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بشراف على إصدارها
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بالأذى والفتنة

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THE *ḌA'ĪF* AND THE *MUSTAD'AF* AND THE STATUS ACCORDED THEM IN THE QUR'ĀN

R. B. SERJEANT

Let me commence this paper with the prosaic statement that the Qur'ān concordance lists nine places where the word *Ḍa'īf* occurs (in its singular or plural forms) and the word *Istaḍ'afa* or *mustad'af* also nine times.

Commenting on *sūra* al-Baqara (Qur'ān, II,282), Ibn 'Abbās' explains *Ḍa'īf* in the phrase *Ḍa'īf-an safīh-an* as 'ahmaq² stupid', and *safīh* as 'jāhil, unlettered', both in Kinana dialect. Rippin quotes a 6th century author as rendering *safīh* as 'unlettered, a child, women and children, or squanderers of money and corrupters of religion'. I do not intend to deal with *safīh* here but it seems to me to mean 'foolish, unsteady, irresponsible', a combination of all these ideas — as far as one can find an equivalent for this word in English. The explanations of *Ḍa'īf* attributed to Ibn 'Abbās however are interpretative and secondary meanings of the word. Translators of the Qur'ān into English, relying on such secondary interpretations of *Ḍa'īf* and *mustad'af*, have, in my view, failed to comprehend the full significance of the two words, rendering *Ḍa'īf* simply as 'weak' and *mustad'af* as 'weak' also or 'oppressed'.

My contention is that in certain Qur'ānic contexts the sense of *Ḍa'īf* should be understood in the light of its usage in the *Hadīth* which concurs with that of Arabian society, without interruption, right up to our present age. *Ḍa'īf*, weak, is a term applied by the Arabians to persons without the capacity to fight for and defend themselves, therefore to those classes which do not bear arms³, the majority being peasants, perhaps also shepherds, but including craftsmen, petty tradesmen and others. Women and children are also considered to be *Ḍa'īf*.⁴ I have defined the word *Ḍa'īf* as 'the opposite of a strong (*qawī*) tribesman or person of noble birth called

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THE da'if AND THE mustad'af AND THE STATUS ACCORDED THEM IN THE QUR'ÂN

R B Serjeant

Let me commence this paper with the prosaic statement that the Qur'ân concordance lists nine places where the word *da'if* occurs (in its singular or plural forms) and the word *istad'afa* or *mustad'af* also nine times.

Commenting on *Sûrat al-Baqarah* (Qur'ân, II:282), Ibn 'Abbâs¹ explains *da'if* in the phrase *da'if-an safih-an* as "ahmaq², stupid!", and *safih* as "jâhil, unlettered", both in Kinânah dialect. Rippin quotes a 6th century author as rendering *safih* as "unlettered, a child, women and children, or squanderers of money and corrupters of religion". I do not intend to deal with *safih* here but it seems to me to mean 'foolish, unsteady, irresponsible', a combination of all these ideas — as far as one can find an equivalent for this word in

English. The explanations of *da'if* attributed to Ibn 'Abbâs however are interpretative and secondary meanings of the word. Translators of the Qur'ân into English, relying on such secondary interpretations of *da'if* and *mustad'af*, have, in my view, failed to comprehend the full significance of the two words, rendering *da'if* simply as 'weak' and *mustad'af* as 'weak' also, or 'oppressed'.

My contention is that in certain Qurânic contexts the sense of *da'if* should be understood in the light of its usage in the *Hadîth* which concurs with that of Arabian society, without interruption, right up to our present age. *Da'if*, weak, is a term applied by the Arabians to persons without the capacity to fight for and defend themselves, therefore to those classes which do not bear arms¹, the majority being peasants, perhaps also shepherds, but including craftsmen, petty tradesmen and others. Women and children are also considered to be *da'if*.² I have defined the *da'if* as 'the opposite of a strong (*qawî*)

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- 1 See my 'South Arabia' in C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze, *Commoners, climbers and notables*, Leiden, 1977, reprint in my *Studies in Arabian history and civilisation*, London, 1981, IX, 232.
 - 2 *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, described to me in Hâd ramawt as workers in clay, builders, potters, field-workers.

- 1 Quoted in A. Rippin, 'Ibn 'Abbâs's Al-lughât fi 'l-Qur'ân', *BSOAS*, London, 1981, XLIV, 1, 23.
- 2 Lane, *Lexicon*, gives the senses, 'foolish, unsound in intellect or understanding'. *The Sabaic dictionary*, ed. Beeston et alii, Leiden, 1982, reports a root *sfh* but not *d'f*.