

ON THE ORIGIN AND AIM OF THE TRANSLATOR OF THE EARLY GREEK QU'RAN*

CHRISTIAN HØGEL
LUND UNIVERSITY

Abstract

The article discusses what origin or background the translator of the early (medieval) Greek translation of the Qur'an may have had. A few extant fragments of the translation have an inconsistent use of the *idāfa* (genitive) construction, but the article argues that the variation falls within the usual when translating between Arabic and Greek. Furthermore, it is suggested that the manuscript that the Byzantine excerpter, Niketas Byzantios, worked on the basis of, may have been a bilingual (Arabic and Greek) manuscript.

Keywords

Qur'an; Arabic into Greek; Niketas Byzantios; *Refutatio*;
Islam-Christian Polemical Writings



I. Introduction

The early Greek translation of the Qur'an has received increasing attention the last decades, after receiving relatively little interest in the first more than a century after the publication of the two texts offering valuable fragments of it.¹ Now,

* The present text comes out of the 2nd Arabo-Greek workshop, organized at the Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz, 9–10 June 2023.

¹ Presentation and translation of fragments in KARL FÖRSTEL, *Schriften zum Islam von Arethas und Euthymios Zigabenos und Fragmente der griechischen Koranübersetzung: griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2009, p. 86–122, and CHRISTIAN HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous Greek Translation of the Qur'ān. The Fragments from Niketas Byzantios' *Refutatio* and the Anonymous *Abjuratio* », *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 7 (2010), p. 67–120, after which a series of publications by Manolis Ulricht have appeared: MANOLIS ULBRICHT, « Der Islam-Diskurs bei Niketas von Byzanz », *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 114 (2021), p. 1351–1394; ID., « Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung durch Niketas von Byzanz », *Byzantion*, 92 (2022), p. 491–519; ID., « Nachweis der Existenz einer vollständigen und schriftlichen Vorlage der griechischen Koranübersetzung. Eine philologische Untersuchung des Codex Vaticanus graecus 681 », *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 72 (2022), p. 533–550; ID., « Die

Mediterranea. International journal on the transfer of knowledge, 11 (2026), p. 173–187 ISSN: 2445-2378

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recent presentations and discussions have changed the scholarly perception of the text, and today we no longer repeat the rejection of the translation on the grounds of lacking quality.² Instead we acknowledge how the fragments display the work of a well-informed translator (or group of translators), producing a complete Greek rendering of the Qur'an, of which we today have about 82 fragments of varying length (from a short line to almost half a page). Produced in the 860's CE at the latest, but possibly decades or even centuries prior to that, the translation is one of our earliest sources to the interpretation of Qur'an, making its Greek rendering of great value to all who study the history of Qur'an and its reception. In this article, some of the main features regarding the aim of the translator will be discussed, taking as point of departure the thesis put forward by Ulbricht that the translation carries signs of Christian traits, based on linguistic features and the interpretation of these. Our conclusion will be that we hardly find evidence for this, and that we therefore are still not able to really pinpoint the origin or purpose of the translation, being hampered by not knowing the date, time, or background to the translation, in fact anything that can explain why somebody took the time and care to produce a full translation of the Qur'an sometime in the seventh, eighth, or ninth century CE. But further studies may eventually bring up clues to this, and the following is an attempt to further that investigation.

Since the complete translation has been lost to us, our only access to the Greek rendering comes out of two extant Byzantine Greek texts that quote the translation: the so-called *Refutatio* (in Greek *Anatropē*), composed by Niketas Byzantios in Constantinople around the 860's CE, and the anonymous *Abjuratio*, a text intended to be recited by converts from Islam to (orthodox) Christianity.³

philosophisch-dialektische Arbeitsweise und das theologische Selbstverständnis des Niketas von Byzanz », *Byzantinoslavica*, 80 (2022), p. 30–58; ID., « Die Klassifizierung in 'Philologische Kategorien' der im Coranus Graecus überlieferten Koranfragmente. Eine Einteilung in Wörtliches Zitat, Freies Zitat, Paraphrase und Anspielung », *De Medio Aevo*, 12/1 (2023), p. 125–145; ID., « The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation of the Quran (Vat. gr. 681) », *Dumbarton Oaks papers*, 77 (2023), p. 221–244. See also CHRISTIAN HØGEL, « The Byzantine Panoplia Tradition and the Greek Qur'an Translation in the Latin West », *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 20/3 (2018), p. 21–32.

² ADEL-THÉODORE KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'islam. Textes et auteurs (VIII-XIIIe s.)*, Éditions Nauwelaerts, Louvain – Paris 1969, KEES VERSTEEGH, « Greek Translations of the Qur'ān in Christian Polemics (9th C. A.D.) », *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 141/1 (1991), p. 52–68, ERICH TRAPP, « Gab es eine byzantinische Koranübersetzung? », *Diptycha hetaireias byzantinon kai metabyzantinon meleton*, 2 (1981), p. 7–17, REINHOLD GLEI, « Der Mistkäfer und andere Missverständnisse. Zur frühbyzantinischen Koranübersetzung », in ID. (ed.), *Frühe Koranübersetzungen. Europäische und außereuropäische Fallstudien*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, Trier 2012, p. 9–24; for earlier scholarship and its (in most cases ungrounded) criticism, see CHRISTIAN HØGEL, « The Greek Qur'an: Scholarship and Evaluations », *Orientalia Suecana*, 61 suppl. (2013), p. 173–180.

³ The most recent editions are the following, *Refutatio*: KARL FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz. Schriften zum Islam*, Echter Verlag, Würzburg 2000, p. 2–152 and *Abjuratio*: PG, 140, p. 124–136. ULBRICHT,

Niketas's *Refutatio* contains the bulk of our material with 80 fragments; the *Abjuratio* contains three fragments, one duplicating one of those found in the *Refutatio*, giving us a total of 82 fragments.⁴ In studying the Greek translation, we of course have to take the polemical nature of these transmitting texts into account, but luckily both texts contain very close direct quotations of the original wording of the translation. This we know because the translation was a word-for-word translation, and we are therefore able to identify quoted passages very precisely, matching Arabic words with Greek appearing in the same order, and to distinguish these from the many passages where Niketas paraphrases or in other ways refers to Qur'anic contents.⁵ Also, the Greek translation has a very particular Greek, which makes it quite distinguishable from Niketas's Greek.⁶ What we have, therefore, are 82 direct quotations of the early Greek translation, found in two texts presenting (in the case of the *Refutatio*) a polemical reading of these quotations and (in the case of the *Abjuratio*) formulas for anathematizing Islam.⁷ The main theme here will be the Greek translation, but some attention needs also to be paid to the transmitting texts, not least the treatise by Niketas. In the following come, therefore, a short overview of Niketas's working method (since he is the most important source), then a description of the main features of the translation, subsequently a presentation and analysis of the thesis of Ulbricht, and finally a brief conclusion.

II. Some Words on the Procedure of Niketas Byzantios

Since Niketas Byzantios's *Refutatio* is by far our most important source for the early Greek translation, we need to pay close attention to his working procedure to get an idea about how he handled the text. As has been shown in previous scholarship, Niketas had absolutely no Arabic and was working solely on the basis of a Greek Qur'an that he had at hand, referring to the book under various polemical labels. Niketas gives no information about how or from whom he acquired the book and seems to have worked on his own, only with a Greek text at hand, though also

« The Authorship », p. 224 narrows down the probable time of composition for the *Refutatio* to « sometime after 856–63 ».

⁴ I here use the numbering and counting employed in HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous ». A promised edition by Ulbricht (see ULBRICHT, « Der Islam-Diskurs », p. 1352), has not yet been published. Also, chapter 3 of this, by Ulbricht referred to in ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 227, under the title of « Graeco-Arabica am Beispiel der ältesten Koranübersetzung: Die Übersetzungstechnik im Coranus Graecus samt Glossar und Konkordanz der wörtlichen Koranzitate (griechisch-arabisch, arabisch-griechisch) » was unavailable to me.

⁵ On Niketas's procedures when paraphrasing, see ULBRICHT « Die Klassifizierung ».

⁶ Many features of the Greek of the translation were presented in TRAPP, « Gab es eine ».

⁷ Ulbricht employs the term *Coranus Graecus* when referring to the translation, but the present text will just use 'the Greek translation' as referent.

sharing other – partly polemical – information on Islam. As is clear from the prologue, and the prologues to Niketas's other polemical writings, he wrote on the instigation of a patriarch, possibly the patriarch Photios, who was himself an author of polemical writing.⁸ A large middle section of the *Refutatio* contains Niketas's polemical reflections as he browses through his Greek translation of the Qur'an. In this section, he indicates numbers and titles of suras, mixes quotations with paraphrases and interpretations, and at one point he says that he will now skip a series of suras, jumping in his presentation from sura 18 to sura 38, though paraphrasing some of the intermediate sections.⁹ So, in this part of his text he is working as a reader of the translation he has at hand and not, it seems, retrieving information from any other source. But at times, and not least in the latter part of his treatise (ch. XIX–XXX), he seems to adduce information from other sources. That he in some way has two sources – external polemical material as well as the Greek translation – is clear not least from the fact that he deals with the same sura, sura 112, twice, with a variation in his treatment of one Greek word coming out of the translation of this sura. The first time Niketas refers to the content of the sura, the word *al-ṣamad* is rendered *holosphairos*, the second time – when quoting the full Greek version of sura 112 – it is *holosphyros*.¹⁰ The two renderings are very different in meaning but phonetically almost identical. So, despite the semantic difference, they probably somehow go back to the same translation – whether oral or written – but we have no means of reconstructing this. This is, in any case, yet another sign of Niketas's complete dependence on somebody else's translation, having no means of checking the original Arabic.

As indicated above, we know that Niketas quoted the Greek text very conscientiously. In quotation after quotation the Greek renders the Arabic by giving almost exactly one Greek word for every Arabic word in the Qur'an and in the same order, appearing as such in Niketas's text. Since he had no Arabic, this feature can only go back to the original translator. The strict adherence to the Greek wording when quoting did, however, not prevent Niketas from interpreting the meaning in ways that more served his polemical aim than a strict reading of the text. Also, in some places he combined passages that he found in the proximity of each other, quoting disparate passages in sequence as if not skipping anything of importance. Some of these combinations do, however, result in misconstruing

⁸ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 223–224.

⁹ See HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 68 and ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 226–229. On the numbering of Niketas – with one digit lower than the now prevalent one – see HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 68.

¹⁰ The two passages in Niketas's text are found in FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz*, Introduction, p. 44, l. 81–92 and section XVIII, p. 116, l. 144–146. On the meanings and implications of this, see CHRISTOS SIMELIDIS, « The Byzantine Understanding of the Qur'anic Term *al-ṣamad* and the Greek Translations of the Qur'an », *Speculum*, 86 (2011), p. 887–913.

the meaning.¹¹ Also, and of central importance for our study here, he sometimes inserts a definite article when none was found in the Arabic, just as we may suspect that he did not always copy transliterated names with a consistent spelling.¹² The latter variation in terms of spelling, and probably also the use of definite article, may however also depend on the transmission of either the translation or Niketas's polemical treatise. The single manuscript that transmits the *Refutatio*, the Vat.gr. 681, is near contemporary with Niketas, but we have no proof it has come directly from his hand. So, with these reservations in mind, we may turn to the Greek translation itself.

III. *The Main Features of the Greek Translation*

The Greek translation, as we know it from the 82 fragments that have been transmitted, shows some very consistent features. First of all, it is a word-for-word translation, meaning that every word in the Arabic text has been rendered into 'one' Greek word, presented in the same order.¹³ Such radically direct translation is of course only possible if the target language has the needed flexibility in terms of word order and other basic linguistic features. And this is the case of Greek, which with a high degree of inflection can have the various sentence parts appear in almost any order. Furthermore, Greek also shares a number of features with Arabic in terms of sentence subordination, the use of definite articles, etc. Still, some features do cause problems for this manner of translation, especially prepositions. The highly unusual employment of Greek prepositions as complements to verbs (as well as certain verb + case combinations) was noted already by Trapp.¹⁴ When it comes to the *idāfa* construction (or genitive construction), which is characteristic of Arabic (and other Semitic languages), this on the one hand is easily reproduced in Greek, normally with the second part of the construction appearing in genitive in Greek, but here the specific use of definite article in Arabic (with no article being possible for the first part of the construction) is bound to put some demands on the translator in order to find a viable solution in Greek.¹⁵ We shall return to this below.

¹¹ ULBRICHT, « Die Verwendungsweise », p. 497–508.

¹² On inconsistent rendering of definite articles, see ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 232, referring to the « Graeco-Arabica » (vol. III of his dissertation), which was unfortunately unavailable to me. On the inconsistent spelling of names, see ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 230.

¹³ The word-for-word nature of the translation was first pointed out in HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 69.

¹⁴ TRAPP, « Gab es eine », p. 11–12, who also notes that verbs that usually carried a preposition in Greek but had not done so in the Arabic original came out with unusual case constructions.

¹⁵ On the *idāfa* construction, see also ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 232–233.

The word-for-word nature of the translation, together with Niketas's systematic reading of a number of suras with indication of numbers and titles of these, makes it clear that the Greek rendering was of a Qur'an very closely resembling the one we know, though some divergencies may take us into landscape of the various readings that Muslim interpreters made of the Qur'anic text.¹⁶ As is also clear from some of the renderings, the translator had knowledge not only of Arabic but also of Muslim interpretation of several Qur'anic passages.¹⁷ The Qur'an contains many words not known from other early Arabic writing, and it would in a sense have been unlikely to think of a Qur'anic translator who worked solely on the basis of good Arabic. Such a translator would soon start searching for help. The translator(s) working to produce this Greek rendering had information at hand, managing also to be consistent in the rendering of certain linguistic stems and, it seems, of technical vocabulary.¹⁸ It is even possible that certain poeticisms entered the Greek text, mirroring the poetic nature of the Qur'anic source text.¹⁹ All these features characterizing the translator – or the translator team – working in an organized and consistent manner led the present writer in 2010 to suggest a Muslim or at least Islamic origin for the Greek translation, under the assumption that some Muslim readers or even officials would have found a translation useful and the listed features of satisfactory quality.²⁰

Regardless of the actual origin, the most common background to a word-for-word translation is that of an interlinear translation, i.e. a translation produced to appear on the page above (or below, or even next to) the original text, often serving as an aide-mémoire. The fact that Arabic and Greek are written in each their direction does not exclude such origin. Every Arabic word could have a Greek word added above (or below, or even in between), though in some cases the result would be two words. To ease the reading of the Greek, signs (dots or such) could be added to indicate every chunk of Greek to be read at a time. This would work for just about all the text contained in the 82 extant fragments. There are, however, cases where the translator may have diverted from this. When we read *dia tou hagiou pneumatatos* as translation of the *idāfa* construction *bi rūḥi l-quḍus*,²¹ this may have appeared as an interlinear translation, but only with e.g. dots framing

¹⁶ On Niketas having a complete Greek translation at hand, see HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 68 and ULBRICHT, « Nachweis ». On the possible divergencies between the Arabic text employed by the translator and the present standard Qur'an, see ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 229–230.

¹⁷ VERSTEEGH, « Greek Translations », p. 61.

¹⁸ On consistency in stems and the use of technical vocabulary, see HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 70–71.

¹⁹ This was suggested in HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 71–72 and p. 111, concerning frgm. 70. Here the final rhyme of the Arabic seems to find poetic representation in internal rhyme/alliteration in the Greek.

²⁰ HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 72–74.

²¹ HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 75, frgm. 2: برح القدس translated into διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.

this whole sequence (• *dia tou hagiou pneumatos* •). For the case is a bit complicated, for several reasons. First, the Greek rendering turns the second part of the *idāfa* construction (namely the words *l-qudus*) into an adjective (*hagios*). The reason for this is that the words to be translated, meaning ‘the Holy Spirit’, are so common in Greek (whether Christian or any other Abrahamic writing) that any other rendering would sound somewhat strained. But since all other *idāfa* constructions that we find rendered into Greek in our translation consistently reproduce the two parts in the sequence found in the Arabic text, it is possible that the translation originally read • *dia tou pneumatos • tou hagiou* •. But this would then produce a doubling of the definite article, as required by Greek syntax. So, as we see, the rules governing the *idāfa* construction as well as the definite article put some demands on the translator. And it will be fruitless guess work to attempt deciding what the original translation had here. What is certain is that the Greek translation exhibits a very clear word-for-word structure, with some dilemmas creating possible choices for the translator. And in some cases, we are certain about the choices made, in others we may see small inconsistencies that it is hard to ascribe to either translator or copyist with any certainty.

We do not possess the book that Niketas had in hand, but it would be wonderful to know what kind of a book it was, how the Greek text appeared on the page of the manuscript, and whether it e.g. contained the Arabic text as well. Here our only source is the few short paragraphs that Niketas spends on describing the book, especially in his first refutation.²² This is where Niketas tells us that it contains 113 chapters and a prologue (i.e. 114 suras). But it does not come down to a real description. Due to spelling mistakes in the copying of the Greek, Trapp deduced that the translation was made after the introduction of the Greek minuscule script and written with that script.²³ This conclusion may seem a bit over-stated, but we may probably say that the copy that Niketas worked from was in the minuscule.

Furthermore, several scholars assert that the manuscript reproduced also the single letters, the so-called *fawātih*, which come at the beginning of 29 suras of the Qur'an.²⁴ This they deduce from the words that come a bit further on in the same section that contains some description of the manuscript. Here Niketas speaks of the demonic nature of the qur'anic text – that it contains Manichaean ideas and all sorts of spells:

Καὶ πλεῖστα δὲ αὐτοῦ τῆς Μανιχαϊκῆς μουσαρίας συλλέλεκται τερατεύματα,
δαιμόνων τινῶν προσηγορίαι καὶ κατ' αὐτῶν ὀρκωμοσίαι ἐπὶ δυσφήμοις
προσφωνήσεις τε πρὸς τῶν δαιμόνων χώρους καὶ ὁμολογίαι, ὅτι καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν

²² These come at certain points in the passage. See FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 44–48, I.104–174.

²³ TRAPP, « Gab es eine », p. 10–11.

²⁴ ULBRICHT, « Nachweis », p. 29.

ἀπόστολοι καὶ προφῆται παρὰ τοῦ διαγγελλομένου ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ γραφῇ Θεοῦ πλειστάκις κεχειροτόνηνται.²⁵

And most wondrous tales he has collected from the Manichaean pollution: the names of some demons, some oaths to be used against these containing abusive words, pronouncements against places of demons, and assurances that also from these apostles and prophets are most often elected by the God announced in this writing [i.e. the Qur'an].

He then adds some observations that are difficult to translate:

Καὶ στοιχεῖον δὲ γοητικῶς προγραφὲν καὶ ψῆφοι μεταγεγραμμένοι παρ' αὐτῶ διαφόρως τυγχάνουσι.²⁶

Already A. Mai, the first editor of Niketas's treatise, translated στοιχεῖον ... γοητικῶς προγραφὲν with *littera fraudulenter praeposita*, « a letter deceitfully placed in front » and in a footnote explained that this referred to the Qur'anic single letters.²⁷ Förstel and Ulbricht offer the same explanation.²⁸ The passage is, however, difficult. Niketas is not being very precise, and his use of singular *stoicheion* instead of plural *stoicheia* makes it unlikely that he is referring to the single letters, which in most cases come in clusters of more than one letter and appear in front of altogether 29 suras. Another explanation would here be that *stoicheion* means not 'letter' but 'element' or 'segment' and refers to single Arabic words, which Niketas took to be of some magic nature. The *psephoi* in the second half of the sentence, which all previous commentators translate or interpret as 'views' or 'sentences', could here be taken in the original meaning of 'pebble', pointing to the dots separating sentence segments, as explained above.²⁹ Or it

²⁵ FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 48, I.168–172.

²⁶ FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 48, I.172–173.

²⁷ PG, 105, col. 711, adding a footnote: « Videtur denotare solitarias illas, nulloque sensu, ut Moslemi fatentur, praeditas litteras, quas multarum surarum initiis praepositas videmus » (« this seems to indicate those single – senseless as the Muslims concede – initial letters, which we placed in front of many sura openings »).

²⁸ Förstel translates « einzelne <den Kapiteln> zum Zweck der Zauberei vorangestellte Buchstaben » (FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 49). ULBRICHT, « Nachweis », p. 541–542. I see no reason to believe that Niketas is here somehow dealing with sura 7, as indicated by Ulbricht. Furthermore, Ulbricht also indicates that the beginning of Niketas's refutation no. 6 contains reference to the single letters. In Niketas's words ὁ ἔκτος τῶ Μωάμετ μῦθος ἐπιγράφεται μὲν εἰς τὰ γωνρίσματα, τουτέστιν εἰς τὰ παραστατικά σημεῖα καὶ τὰς ἀποδείξεις, ὅτι ἐκ Θεοῦ δῆθεν αὐτῶ ἢ τοιαύτη δέδοται γραφή (FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 80, VI.1–3), but these words only clarify the name of sura 7, i.e. the *gnōrismata* are explained as *ta parastatika semeia kai tas apodeixeis* (« the characterizing signs and proofs »), as also in the translation of Förstel.

²⁹ Mai translates ψῆφοι μεταγεγραμμένοι παρ' αὐτῶ διαφόρως with *sententiae varie mutatae* (PG, 105, col. 711). Förstel translates in *verschiedener Weise abgeänderte Urteile* (FÖRSTEL, *Niketas von Byzanz*, p. 49); Ulbricht does not translate this part of the sentence.

could refer to the dots of the Arabic script. A translation of the quote above would then run as this:

And a segment magically inserted in front and pebbles inscribed by it in different ways also occur. (my translation)

With this interpretation, the last sentence refers altogether to visual objects visible on the pages of the manuscript, coming in a section in which Niketas is keen to prove its demonic nature, and in this way the singular *stoicheion* would make sense (as 'a word segment' that Niketas is not able to read and sees as magical), as would the *psephoi*, which hardly ever means 'views' or 'sentences' but rather 'votes' or 'decisions', a meaning stemming from pebbles being used for voting. If this interpretation is corrected, Niketas's manuscript was bilingual, possibly with dots separating word segments.

With these words on the translation and how it appeared to Niketas, we turn to Ulbricht's thesis on the aim and nature of the translation.

IV. Ulbricht's Thesis

In Ulbricht's article entitled « The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation of the Quran (Vat. gr. 681) » from 2023 a thesis is proposed concerning the origin of the Greek translation of the Qur'an. This thesis is introduced on p. 223 of the article, where Ulbricht states that he will « elaborate on the Christian understanding of the quranic text as documented in the *Coranus Graecus* ». Later in the article, the author offers a series of arguments in support of the thesis. We will deal with these shortly, but first a note on the consequences of such Christian origin. It will of course make a difference if the translator was a Christian (or a group of Christians), through it might be difficult to say exactly which. As we have already seen, much precision went into the extensive work of translating the whole Qur'an, and the polemical statements that we have hitherto referred to all went back to the work of Niketas, not to the translator. But according to Ulbricht also the translator stood behind some modifications concerning two themes, namely « sexuality and the quranic image of God », to which he adds yet a third kind of modification by the translator, namely « in quranic verses dealing with theological issues with respect to Muslim and Christian dogmas ». ³⁰ Furthermore, according to Ulbricht, some omissions of negative or interrogative particles lead « to diametrically opposed, sometimes even salacious, statements within the Greek translation, and the description of the quranic God is pejoratively connoted ». ³¹

³⁰ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 231.

³¹ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 231.

We will now go through the cases of modifications discussed by Ulbricht and see whether they fit clearly into a pattern. The three kinds of modification mentioned by Ulbricht often occur where we find a surprising use of the definite article, but also other features play a role, as we shall see. Ulbricht highlights five Qur'anic passages as rendered in the Greek translation: Q 3:45, 3:64, 9:30, 5:19, 3:44.

Q 3:45

In this Quranic verse, the Greek translation, as preserved through Niketas's text, renders the Arabic *bi-kalimatin minhu* into the Greek *ton logon autou*.³² A first thing to note is that the Arabic preposition *bi-* disappears in the Greek, and instead we find now an additional definite article, *ton*. As mentioned above, definite articles do appear and disappear in the Greek translation, in some cases governed by the requirements of Greek, in other cases not. Prepositions, on the other hand, tend to be rendered into Greek even when they do not fit the language parameters.³³ The passage therefore seems to have been modified, using Ulbricht's term, but probably so that the preposition fell out and was replaced by a definite article. Whether this gives the passage a clear Christian reference, in the sense of *logos* now being a referent to Christ, is hard to say. Christ does appear as the next word, but in another case (nominative instead of accusative). In fact, if anything, Christ now appears as an apposition to God, both appearing in the nominative case, since in the passage Christ has only participles connected to him (and no definite verb). But none of this concerns the Greek *logon*, which I believe any reader would take to carry some general sense ('word' or 'speech'). Not even Niketas equates *logon* and Christ in his comments. So, some irregularity does appear in this passage, but hardly anybody's attempt through translation to bend the Qur'anic text into supporting or mirroring Christian dogma.

Q 3:64

As Ulbricht tells us, there are in the Greek Qur'an four passages in which *logos* represents the Arabic word *qawl* and three in which it represents the Arabic word *kalima*, and all the three latter are in passages that treat Christological questions: Q 3:45 (discussed above), in Q 4:171, as well as in Q 3:64, the passage now under discussion. Here Ulbricht solves the seeming lack of analogy between the Greek *ton logon ton stoichounta* and the original Arabic *kalimatin sawā'in*. They both mean something like « a/the word that is equitable ». But the Greek translation carries a definite article, according to Ulbricht turning this into a Christological statement (Christ being the « equitable Word »).³⁴ It is true, as pointed out by Ulbricht, that

³² HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 80–81, frgm. 13.

³³ TRAPP, « Gab es eine », p. 11–12, HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 76 n. 37.

³⁴ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 234

the Qur'anic passage comes right after a Christological section (Q 3:45–57, 58–63), but the words of Q 3:64 clearly speak of God in the Qur'anic way, and any reader would soon discover that a consistent distinction between God and Christ is here upheld. It is therefore hard to believe that anyone would have read the passage the way Ulbricht suggest, and also hard to explain why a translator would want « to make the quranic concept of 'God's Word' accessible or more familiar to non-Muslim readers». ³⁵ If really wanting to make Christian and Muslim dogma correspond on this, much more intervention into the text would be needed. So, it is possible that Christian language has entered the text here, but then probably by slip caused a subsequent copyist or by Niketas himself, who does not comment upon this possible Christological meaning.

Q 9:30

In this passage, we find two instances of the same *compound*, *bnu llāhi* ('the son of God') translated differently, as *hyios theou* and *ho hyios tou theou*, respectively. ³⁶ First of all, this observation should make us question whether the translator paid much attention to this. Could it simply be two different renderings that the translator found equally good? We find support for such a deliberation on our part in the complications that the Arabic implied for a Greek translator. The expression *bnu llāhi* is (again) an *iḍāfa* construction, and as such a difficulty in any case for a translator from Arabic to Greek. The first word does not and cannot carry a definite article in Arabic, the second here only does it as part of God's name. According to Arabic grammar having a definite article on the second part makes the whole construction definite. But which solution is then most correct for a word-by-word translator into Greek? Well, various solutions offer themselves, but the most likely renderings are just the ones we see, either with no definite articles at all or with definite articles on both. These are also the variations that we see in the New Testament (as in Mark 15:39), appearing also there as translations (probably from an oral context) of a similar Semitic/Aramaic construction. It is true, as Ulbricht points out, ³⁷ that Niketas a bit later in his refutation on sura 9 does claim that Muhammad tries to claim the title of, or position as, son of God for himself. But Niketas does not refer to Q 9:30 there, and the passage only shows how far Niketas is prepared to twist the Qur'anic text to serve his polemical purposes.

Q 5:19

In this passage, the Arabic *min bashīrin* ('any bringer of good news') is translated as *ho evaggelizomenos* ('the bringer of good news'), so again a case of a definite article

³⁵ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 234–235.

³⁶ HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 90–91, frgm. 33.

³⁷ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 236.

inserted into the Greek rendering.³⁸ First in our analysis we may note here that the Arabic uses a common partitive construction with *min* ('of' + noun in plural, meaning 'any ...'). This construction has a near parallel in Greek, requiring however that one inserts an additional indefinite pronoun *tis* (together with a genitive plural). Here a simple singular has been employed, and we find such partitive construction rendered into a noun in singular also in other places of the Greek translation. This also happens in fragment 14, where the Arabic *min naṣīrīn* becomes *ekdikos* in Greek. In this other example no definite article is added, but *ekdikos* is a Greek noun (or adjective), whereas the chosen rendering for *bashīrīn* is a Greek participle *evaggelizomenos*. One quite simple explanation for the article is therefore the need to underline that this word here has a nominal function (as subject of the clause). A common manner of making this clear in Greek is, as mentioned, to add the indefinite article *tis* ('someone'). Here instead another solution was found, that of adding a definite article. Following this line of thought makes it very unlikely that Christian vocabulary went into the wording of our passage. We are witnessing an attempt at a quite literal translation, and if we take the word *evangelizo* to be very Christian, we must remember that Greek of all kinds were floating around in all parts of the eastern Mediterranean, making religious parlance adopt the available religious Greek words.

Q 3:44

The final passage discussed by Ulbricht is a complicated case. The Arabic *aqlāmahum* ('their pens'), which comes in a proverbial phrase, is translated as *autōn tas aqkalas* ('their wings').³⁹ Since it would in any case be difficult for the translator to find anything in Greek that closely resembles the Arabic expression, given its gnomic nature, we may start looking for what could have led to such a distant rendering. One solution, which Ulbricht also refers to as a case of 'phonetic proximity', is that *aqkalas* simply transliterates *aqlāma-* (without the possessive suffix). In general, the Greek translation displays extensive use of transliterations, which appear consistently with names and with words of which the meaning is uncertain, in most cases because the Qur'anic text poses the question as to the meaning of the given word.⁴⁰ The latter is not the case here, so perhaps the translator believed that this was a name, or reused it as a loan word or neologism. In any case, the passage does contain surprising features in Greek: the insertion of *aggeloi* ('angels') as a new subject of the clause, the reordering of noun and possessive genitive (*-hum* after the Arabic noun becomes *autōn* before the Greek noun), and the fact that the same Arabic passage *wa-mā kunta ladayhim* ('and you

³⁸ HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 86, frgm. 23.

³⁹ HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 80–81, frgm. 13.

⁴⁰ HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 71.

were not there'), appearing twice in close proximity in our passage, comes out in Greek with two different syntactical solutions (first as a double genitive *sou mē ontos ekeise* and then a few words later as *kai ouk ēs ekeise*). In any case, there is hardly an argument for seeing this as « a result of an unconscious association with Christian intertext », which it would in any case be hard to explain.⁴¹ What we find is a possible transliteration, with some variation inexplicably introduced into the Greek rendering.

So, if it is hard to argue for a Christian voice or standpoint in the fragments that we have of the Greek translation of the Qur'an, it may be best to repeat some of the features that clearly demonstrate that the translator had an intimate understanding of the text:

- the translation demonstrates knowledge of secondary interpretations coming from the Muslim world (see above footnote 17);
- the translation reflects a fine-tuned care of precision, see e.g. how *ahl al-kitāb* becomes *hoi oikeioi tes graphēs*, with the communal meaning of *ahl* ('the people of ...') retained and *kitāb* with the sense of 'writing' or even 'scripture'.⁴²
- the translation of Arabic *sura* as *ōdē*, as commented upon by Ulbricht⁴³ again shows the translator knowing both the context of the Arabic text and what the right word for this would be in Greek.

V. Conclusion

As the analysis above has shown, it is hard to argue for a clear Christian phrasing built into the Greek translation of the Qur'an by its translator. It is in fact hard to understand why a translator of that text would want to make the Qur'anic text suggest that « the concepts of Christ's filiality and divinity were also present in Islam ». ⁴⁴ So much of the text, even in the extant passages of the Greek translation, shows the Qur'an arguing for the opposite. So, if this did enter the translation, it must be ascribed to faulty copying. In any case, as indicated above, there is hardly an argument for this, in fact more for the opposite. The conclusion must then again be that the translator could at least equally well have been a Muslim or a person well-trained in the Muslim tradition.

⁴¹ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 238.

⁴² On *graphēs* as 'scripture', see fragments 5, 16, 19, 26, 41, 45, and 55, but note also that it is sometimes interpreted as a plural form. See also HØGEL, « An Early Anonymous », p. 74.

⁴³ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 239–240.

⁴⁴ ULBRICHT, « The Authorship », p. 234.

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