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Book Review: Public Duties in Islam

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Ibn Taymiyah

Public Duties In Islam

*Translated from Arabic: Muhtar Holland (Tr),
Leicester (U.K.): Islamic Foundation, 1982, pp 159.
ISBN 086037 PbK.*

Reviewed: A.A. Islahi

The publication of the English translation of *al-Hisba fi'l Islam* is a useful addition to Islamic economic literature. Notwithstanding a few small errors, noted below, the translation reads well and the notes are excellent. This book is a good manual and can justifiably be claimed to be a treatise on Islamic sociology, political science and economics. It has a rich introduction by the editor, Professor Khurshid Ahmad and a useful paper titled: "*al-Hisba* and Islamic Economy" by M. Akram Khan.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is entitled: "Managing an Islamic Economy and Society", which discusses different economic issues. It consists of five chapters. The second part entitled: "Towards a Just Society", also consists of five chapters.

The importance of the book for economists lies in the fact that "Ibn Taymiyyah wrote in an age when economics as a science was not born. But one is astonished at his perception of market mechanism and the forces of demand and supply and problems of market imperfections and their consequences for the consumers and producers. He is concerned with the questions of monopoly, hoarding and price manipulations and is eager to establish the principle of just price and just wages. his primary concern is with the establishment of a just economic order" (p. 9)*.

A few translation oversights may however, he noted in passing:

On page 22, under sub-heading 'Sanction for Authority in Islam' the translation reads, "it follows from all this that authority, for one who assumes it, is liability for which he is responsible to God and a duty to perform, as far as possible, the very best of good works". In my opinion, it would be more clear and nearer to the original words to render it in the following way: "It follows from all this that authority, for one who assumes it, as a religious duty to seek thereby nearness to *Allah* and fulfils its obligations as far as possible, is the best of good deeds".

(*) These and some other substantive issues of the book need critical and analytical exposition, which the present writer intends to do at any other occasion.

And on page 23, it says, "The Prophet, on him be peace, said *speaking of 'injustice'*: "The correct rendering of this phrase should be: 'when he spoke of tyrants...' as the word *Zalamah* has been used in the Arabic text which is plural of *Zalim* = tyrant. Perhaps the translator has read it *Zulmah* = darkness and took it in the sense of injustice'.

In the above *Hadith*, another error in translation is caused by reading '*yaridu*' (future active voice with the root w.r.d. = to arrive at water) as '*yuraddu*' (future passive voice with the root r.d.d. = to turn or to bring back).

On page 24, the translator writes, "To confer on a man a turban (of office) when one could find another more worthy of that turban...". The correct translation is, "One who appoints a person over a group of people while he finds in that group someone who is more worthy than him...".

On page 27, the famous saying of Umar ibn Khattab about (*salah* - prayer) is not correctly translated. It should be rendered as, "One who neglects it (i.e., prayer), will surely be more negligent towards other duties".

On page 30, the translation of the first part of the *hadith* is missing. It should be, "The adulterer cannot commit an adultery while he is a believer...".

On page 40, the translator says, "This arrangement remained in force until 'Umar vacated the arrangement of Khaybar". The Arabic words are 'hatta ajla hum `Umar 'an Khaybar', which simply means "...Until 'Umar expelled them from Khaybar".

On page 41, the words "They then allowed share-cropping as a necessary corollary of *musaqah* either when the land is the greater part (*al Shafi'i*) or on the basis of one third (*Malik*)" are likely to create misunderstanding. The correct version of the last line should be as: "... or they fixed the proportion of (free) land as one-third, as Malik has done".

After a few lines the translator writes, "For the purpose in both cases is to obtain fruit and crops and both parties are contributing partners". It is clear, he is talking about two parties in certain arrangement, namely, share-cropping. So it is more correct to say, "For the purpose of each of the two parties is to obtain fruit and crops...".

On the same page the words, *Kama jarat al 'adah fi mithli dhalik* have not been translated at all. The complete translation of the concerned lines will be as follows: "... therefore it is either one-third or one-half of the profit or increment that becomes due according to the existing practice in similar cases, not a fixed rent...".

On page 48, the translation "Against the doctrine of Malik, Abul Walid al Baji says..." should read "Based on the doctrine of Malik Abul Walid al Baji says...", a similar error occurs on page 55f.

On page 115, *wa kana mutaqaaribain fi'l qir'ah* has been translated as, "... and keep close together in recitation" which is not correct. The correct is "... as they were equal in recitation (or understanding of the *Qur'an*). *Kana* is a past tense, not an imperative.

On page 117, '*al Ahmasiyyah*' has been translated as the 'pious woman'. Here '*al Ahmasiyyah*' means 'the woman who belonged to the tribe of *Banu Ahmas*. The feminine of '*ahmas*' is not '*ahmasiyyah*'.

In translation of verses of the *Qur'an*, it would have been advisable for the translator to borrow from authentic translations of the *Qur'an*, instead of doing it himself; or at least to compare his own translation with authentic translations. This would have saved labor and possible oversights.

We hope the second edition of the book will be free from such deficiencies. However, the translator deserves congratulation for presenting a book which will influence the way Islamic economics is viewed.

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