

## Greek Translations of the Qur'ān in Christian Polemics (9th century A.D.)\*

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If the writings of the Christian and Muslim polemicists were the only source for our knowledge of Byzantine-Arab relations from the 7th through the 10th centuries, we would get a very dismal view of the intercourse between the two empires and the two religions during that period. Both sides made a serious effort to defeat their opponent completely – fortunately, only on paper. In actual life, relations between the two empires were generally much less strained, and to both sides commercial transactions were more important than the occasional military confrontations, which at the time of the Abbasids had become all but a ritual.<sup>1</sup>

Theoretically, however, the state of war between Byzance and Baghdad never ceased, and at the level of religion the possibility of an accommodation was never seriously considered. Already at an early date the Muslim state had developed a *modus vivendi* with other religions. A large number of Christians and Jews lived under the jurisdiction of the caliphs and their status had been determined both legally and socially. In spite of occasional restrictive measures against members of other religions, one can safely say that the prevalent attitude towards them was fairly tolerant. As *ḍimmī's* they were allowed to perform their religious duties and within certain limits they could continue to exercise their own jurisdiction within their religious community.

Notwithstanding this tolerance, Muslim opinions concerning the nature of the Christian religion did not change at all. According to their view, based on the teachings of the *Qur'ān*, the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) had received a true revelation, but they had been foolish enough to falsify this revelation. One of the proofs for this falsification (*tahrīf*) was that neither in the *Torah* nor in the New Testament was there any mention of the coming of the prophet Muḥammad, although

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<sup>1</sup> For general information on the relations between Arabs and Byzantines see CANARD (1956; 1964).

originally his mission had been announced to the Jews and the Christians. This leads us to one of the inherent problems with which Muslim polemicists were confronted: on the one hand they tried to demonstrate the internal inconsistencies and contradictions of the Jewish and Christian revelations,<sup>2</sup> but on the other they kept looking within these same books for statements announcing Muḥammad's mission. Nonetheless, the status of the Jewish and Christian books in themselves was not a matter of discussion — in principle, they represented a true revelation from God.

For the Christians, on the other hand, there was no such possibility of incorporating the Islamic revelation into their own religious system nor of recognizing it in principle. According to the Christian view,<sup>3</sup> Jesus had not been a mere prophet, but the true son of God, who by his teaching had superseded all previous revelations. The Christians regarded themselves as the *tertium genus*, after the pagans and the Jews. Their judgment on the teachings of the *Qur'ān* was, therefore, of necessity a negative one. If they wished to preserve their own religion, they had to come to the conclusion that the Islamic revelation had been invented by a human being, Muḥammad, whom accordingly they regarded as a pseudo-prophet. There were among the Christian polemicists different opinions as to his motives — he was variously regarded by them as a charlatan, a heretic, an ignoramus, or an obsessed man — but they all agreed that God had had no part in the revealing of the *Qur'ān*.

For a Christian polemicist there were several possible approaches to the polemical attack on the fundamental teachings of Islam. He could point out what he saw as the internal absurdities in the *Qur'ān*; he could take his own Books as his point of departure and show that the *Qur'ān* contradicted their teachings. He could also enter into a discussion on the substance of Islamic beliefs and try to show with logical or ethical arguments that they were inferior to Christian beliefs, so that Islam could not lay any claim to supersession or abrogation of previous revelations. The choice of the polemical approach was, of course, dependent on the prospective audience: the arguments to be used against a Muslim opponent were different from those to be used, for instance, to someone who wished to reconvert, or who was just a neutral bystander.

<sup>2</sup> These inconsistencies were collected in the so-called *tanāquḍāt*-collections, see FRITSCH 1930: 70 ff.

<sup>3</sup> A systematic analysis of Christian views on the Islamic revelation in KHOURY 1972: 143–218.

The point to be discussed in this paper is the role of the text of the *Qur'ān* in Christian polemics and the question of the degree of knowledge the Christians possessed about the revealed Book of their religious opponents. In Muslim circles knowledge of the Bible was widespread and there had been translations into Arabic from a very early date.<sup>4</sup> But the Arabic text of the *Qur'ān* was much less known by Christians. One of the first Christian polemicists, John of Damascus (ca. 655–750), shows in his writings against Islam that he knew the Arabic text and he paraphrases parts from it, including even one literal quotation translated fairly accurately into Greek.<sup>5</sup> After John of Damascus there are no polemicists, neither in the Islamic empire, nor in Byzance who exhibit direct knowledge of the Arabic text, although they do have a stock of standard arguments, which are based on second hand knowledge. The first Byzantine polemicist to quote extensively from the *Qur'ān* is Nicetas Philosphus (or Byzantinus).

Not much is known about Nicetas. SAHAS gives his dates as 842–912, but this cannot be correct.<sup>6</sup> His main activities probably fell in the reign of Michael III (842–867), who is generally depicted as a drunkard and a weakling, although he was rather successful in his campaigns against the Arabs.<sup>7</sup> Among Nicetas' writings are an exposition of the Christian faith, as well as an extensive answer to two letters which were ostensibly written by the "Agarenes" (Muslims) to the Byzantine emperor Michael III. In these letters the Agarenes accuse the Christians of polytheism and Nicetas defends himself against this slanderous accusation (*διαβολή*), as he calls it. A large part of the exposition of the faith is repeated in Nicetas' most important work, the Refutation of the *Qur'ān*, in which he systematically deals with the contents of the Holy Book of the Muslims.<sup>8</sup> He quotes in Greek translation verbatim about 200 verses and discusses in detail the contents of the first 18 sura's. The rest of the *Qur'ān* is dealt with in a more fragmentary way.

According to GÜTERBOCK, Nicetas' Refutation cannot have been written in the reign of Michael III, but it must date from the reign of his successor, Basilus (867–886), although there is no real evidence for

<sup>4</sup> For Arabic translations of the Bible see GRAF 1944–53: I, 30–53.

<sup>5</sup> See SAHAS 1972: 45–47; there can be no doubt that John of Damascus knew Arabic and that he actually engaged in religious discussions.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SAHAS 1972: 77, n. 1; these dates are those of the emperors in whose reign Nicetas lived. Cf. KRUMBACHER 1897: 79; KHOURY 1969: 113–64.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. VASILIEV 1952: 277 ff.

<sup>8</sup> The Refutation must be later than the letters to the Agarenes, cf. KHOURY 1969: 121 and n. 15.

this assertion.<sup>9</sup> GÜTERBOCK assumes that Nicetas wrote his work under the impression of Basilius' victories against the Arabs between 875 and 878, and not those of Michael III between 855 and 856.<sup>10</sup> KHOURY, on the other hand, tentatively refers to a statement in Ṭabarī, according to which a Byzantine patrician, called Niqīṭā, was captured by the Arabs while trying to convert the inhabitants of the village of Lu'lu'a, and subsequently ransomed by the Byzantine emperor himself. This incident took place in 245/859, but there is no evidence connecting this patrician with our Nicetas.<sup>11</sup>

The Refutation of the *Qur'ān* remained the only source for relatively reliable information on the contents of the Muslims' Holy Book, and almost all later polemicists quote from it, among them Euthymius Zigabenus, Nicetas Choniates, and even a late author such as Bartholomew of Edessa (14th century). Only with the Latin translation of the *Qur'ān* by Robertus Retenensis, which was made in 1143 for Peter of Cluny, did the West get acquainted with a new version of the text. This text served as the basis for Nicolaus of Cues' *Cribratio Alcoran*. By then, Nicetas' work had become antiquated.

What was Nicetas' attitude towards the book he studied so intensely? For a strict adherent to the orthodox Christian religion such as Nicetas there was no choice but to condemn the *Qur'ān* completely. For him it was the product of diabolical inspiration by Satan himself, although from time to time he also suggests that it was entirely Muḥammad's invention, who claimed to have received this book from God, whereas his sole purpose was to get power and to corrupt his people. The Refutation constantly warns the reader that the *Qur'ān* is full of blasphemous utterances against the true God, since the God of Muḥammad's revelation cannot be identical with the God of Christianity. There is no proof, nor are there any witnesses to corroborate Muḥammad's claim that he received the *Qur'ān* from God (cf. 705B). Nicetas' contempt for the *Qur'ān* shows itself clearly in the expressions he uses to indicate the Book: he calls it τὸ θεολοίδορον γράμμα (713A), ἡ βάρβαρος γραφή (716D), ἡ πλαστογραφηθεῖσα βίβλος (704A), τὰ τοιαῦτα παίγνια (753D), or simply refers to it as βιβλίδιον.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. GÜTERBOCK 1912: 24–26.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. KHOURY 1969: 114; VASILIEV 1952: 303.

<sup>11</sup> Ṭabarī: *Ta'riḥ* III, 1448; cf. KHOURY 1969: 120; the printed edition has *Luḡulī*.

<sup>12</sup> See also the translation of the word *sūra* (Q. 2/23) as ὠδή (713A): the verses of the *Qur'ān* are more akin to magical incantations than to a decent revelation, at least in the eyes of the Byzantine Christians.

According to Nicetas its source of inspiration is either the Antichrist (717A)<sup>13</sup>, or the devil (764C), or the Manicheans (712C, 720A, 740B, 741C), and even Muḥammad's phantasy itself. But he is not interested in the psychology of religion: his main purpose is to end once and for all what he believes to be the dangerous and blasphemous talk of the Muslims which threatens the true faith of the Christians, before they end up in the same way as the ignorant barbarians, by giving themselves to the adoration of the devil and other demons. It is true, Nicetas concedes, that the *Qur'ān* also contains moral precepts which are irreproachable in themselves, but Muḥammad only incorporated these in order to mask his true purpose (e.g., 769D).

In this respect, Nicetas' attitude towards Islam differs widely from that of Nicolaus of Cues. According to this much later author — he wrote his *Cribratio Alcoran* between 1460 and 1462 — the *Qur'ān* was part of God's true revelation. On the one hand, Muḥammad did not dare to confront his compatriots with the full truth, and on the other hand, his knowledge of the Christian faith was incomplete, so that he attacked them for the wrong reasons. Psychologically, his attitude was wrong, because he concentrated on his own glory, but on the whole his beliefs were right. This may also be seen in the title of Nicolaus' main work: his purpose was not a refutation of the Muslims' Book, but an effort to sift it in order to find the true elements, with the help of the teachings of the Gospels.<sup>14</sup>

For Nicetas on the other hand, the *Qur'ān* is wrong from beginning to end, and he sets out to demonstrate this by means of a comparison with his own point of reference, the Christian Books: ἔστι δὲ ἡ πρώτη κατὰ τῆς σαθρᾶς ταύτης προσαγομένη οἰκοδομῆς μηχανῆ, ἡ πρὸς τὴν θείαν Γραφὴν σύγκρισις (704B). The *Qur'ān* may not contradict these Christian Books, since Muḥammad himself acknowledged the truthful character of the Christian revelation. This means that Nicetas was unaware of the fact that the truthful character of the Christian revelation was precisely a bone of contention between Christian and Muslims, since the Muslims accused the Christians of having falsified their revelation, among other things, by suppressing any mention of the prophet Muḥammad (*tahrīf*).<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the comparison of the two revelations as a polemical means was invalidated and it was impossible to use the Bible as

<sup>13</sup> Cf. SAHAS 1972: 68–69.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. NAUMANN 1948: 63–69.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. KHOURY 1972: 210–216; FRITSCH 1930: 54 ff.

authoritative argument or as common ground in polemics against Islam.<sup>16</sup>

In a wider sense, one may say that the Bible is a frame of reference for the whole of Nicetas' attitude in his polemical writings. He rejects the *Qur'ān* not only because it contradicts the Bible, but also because it is so radically different from what he regards as a Holy Book. Its structure cannot be compared to that of any of the parts of the Bible: it is neither historical, nor narrative, nor poetic, nor gnomic, etc. There is no orderly treatment of the material,<sup>17</sup> and the titles of the chapters do not correspond with the contents of each chapter. Apart from this, it also contains in Nicetas' view, absurd stories and many proofs of the bad characteristics the Byzantines had always assumed to be typical of their opponents, such as lust and cruelty.

In one passage, Nicetas explicitly discusses the argument according to which the *Qur'ān* had superseded any previous revelation. In his translation of Q. 10/2 (752B-D) the Arabic expression *qadam šidq* is represented as προκοπή ἀληθινή "a true progress". Nicetas uses this (incorrect) translation as the point of departure for a long discussion concerning the additional truths Muḥammad claims to have brought.<sup>18</sup> If the *Qur'ān* is to be a τρίτη γραφή, Nicetas says, there ought to be the same relation between Muslim and Christian revelation as the one existing between Christian and Jewish revelation, namely one of superior value, which abrogates the preceding revelations.<sup>19</sup> But, Nicetas contends, nothing of the kind can be claimed for the *Qur'ān*, since it is full of absurdities and patently wrong teachings.

In the previous paragraphs we have indicated that in Nicetas' reasoning the text of the *Qur'ān*, its contents, play an important role. This text bears witness to the diabolical purposes of the prophet and to the kind of false beliefs he imposed on his compatriots, that is what Nicetas wishes to demonstrate. He presents his audience with a collection of quotations which he regards as ridiculous and which in his view may be successfully used in a discussion with Muslims. It is clear from the start that he does not direct his book at the Muslims themselves. In the first place, he does not mention any objections and the text of the Refutation is not even written in the form of a discussion. The fact that he does not

<sup>16</sup> Contrast this with John of Damascus who knew of this accusation, cf. SAHAS 1972: 82.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. 705A ἀκοσμόν τε καὶ ἄτακτον τὴν σύνθεσιν ἔχον.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. KHOURY 1972: 109; 285-88 on "la loi du progrès religieux".

<sup>19</sup> Cf. KHOURY 1969: 161 and Nicetas 716B.

take into account the Muslim argument of *tahrif* is probably explained by his ignorance of this argument, but this ignorance, too, demonstrates the fact that he did not have any feedback from Muslims, or from Arabophones, for that matter.<sup>20</sup> Such actual contact would have brought to light the factual inaccuracies in the translation, such as the remark that Q. 61/6 mentions the name Μωάμετ, whereas in fact the text has *Ahmad* (772A), or the remark that Q. 9/29 has the name Ἰσραήλ, whereas in fact it has 'Uzayr (745C). The only reasonable assumption seems to be that the Refutation was not intended as a call for conversion to the Muslims, unlike the replies to the Letters of the Agarenes, which are written in a quite different style. Rather, one must assume that it was directed at those Christians who were under attack by Muslim propagandists, or who had already been converted to Islam and were now being pressured by Nicetas to return to the Mother Church. It has been suggested that the Refutation was written for the Christians in Sicily, who at this period were in such a situation. One may also think of Ṭabari's report about the efforts of a Byzantine patrician to win back the inhabitants of Lu'lu'a. Whatever the real background of Nicetas' work, it is obvious that it is not the reflection of an actual discussion, but rather a collection of arguments of the same type as the Muslim collections of *tanāqu-ḍāt*, written as a tool in the hand of the believers in case they had to engage in real discussions.

In this respect Nicetas did not have any predecessors. The only author before him who shows any sign of being acquainted directly with the text of the *Qur'ān* represents a completely different tradition. We have seen above that John of Damascus discussed the contents of the *Qur'ān*, basing himself on the Arabic text. Regarding his translation, one notices immediately that it was different from the translation used by Nicetas. The titles of the sura's differ;<sup>21</sup> the transcription of the names differs, John of Damascus having, for instance, Μαμέδ, where the printed text of Nicetas' work has Μωάμετ.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, when we compare the only literal quotation in John of Damascus with the same

<sup>20</sup> Remarks to the effect that Muḥammad talked to himself in the *Qur'ān* would hardly have been effective in an actual discussion with Muslims.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. SAHAS 1972: 89–93; John of Damascus mentions the names of four sura's: ἡ γραφή τῆς γυναικός (Nicetas: εἰς τὰς γυναῖκας); ἡ γραφή τῆς καμήλου τοῦ Θεοῦ (? sura 26?; Nicetas knows the story, but does not attach the same importance to it as John of Damascus does, cf. KHOURY 1972: 157 ff.); ἡ γραφή τῆς τραπέζης (Nicetas: εἰς τὴν τράπεζαν); γραφή Βοιδίου (no title given by Nicetas).

<sup>22</sup> According to the editor one finds in the manuscripts also the forms Μωάμεδ, Μωάμεϋ, Μαχοῦμεδ.

passage in Nicetas, we find that it uses a different language and is much less literal than Nicetas' translation.<sup>23</sup> Another argument may be that Nicetas ignored the argument of the *tahrīf*, which John of Damascus mentions, and that John of Damascus does not have the translation of ὀλόσφαιρος or ὀλόσφυρος for *šamad* (see below). The most important difference between the two authors with regard to their polemical activities is that Nicetas could not check the translation he used with the help of the Arabic text, whereas John of Damascus could.

Before we proceed with a discussion of the translation as such, we shall take a brief look at the methods of interpretation used by Nicetas in his analysis of the text of the *Qur'ān*. We have seen above that for him it was a book which must conform to the Gospel if it was to uphold any claims to being a revelation. In some instances Nicetas goes so far as to adapt the contents of a Qur'ānic story to the Gospel version, e.g., when he says that Zachary had to be silent for three days as a punishment for his incredulity (725A), apparently reading the contents of the story in the Gospel of Luke (I, 20) into the text of the *Qur'ān* (3/41) which does not mention this detail. In another case the conclusion is almost unavoidable that he knowingly distorted the meaning of the text, when he quotes Q. 2/191 (708B) ἐχθράνατε παντὶ καθ' ὃ πᾶς τις ἐχθραίνει ὑμῖν, without adding the rest of the context where it is said that the fighting must stop when the enemy no longer resists. Moreover, Nicetas does not tell the reader that the text speaks only of fighting against those who do not believe, and thus makes it sound as a general call to aggression.<sup>24</sup>

We have stated above that Nicetas did not have an Arabic text at his disposal, but only a translation. Our only information about this translation is what we can glean from Nicetas' treatise. It is, for instance, uncertain whether or not the translation was incomplete. Nicetas gives the impression of quoting from a larger text: many of the passages he quotes are not immediately relevant for polemical purposes, especially

<sup>23</sup> The passage concerned is Q. 2/223 *nisā' ukum hartun lakum fa-tū hartakum annā šī tum wa-qaddimū li-anfusikum*; this is translated by Nicetas as αἱ γυναῖκες ὑμῶν νεατὸς ὑμῶν εισέλθετε εἰς τοὺς νεατοὺς ὑμῶν ὅθεν βούλεσθε· καὶ συνέλθετε ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν (721C), and John of Damascus has εἰργασαὶ τὴν γῆν, ἣν ὁ Θεὸς ἔδωκε σοὶ καὶ φιλοκάλησον αὐτήν· καὶ τότε ποιήσον καὶ τοιῶσδε (cf. SAHAS 1972: 138, 771D).

<sup>24</sup> Another example is that of the two verses Q. 2/24-24 where the interpretation takes the first part of the next verse "God is not ashamed . . ." together with the last part of the last verse "they will enjoy themselves . . ." It is hard to distinguish here between the biases of the translator and those of the interpreter (712A).



in the case of the later sura's. KHOURY observes that he would not have done this if the Greek translation had been readily available for everyone in Byzance since in that case he could have referred to it.<sup>25</sup> But the practice of quoting extensively from another text is certainly normal at this period, even if the text was available, so that the extensive quotations do not rule out the existence of a complete translation in manuscript form. Besides, this translation may well have been made for Nice-tas' personal use only.

As for the quality of the translation, it is not really a bad translation at all. One might say that it is rather literal, perhaps in an intentional effort to increase the awkward character the text must have had for Byzantine readers who were used to the text of the Biblical revelation. Within the limits of this literality the translator seriously attempts to translate the complete Arabic text, giving each Arabic element a Greek equivalent, as far as possible. It is obvious, that he was not a native speaker of Arabic, since he makes mistakes which must have been caused by insufficient knowledge of Arabic grammar. In some cases the grammatical construction has clearly been misunderstood: Q. 2/23 (*wa-d'ū šuhadā'akum min dūni llāhi in kuntum šādiqīna*) is translated as εἰ πάρεξ Θεοῦ ἔσται ἀληθής (713B); Q. 5/68 *wa-la-yazīdanna kaṭīran minhum mā unzila ilayka min rabikka tuḡyānan wa-kufran* is translated as προστίθεται γὰρ ἐκ τῶν κατενεχθέντων ἡμῖν παρὰ τοῦ Κυρίου πλάνη καὶ ἄρνησις (737D-740A), where the replacing of *ilayka* with ἡμῖν may have been intentional: the revelation is more than once said to be a soliloquy by Muḥammad;<sup>26</sup> Q. 3/144 *fa-in māta aw qutila inqalabtum 'alā a'qābikum* is translated as ἐὰν ἀποθάνῃ ἢ σφαγῇ ἀποστρέφεται εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω (729A); the word *marratayni* in Q. 17/4 is translated with δεύτερον (764A). A serious, perhaps tendentious, mistake occurs in the translation of Q. 17/40 *a-fa-asfākum* where the rhetorical question is changed into an assertion: καὶ ἐπελέξατο (764D). A complete misunderstanding of the interrogative particle *annā* occurs in the translation of Q. 9/30 *annā yu'fakūna* which comes out as ἔνεκεν τῶν ἀρνοῦνται (745C). Less serious mistakes are the translator's tendency to translate the particle *kam* with "many", as in Q. 17/17 *kam ahlaknā min al-qurūni* which is translated as καὶ πολλοὺς ἀπωλέσαμεν ἐκ τῶν γενεῶν,<sup>27</sup> or his

<sup>25</sup> Cf. KHOURY 1969: 121-22.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 716A; 725A: Muḥammad talks to himself, which proves that he is possessed by a demon.

<sup>27</sup> Similarly Q. 53/26 *wa-kam min al-malak* = 769C καὶ πῶς οἱ ἄγγελοι, or is the text corrupt (καὶ πόσοι ἄγγελοι)? It may be added that Rāzī: *Mafātīh* XXVIII, 305, says that semantically *kam* is equivalent with *kaṭīr*.

unusual interpretation of *miṭl* in Q. 2/23 (*fa-tū bi-sūratin*) *min miṭlihi* which is translated as ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων αὐτοῦ (713 B); Nicetas adds that this means "from the other prophets" making it clear how he interprets the sentence.<sup>28</sup>

On the lexical level there are many instances where the translator apparently could not find out the meaning of the Arabic word, e.g., in the title of some of the later sura's, which are left without translation, ἐξ τὰ ἀκκά (sura 61; 772 B) or εἰς τὸ καρπέ (sura 101; 776 A) or εἰς το ἀλέξαρ (sura 103; 776 A). Obviously, the translator did not have access to the extensive exegetical literature and had to make do with what lexicographical material he had. The absence of exegetical knowledge may also be noted in the case of some of the typically Qur'ānic proper names, such as *Hijr* in sura 15, which is first transcribed as Νόγερ (761 A) and then as Ὀγερ (773 A); the bearer of this name is erroneously identified as one of the inhabitants of the city of Sodom, which is clearly contradicted by the context and by the commentaries. Lexical differences between the Arabic original and the Greek original are particularly frequent in the later sura's and in typically Qur'ānic phraseology such as the use of *aṣ-ṣā'iqā* in Q. 4/153, translated simply as τὸ θεῖον (733 A). In some cases, however, the interpretation of the translator is backed by at least one interpretation in the exegetical literature. He translates the title of sura 7, *al-A'rāf*, as εἰς τὰ γυνώρισματᾶ (740 D), which finds some support in the interpretation of this word by al-Ḥasan and az-Zağğāğ, namely that it means *ma'rifa*.<sup>29</sup> A similar case is that of the expression *fī kabad* in Q. 90/4; Nicetas' translation has been criticized since this expression is usually not interpreted as ἐν ἰσχυῖ (773 A). But again there is at least one source which interprets the expression as just that: *šiddat al-ḥalq wa-l-quwwa*.<sup>30</sup> A similar case is that of the Greek διχοτομημένος for *al-abtar* (Q. 108/3; 776 B); although this word is normally interpreted as "orphan", there are at least some commentaries which give the meaning "amputated" in this case.<sup>31</sup>

Rather different is the case of two words which have a long history of misinterpretation. In the first place, the word *šamad* (Q. 112/2), which is translated first as ὀλόσφαιρος (708 A) and then with an implicit correction as ὀλόσφυρος (775 B). This translation is one of the stock

<sup>28</sup> According to Rāzī: *Mafātiḥ* II, 136-37, some of the commentators interpreted *miṭl* in this way, although it is not the preferred interpretation, cf. also Tabarī: *Ġāmī'* I, 166.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Rāzī: *Mafātiḥ* XIV, 87.

<sup>30</sup> Rāzī: *Mafātiḥ* XXXI, 182.

<sup>31</sup> Rāzī: *Mafātiḥ* XXXII, 133.

examples in Christian polemics against Islam, from the times of Abū Qurra onwards: he was the first to translate the Arabic word in this sense (σφυρόπηκτος). It may be noted that John of Damascus did not make this mistake, as may be gathered from his interpretation of this passage as ποιητής τῶν ὄλων.<sup>32</sup> The second example concerns the word 'alaq in Q. 96/2 which is translated as βδέλλα "leech" (708B), possibly because of a confusion with the word 'alaqa, which does have this meaning, although it seems more probable that in this case the translator could not resist the temptation to ridicule the Islamic revelation. The statement that the Muslims believe that God created man from a leech became very popular in Christian polemics on the basis of Nicetas' work.<sup>33</sup>

As a general conclusion we may say that the translator whose work was used by Nicetas had lexicographical material at his disposal, maybe even an informant, but that he was not acquainted with the commentaries. In those cases where his translation agrees with one of the possible interpretations given in the Arabic exegetical literature, we assume that the translator received his information through some kind of wordlist, rather than through the medium of a commentary. He does not seem to have written his translation in an Arabophone environment where he could have obtained much more information concerning obscure or difficult words. One other remark must be made with regard to the style of his translation: he often uses words which have a Christian sound, e.g. εὐαγγελίζειν for *baššara* (752B), φανέρωσις for *bayyināt* (716A), the already mentioned προκοπή for *qadam*, which certainly had religious connotations for a Christian. We may also refer to his translation of *ahbārahum* (Q. 9/30) with τοὺς ἀποστόλους αὐτῶν (745C).

Where there are differences between the text of the *Qur'ān* as we know it and the Greek translation used by Nicetas, these differences may have been caused by insufficient knowledge, biased interpretation, or simple oversight on the part of the translator. But in some cases the discrepancy may be due to the fact that the translator followed a different reading of the text. We have already noted above that his interpretation sometimes agrees with non-canonical interpretations in the exegetical literature. Here we are dealing with non-canonical variant readings, e.g. in Q. 17/13 where the Uthmanic text has *nuhriḡu lahu yawma l-qiyāmati kitāban yalqāhu manšūran*, but we know from the variant literature that there existed other readings of this verse, in particu-

<sup>32</sup> Cf. SAHAS 1972: 77.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. KHOURY 1972: 148.

lar the reading of Ibn 'Abbās *yuhraḡu . . . kitābun*. Our translator must have had a text with this reading, since he translates *καὶ ἐκβαίνει αὐτῶ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἀναστάσεως γραφή* (764A).<sup>34</sup> A similar case is that of Q. 5/47 where the canonical text has *wa-li-yahkum ahlu l-inḡili*, but the translator has *εἰς τὸ κρίναι τοὺς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου* (737B), which is either a mistake or a translation based on a different reading, several of which are mentioned in the exegetical literature, in particular the one proposed by Ubayy *wa-an aḡkuma*.<sup>35</sup> In Q. 111/4 the translation *τῆς αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς ὑποκαίουσης κάμινον* presupposes of course the well-known reading *wa-mra'atuhu ḡammālatu l-ḡaḡib* (776B).<sup>36</sup>

In the same way one is tempted to explain the translation of Q. 18/18 *wa-nuqallibuhum dāt al-yamīn* with *ἀναστρέφεις αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ δεξιόν* (765D) through a variant reading *wa-tuqallibuhum* which, however, as far as we know, is not attested in the exegetical literature. Similarly, one wonders if there existed a variant reading *wa-stabraḡan* in Q. 18/31 *wa-yalbasūna ḡiyāban ḡudran min sundusin wa-stabraḡin* to explain the translation *φοροῦσιν ἱμάτια πράσινα ἀπὸ σίνδονος ἢ σταυράκιν* (768A).<sup>37</sup> But another possibility may be that the text used by this translator did not contain all vowel signs and not all diacritical points. In some cases the translator is so patently wrong in assigning the correct (i.e., canonical) case-endings to the words that one can hardly believe that he was capable of such mistakes. If we assume that he worked from an unvoiced manuscript the discrepancies become much more understandable. An ambiguous manuscript would also explain cases such as the confusion between *ibn* and *uḡn* in Q. 9/61 (749D), the confusion between *bi-* and *li-* in Q. 9/33 (749C) and Q. 5/47 (737B), the translation of *innamā tu'adūna la-wāḡi'* in Q. 77/7 with *ὑποχνύεσθα γὰρ τὴν ἔλευσιν* (772C),<sup>38</sup> and possibly the translation of Q. 53/6 *dū mirratin* with *ὁ εὐθεώρητος* (769B), although in this case there is an interpretation in the exegetical literature which supports the translation.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Cf. JEFFERY 1937: 200 (Ibn 'Abbās), 271 ('Iqrima *yahruḡu*), 280 (Muḡāhid); Rāzi: *Mafātih* XX, 168; Ṭabari: *ḡāmi'* XV, 51–52; Farrā': *Ma'āni* II, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Mentioned by Ṭabari: *ḡāmi'* VI, 264–65; JEFFERY 1937: 128 mentions a reading for Ubayy as *wa-an li-yahkum(?)*.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Farrā': *Ma'āni* III, 298–99.

<sup>37</sup> There is a reading *wa-taḡlibuhum* attributed to al-Ḥasan and 'Ikrima (cf. 'UMAR & MAKRAM 1982–85: III, 353, no. 4697). In the second verse Ibn Muḡayyis read *wa-stabraḡa* (cf. 'UMAR & MAKRAM 1982–85: III, 362, no. 4748).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also Q. 51/5 *innamā tu'adūna la-ḡādiḡ* = 769B *ὑποχνύεσθα γὰρ τὸ ἀληθές*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Rāzi: *Mafātih* XXVIII, 285, and Ṭabari: *ḡāmi'* XXVII, 42: Ibn 'Abbās used to interpret this expression as *dū manḡar ḡasan*.

The discrepancies between the translation and the canonical text confirm our hypothesis that the translator worked in a non-Arabophone environment, where he had no opportunity to check his translation with native speakers, that he worked from an Arabic text and that his native tongue was not Arabic. In this view, the written text at his disposal did not contain vowel signs, and not all diacritical signs. It is a well-known fact that the earliest manuscripts of the *Qurʾān* lack, indeed, many of the later signs that facilitate reading the text.<sup>40</sup> We may also assume that the separation between the verses was not always clear, since in some cases the translation runs over the end of the verse. Sometimes this may have been the fault of Nicetas, for instance in the case discussed above, where Nicetas ignored the separation between two verses for polemical purposes. But in other cases the running over of the translation does not make much difference for the meaning of the text and may, indeed, be the result of the notation in the manuscript.<sup>41</sup> We may add that Nicetas counts the sura's of the *Qurʾān* beginning with the *sūrat al-baqara*; in his view the *Fātiḥa* was only an introductory prayer to the whole of the Book. This tallies with the division in some of the older codices, which sometimes do not include the *Fātiḥa*, since they do not regard it as a real sura.<sup>42</sup>

If we now turn to the question of the person of the translator, we have seen already that there is evidence suggesting that his native language was not Arabic. It is rather improbable that it was Greek, either, since the language used in the translation is often so awkward as to preclude the possibility of its author having been a native Greek. A few examples will suffice to give an idea of his style. In many cases the referential pronoun in the Arabic relative sentence is not deleted, as it should be in Greek, something, one assumes, a native Greek would never have allowed, for instance the translation of Q. 13/30: ἀπεστείλαμεν σε πρὸς ἔθνος οὐ παρῆλθον παρ' αὐτοῦ ἔθνη (757C), or in the same passage the translation of Q. 13/43 καὶ ὅστις ἐστὶν παρ' αὐτοῦ εἰδησις τῆς Γραφῆς. He consistently translates the absolute infinitive of the Arabic text, as in Q. 17/16 *fa-dammarnāhā tadmīran* = καὶ ἐδαμάσαμεν αὐτοὺς δάμασιν (764B),<sup>43</sup> which leads to most un-Greek sentences. A good example is

<sup>40</sup> For the history of the manuscript reedition of the *Qurʾān* and the analysis of the earliest writing systems in this manuscript tradition see NÖLDEKE & SCHWALLY 1961: III, 251-70.

<sup>41</sup> Examples are 769C = Q. 54/2-3; 769A = Q. 37/8-9 and 737B = Q. 5/46-47.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. e.g. JEFFERY 1937: 21 about Ibn Mas'ūd's codex.

<sup>43</sup> Similar sentences at 725C and 756A.

the sentence given at 733C οὐκ ἔχουσιν εἰς αὐτὸν εἶδησιν εἰ μὴ ἀκολουθίαν τοῦ νομίζειν, which can hardly be understood without consulting the Arabic original *wa-mā lahum bihi min 'ilmīn illā ttibā'a z-zannī* (Q. 4/157). The translator's unfamiliarity with Greek prose-style shows itself also in the fact that he is sometimes short of synonyms: the Arabic preposition 'alā is consistently translated by him with ἐπάνω, for instance ἐκωλύσαμεν ἐπάνω αὐτῶν (733B) = *ḥarramnā 'alayhim* (Q. 4/160), or καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἐπάνω αὐτῶν λόγος (764B) = *fa-ḥaqqa 'alayhā l-qawl* (Q. 17/16).

At one point Nicetas makes a reference to those among the Arabs who were baptized<sup>44</sup> and who provided him with some information. As the translator did use Christian phraseology in his translation, this may lead us to the assumption that he was a Syrian Christian or perhaps a converted Muslim, whose native language was Syriac and who came to Byzance, perhaps as a prisoner of war who did not want to return to his country and who assisted Nicetas in his polemic against Islam, because he had an axe to grind.

This is perhaps the most reasonable conclusion, but there is another possibility which may be mentioned here at least for the sake of conjecture. Elsewhere we have tried to demonstrate that the mission to the Saracenes which is mentioned in the Old Church Slavonic biography of Constantinus Philosophus, better known as Cyril, the apostle of the Slavs (d. 869) was authentic.<sup>45</sup> In this biography it is said that in 851 Cyril went to the Saracenes in order to bring a reply to their slanderous accusations against the Holy Trinity. It is said that he went to the city of the Saracenes and discussed with them various religious matters. Perhaps this mission was identical with the one mentioned by Ṭabarī in 855.<sup>46</sup> Cyril used to be a pupil of Nicetas' friend and colleague, the famous Photius and one reasonable assumption seems to be that the purpose of the mission was precisely to present the Muslims with the answer to the letters of the Agarenes written by Nicetas. It is only conjecture, of course, but there is some confirmation in the fact that there are parallels between the text of the letters and the report about the discussion held by Cyril in the city of the Saracenes. Both texts mention the word "slander" (*chula*, διαβολή) in connection with the controversy about the Holy Trinity; both use the argument of religious progress; both accuse the law of the Muslims of inciting man to lust and passion;

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 729A ὡς οἱ βαπτίζομενοι ἐξ αὐτῶν ὁμολογοῦσιν.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. VERSTEEGH 1979.

<sup>46</sup> Ṭabarī: *Ta'riḥ* III, 1426 ff.; for more details see VERSTEEGH 1979: 255 ff.

and both assign to man an intermediate status between the animals and the angels. There is another remarkable coincidence, too: Cyril quotes a verse from the *Qur'ān* (19/17) in the course of the dispute, showing his knowledge of the Holy Book of the Muslims. This verse is not quoted by Nicetas in his Refutation, but he does discuss the passage in which it occurs (768C).

We know that Cyril at one time learnt Hebrew and even translated into this language a grammatical tract — at least that is what the Old Church Slavonic biography tells us. And, of course, his activities at a later period, when he translated the Bible into Old Church Slavonic, are well-known.<sup>47</sup> One might, therefore, come to the suggestion that perhaps Cyril brought back from his trip to Baghdad — or rather Samarra, at that time the residence of the caliph — a copy of the *Qur'ān*, which he then sat down to translate at his leisure when he had returned to Byzance. He had of course a good command of Greek, but his native language was probably not Greek, but a Slavonic dialect (he had been born in Saloniki), and moreover, at the time of this mission he was only twenty-one. In this view, the translation originated around 851 and before the victories of Michael III in 855–856. This tallies with the reasoning used by Nicetas (744D ff.) to explain the successes of the Muslims in the Holy War. These arguments are only understandable in a situation where the Muslims had boasted about their victories against the Christians, especially the famous victory at Amorium, the memory of which was still fresh in everybody's mind.<sup>48</sup>

The suggestion made here would confirm our impression that Nicetas did have a Greek translation at his disposal when he started work on his Refutation. No doubt, the arguments given here for the authorship of Cyril for this translation are flimsy, to say the least. Suffice it to say here that at the time of Nicetas there was at least one reasonable candidate who could have translated the Book of the Muslims into Greek.<sup>49</sup> The important thing is, of course, that the Byzantines at this period made a serious effort to become acquainted with the literal text of the Holy Book of their religious opponents and political rivals. On the one hand, one is often appalled at the viciousness of the arguments used by Nicetas in analysing this literal text, and by the invectives he hurls at

<sup>47</sup> Cf. GRIVEC 1960: 57–63, 197–209.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. VASILIEV 1952: 276–77.

<sup>49</sup> We may also refer to the fact that Photius himself is said to have visited Baghdad; even if the stories about his activities there are not correct — cf. AHRWEILER 1965 — he may have brought back a copy of the *Qur'ān*.

his opponents and at their prophet, but on the other hand, the Greek translation of the *Qur'an* did contribute towards a more intimate knowledge of Islam in the Western world.

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65.

## Neue Spuren von Mātṛceṭas *Vaṇārhaṇa*

Von JENS-UWE HARTMANN und DIETER MAUE

*Annemarie von Gabain zum 90. Geburtstag am 4. Juli 1991*

- I. Einleitung
- II. Beschreibung der Handschrift
- III. Transliteration
- IV. Bearbeitung und Kommentar
- V. Glossare
  1. Sanskrit – Uigurisch
  2. Uigurisch – Sanskrit

### I

Von der Zeit ihrer Entstehung bis etwa zum Ende des ersten nachchristlichen Jahrtausends müssen die Werke des buddhistischen Hymnendichters Mātṛceṭa von herausragender Bedeutung im indischen Buddhismus gewesen sein<sup>1</sup>. In Indien selbst läßt sich diese Bedeutung nur indirekt erschließen, so etwa aus dem Bericht, den der chinesische Pilger I-tsing über seine Indienreise verfaßt hat, oder aus den vielen Werken, in denen aus den Hymnen Mātṛceṭas zitiert wird. Ein genaueres Bild gewinnen wir jedoch vom indisch geprägten Buddhismus Zentralasiens, soweit er uns aus den Oasen am nördlichen Zweig der Seidenstraße bekannt geworden ist. Die indische Originalfassung der beiden Hauptwerke Mātṛceṭas, des *Prasādapratibhodbhava* (oder *Śatapañcāśatka*) und des *Vaṇārhaṇa*, ist dort in einer beträchtlichen Zahl von Handschriftenfragmenten enthalten und dadurch fast vollständig bewahrt. Der Zahl dieser Fragmente nach zu schließen, müssen sie zu den wichtigsten Schriften in den buddhistischen Zentren Ostturkistans gezählt haben. Offensichtlich waren sie auch populär genug, um im Leben derjenigen eine Rolle zu spielen, die das Sanskrit nicht oder zumindest weniger gut verstanden, wie Fragmente aus verschiedenen tocharischen Übersetzungen und Bilinguen zeigen.

<sup>1</sup> Zum folgenden vgl. JENS-UWE HARTMANN: *Das Vaṇārhaṇastotra des Mātṛceṭa*. Göttingen 1987. (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. 160.), S. 12 ff. [Künftig: VAV(UH) bei Bedarf mit Seitenzahl].