses 7 and 9 are not participles but rather a plural pattern (*faʿāʾil*); of interest, however, is the fact that they ‘incorporate’ the Form I active participle’s shape and sound: *tarāʿib*, *sarāʿir*. I therefore chose another end-word that includes S, R, and T for verse 7, namely ‘breastbone’, which has the virtue of also including N. It is true that verse 9, on the other hand, has no S, R, T or N: this is because here I decided that it was more important to echo the repeated plural pattern, found in verses 7 and 9 alone, and so opted for a rhyme, with N brought back:

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|---------------|
| 7. breastbone |
| 9. made known |

Verse 11 marks a shift in rhyme and end-sound. The end-words in verses 11–14 are short. What is more, there are new end-letters: *ʿayns* at the end of both verses 11 and 12, which pick up the *ʿayn* in verse 8; the *ṣāds* in the end-words of verses 12 and 13 pick up the *ṣād* in verse 10. The sequence of English end-words attempts to be attentive to these letters and their deployment, while also maintaining trace echoes of S, T, R and N. Because verses 10–14 are a cluster, I maintain the similar -NTS and -NT endings in the English end-words, thus:

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|-----------------|-------------------|
| 11. <i>rajʿ</i> | 11. torrents |
| 12. <i>ṣadʿ</i> | 12. plants |
| 13. <i>faṣl</i> | 13. Pronouncement |
| 14. <i>hazl</i> | 14. merriment |

Hazl is also a hapax, so rather than use a more common word (e.g. ‘amusement,’ which might be used to translate *laʿb* and *lahw* in other suras), I chose an English

word one might be less likely to use elsewhere. The two other hapaxes in this sura are *dāfiq* and *tarāʾib*.³ *Ruwaydā*, though not an absolute hapax, is a form-hapax, a term I use to describe words of a recurring root but occurring only once in a particular morphological form.

Raj^c in verse 11 (*dhāt al-raj*^c) reprises *raj*^c in verse 8 (*alā raj*^c*ihi la-qādir*). I accordingly use ‘power to resuscitate’ to render the latter, and ‘resuscitating torrents’ to render the former; ‘resuscitating torrents’ and ‘bursting plants’ are an attempt to parallel verses 11 and 12; the R, S and T sounds will by now be familiar.

I precede verse 11 with ‘Yea’ because I am in general unsatisfied with the translation ‘By ...’ as a rendering of Qur’anic oaths. I was unwilling to use ‘Yea’ as the opening word of the sura (or ‘I swear by ...’ as I have done in some other translations); the relative unintrusiveness of a ‘Yea’ mid-sura here was therefore welcome.

The end-words in verses 15–17 represent a sound shift – though those in 15/16 do resemble the end-words of verses 11–14 in morphology (*fa*^c*l*). The similarity of the final sound (*-aydā*) in verses 15/16 and 17 seemed to me to call for close rhyme, thus:

15. <i>kaydā</i>	15. wile
16. <i>kaydā</i>	16. wile
17. <i>ruwaydā</i>	17. while

The complete list of Arabic and English end-words is as follows (with hapaxes asterisked):

¹ <i>tāriq</i>	¹ Night-Star	⁹ <i>sarāʾir</i>	⁸ made
¹ <i>tāriq</i>	² Night-Star	¹⁰ <i>nāṣir</i>	¹⁰ support
³ <i>thāqib</i>	³ afar	¹¹ <i>raj</i> ^c	¹¹ torrents
⁴ <i>hāfiḥ</i>	⁴ Sentinel	¹² <i>ṣad</i> ^c	¹² plants
⁵ <i>khuliq</i>	⁵ start	¹³ <i>faṣl</i>	¹³ Pronouncement
⁶ <i>dāfiq</i> *	⁶ spurt	¹⁴ <i>hazl</i> *	¹⁴ merriment
⁷ <i>tarāʾib</i> *	⁷ breastbone	¹⁵ <i>kaydā</i>	¹⁵ wile
⁸ <i>qādir</i>	⁸ restore	¹⁶ <i>kaydā</i>	¹⁶ wile
		¹⁷ <i>ruwaydā</i>	¹⁷ while

All in all, I am happy with the result but, as always, I welcome scholarly feedback (at smtoorawa@cornell.edu).⁴

NOTES

1 All in *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, viz. 8:2 (2006), 9:1 (2007), 13:1 and 13:2 (2011).

2 E.g. Abdel Haleem, Hammad, Jones, Khalidi and Yusuf Ali.

3 I rely on my catalogue in ‘Hapaxes in the Qur’an: Identifying and Cataloguing Loan Words (and Loan Words)’ in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context 2* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 191–244.

4 This translation is dedicated to Baba Noor Mohammad Qadri (*raḥimuhu Allāh*) who loved this Sura, and as a gift to my daughter, Maryam, on whose eighteenth birthday I completed it. And, as always, I am grateful for the support shown by my family, close colleagues and *JQS*.