

The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation of the Quran (Vat. gr. 681)

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The text of the Quran has been largely commented on since its composition. Hapax legomena, ellipses, and metaphors make the holy book difficult to understand, and it is partially incomprehensible without exegetical aids even for Arabic-speaking Muslims today. For this reason, quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and explanations of the Prophet Muhammad's acts (*ḥadīth*), as well as lexicographical and grammatical works, rapidly gained importance after the composition of the Quran in order to ensure a canonical (i.e., "correct") reading of the holy text. Quranic translations reveal additional interpretations because they are valuable sources of sometimes very early hermeneutical understandings of the Quran.

The Byzantines were the first who fully translated the Quran into another language.¹ This Greek translation of the Quran is only fragmentarily preserved, mainly in an anti-Islamic polemic of the ninth century by Nicetas of Byzantium.² The quranic text in Greek preserved therein, called the *Coranus Graecus*,

sometimes bears exceptional and rare interpretations of quranic terms that are not or only rarely transmitted in Muslim exegetical works. For example, the quranic technical term *furqān* in verse Q 3:4³ was translated into Greek as σωτηρία (salvation),⁴ while quranic exegesis often understands *furqān* as what "separates good from evil."⁵ It is usually interpreted as one of the synonyms for the word *Qur'ān*, but in several quranic commentaries, the meaning of *furqān* is explained in the sense of *najāh* (salvation, redemption; e.g., Q 8:29).⁶

others, in the so-called *Abjuration* and in the anti-Islamic verses of Theodore the Stoudite: see below, p. 223 and nn. 19–21.

3 It is also mentioned elsewhere in the Quran at Q 2:53, 2:185, 3:4, 8:29, 8:41, 21:48, 25:1.

4 See fragment Conf. II, 3–6, here line 6. In the following, if not indicated otherwise, I am referring to Karl Förstel's edition by quoting the passage according to the author's system (see Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XXV): i.e., the number of the *confutatio* (Conf.), followed by the line(s) after the comma.

5 From the root *f-r-q* (separate, divide, distinguish); see, e.g., the exegesis (*tafsīr*) in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Tehran, n.d.), part 7, 161, and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm* (Riyadh, 1999), part 2, 5–6; part 4, 42–43, 65–66; part 5, 347. On this point, cf. M. Ulbricht, "Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung durch Niketas von Byzanz," *Byzantion* 92 (2022): 502–5, incl. n. 57.

6 E.g., the quranic commentary (*tafsīr*) by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, part 4, 42–43, esp. 43. See also K. Ahrens, "Christliches im Qoran: Eine Nachlese," *ZDMG* 84.3 (1930): 31–32, and U. Rubin, "On the Arabian Origins of the Qur'ān: The Case of *al-Furqān*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 54.2 (2009): 421–33.

1 See M. Ulbricht, "Nachweis der Existenz einer vollständigen und schriftlichen Vorlage der griechischen Koranübersetzung: Eine philologische Untersuchung des Codex Vaticanus graecus 681," *JÖB* 72 (2022): 533–50.

2 Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, gr. 681 (henceforth Vat. gr. 681), fols. 1r–165v (*codex unicus*) (editions: K. Förstel, ed., *Niketas von Byzanz: Schriften zum Islam*, vol. 1, Corpus Islamo-Christianum, Series Graeca 5 [Würzburg, 2000], 1–153, and PG 105:665–806; *editio princeps*: A. Mai, ed., *Nova patrum bibliotheca*, vol. 4 [Rome, 1847], 321–408). There are also some fragments, among

The Greek translation reflects this meaning by interpreting *furqān* of verse Q 3:4 as *σωτηρία* (Conf. II, 6).⁷ It is, therefore, an invaluable witness of alternative, sometimes very early hermeneutics of the quranic text itself that reflect the “pre-classical” period of Muslim quranic understanding.

Nicetas of Byzantium is the very first Byzantine to extensively refer to the Quran as a written text (ninth/tenth century).⁸ Earlier Christian writers, such as Anastasius of Sinai (ca. 630–700),⁹ John of Damascus (ca. 650–754),¹⁰ Theodore Abū Qurra (ca. 740–820),¹¹

7 The term *furqān* is a loan word from the Syriac word *purqānā* (ܦܘܪܩܢܐ) meaning “salvation” (see F. M. Donner, “Quranic *Furqān*,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 52.2 [2007]: 279–300; A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* [repr. Leiden, 2007], 225–29, esp. 227–28; and *EP*, s.v. *Furqān*). The Greek rendering seems to reflect a Syrian influence of the translation, which might have been done by somebody acquainted with both Syriac and Arabic. Trilingualism was not uncommon in the *Oriens Christianus*, as the multilingual oeuvres of Theodore Abū Qurra and Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq show us. The Greek translator was evidently aware of this, unlike some Muslim Quran commentators who devised theological explanations for the term based on an ad hoc Arabic etymology from the Arabic *farāqa* (فارق; see above, n. 5).

8 On the life, work, and context of Nicetas of Byzantium, see below, pp. 223–26. For his topics and argumentation in the *Refutation* and his perception of Islam, see M. Ulbricht, “Der Islam-Diskurs bei Niketas von Byzanz: Themen und Argumentation in seinem Hauptwerk ‘Widerlegung des Korans’ (*Ἀνατροπή τοῦ Κορανίου*),” *BZ* 114.3 (2021): 1351–94 (with further bibliographical references on Nicetas at n. 13), and M. Ulbricht, “Die philosophisch-dialektische Arbeitsweise und das theologische Selbstverständnis des Niketas von Byzanz: Das *Programma*, die *Apologia* und der ‘Methodenteil’ in seiner Islampolemik ‘Widerlegung des Korans’ (*Ἀνατροπή τοῦ Κορανίου*),” *BSt* 80.1–2 (2022): 30–58.

9 See A. Binggeli, “Anastasius of Sinai,” in *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, 600–900, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden, 2009), 193–202, with further references to editions and studies. For manuscripts, see K.-H. Uthemann, *Anastasioi Sinaitae Viae dux*, CCSG 8 (Turnhout, 1981), and K.-H. Uthemann, “Eine Ergänzung zur Edition von Anastasioi Sinaitae ‘Viae Dux’: Das Verzeichnis benutzter und zitierter Handschriften,” *Scriptorium* 36.1 (1982): 130–33.

10 R. F. Gleib, “John of Damascus,” in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian–Muslim Relations*, 1:295–301, with further references to editions and studies. For the complete list of manuscripts, see P. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 4, *Liber de haeresibus: Opera polemica* (Berlin, 1981), 60–67.

11 J. C. Lamoreaux, “Theodore Abū Qurra,” in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian–Muslim Relations*, 1:439–91, with further references to editions, studies, and manuscripts.

and Theophanes the Confessor (ca. 760–818),¹² did indeed also refer to quranic contents in their polemics against Islam.¹³ Nevertheless, they apparently did not use a quranic text in a strict sense as their source; rather, they display a more general knowledge of Islamic teachings. Nicetas, by contrast, undoubtedly had at his disposal a Greek translation of the Quran. This was not his own but is of unknown authorship.¹⁴ The Greek original of the translation he used for refuting the Quran in his *Ἀνατροπή τοῦ Κορανίου* (*Refutation of the Quran*) must have been complete and in written form.¹⁵ In his polemic, Nicetas extracts a significant number of quranic passages from the Greek translation and uses them for his argumentation against the Quran and the Muslim faith.¹⁶

These quranic fragments are preserved in the codex unicus Vat. gr. 681 of Nicetas’s polemic.¹⁷ As the quranic fragments are only indirectly handed down to us, I refer to them as the *Coranus Graecus*.¹⁸ In addition

12 M. Vaiou, “Theophanes the Confessor,” in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian–Muslim Relations*, 1:426–36, with further references to editions, studies, and manuscripts.

13 Anastasius, *Hodēgos*, 1.1.37.44–49, 7.2.117–19 (for the context, see until line 135), 10.2.8–12 (for the context, see lines 1–16), in Uthemann, *Anastasioi Sinaitae*, 9, 113, 190; John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, chapter 100, in Kotter, *Johannes von Damaskos*, 4:60–67; R. Gleib and A. T. Khoury, eds., *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra: Schriften zum Islam*, Corpus Islamo–Christianum, Series Graeca 3 (Würzburg, 1995); Theophanes, *Chronographia*, PG 108:684–88 (AM 6122).

14 E. Trapp, “Gab es eine byzantinische Koranübersetzung?,” *Diptycha* 2 (1980/1981): 7–17.

15 Ulbricht, “Nachweis der Existenz,” and for the editions, see above, n. 2.

16 For his method of using the quranic text, see Ulbricht, “Verwendungsweise.”

17 Vat. gr. 681, fols. 1r–165v (around 900); I refer to this manuscript by folio and then line numbers. Catalogues: R. Devreesse, *Codices Vaticani graeci*, vol. 3, *Codices 604–866* (Vatican City, 1950), 143–44, and A. Rigo, “Niceta Byzantios, la sua opera e il monaco Evodio,” in *In partibus Clusis: Scritti in onore di Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli*, ed. G. Fiaccadori (Naples, 2006), 149–50. Editions: see above, n. 2.

18 The term *Coranus Graecus* (*CG*) is based on the overall study by the author: M. Ulbricht, “*Coranus Graecus*: Die älteste überlieferte Koranübersetzung in der ‘Ἀνατροπή τοῦ Κορανίου’ des Niketas von Byzanz: Einleitung–Text–Übersetzung–Kommentar,” 3 vols. (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2015). *CG* is a retrospective designation and comprises the various textual witnesses of quranic fragments as we find them in Nicetas’s work *Refutation of the Quran*. Thus, the *CG* has to be distinguished from the original Greek translation of the Quran, whose exact form and wording we do not know anymore. The Latin

to Nicetas's, other documents independently preserving quranic fragments in Greek include the so-called *Abjuration*¹⁹ and some anti-Islamic verses by Theodore the Stoudite.²⁰ But the latter consists only of some seventy-seven verses,²¹ while the former formula of the Orthodox Church (to be read by proselytes during the rite of rejection of the Muslim faith in order to become Christian) similarly preserves a very small number of fragments;²² additionally, its manuscript tradition goes back only to the thirteenth/fourteenth century CE. Since the other Byzantine polemics by Evodius the Monk,²³ Euthymius Zigabenus,²⁴ and Nicetas Choniates,²⁵ which make use of quranic quotations, exclusively depend on Nicetas of Byzantium's work, Nicetas should be considered the main source for reconstructing the Greek translation of the Quran.²⁶

In this article, I will examine some of the fragments of the *Coranus Graecus* in terms of their philological rendering into Greek and compare them synoptically

with the Arabic quranic readings. Through this analysis, I will elaborate on the early Christian understanding of the quranic text as documented in the *Coranus Graecus*. I will therefore focus on quranic verses that are theologically relevant to Christian–Muslim interfaith dialogue. In the final part, I will present my conclusions about the cultural and religious background of the translator(s) of the Greek translation of the Quran based on philological analysis and its interpretation. But first, I will give an overview about the life and work of Nicetas of Byzantium as well as the historical-intellectual context in which he flourished.

Nicetas of Byzantium: His Life, Writings, and Historical-Intellectual Context

Information about the life of Nicetas of Byzantium is scarce.²⁷ Given his epithet, *byzantios* (βυζάντιος), Nicetas might originally be from the city of Constantinople. Further concrete biographical details can be reconstructed exclusively from his own works. We know that Nicetas lived in the shadow of the empire of Michael III (r. 842–867), son of Theophilus, until the reign of Leo VI the Wise (r. 886–912).²⁸ This means that he was a contemporary of the patriarch of Constantinople, Photius (793–810, r. 858–867, 877–886 CE). Nicetas might have been a monk,²⁹ and it is clear from his writings that he had deep knowledge of Orthodox theology and dogmatics. His erudite language and scholarly way of writing indicate his profound education, while his

terminology *Coranus Graecus* is intended to express the hypothetical nature of the version of this translation as preserved today.

19 Editions: E. Montet, “Un rituel d’abjuration des Musulmans dans l’église grecque,” *RHR* 53 (1906): 145–63 (partial edition containing only the anathemas); PG 140:124–36; and F. Sylburg, *Saraceni sine Moamethica* [...] (Heidelberg, 1595), 74–91. A critical edition of the *Abjuration* is still a desideratum. Studies: A. Rigo, “Ritual of Abjuration,” in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian–Muslim Relations*, 1:821–24; D. M. Freidenreich, “Muslims in Canon Law, 650–1000,” in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian–Muslim Relations*, 1:95–96; and P. Eleuteri and A. Rigo, *Eretici, dissidenti, musulmani ed ebrei a Bisanzio: Una raccolta eresologica del XII secolo* (Venice, 1993), 53–59.

20 A. Rigo, “La sezione sui musulmani dell’opera di Teodoro Studita contro le eresie,” *REB* 56 (1998): 213–30.

21 Athos, Great Lavra, ms. Ω 44 (1854), fols. 149v–151r (cf. Rigo, “Ritual of Abjuration,” 821–24, esp. 823).

22 Trapp, “Koranübersetzung?,” 14–17.

23 Madrid, El Escorial, ms. gr. Ψ.III.8 (463), fols. 232r–242r (thirteenth century), and Athos, Great Lavra, ms. Ω 44 (1854), fols. 113r–120v, 123r–128v, 129r–149v (seventeenth century).

24 Euthymius Zigabenus, *Πανοπλία δογματική (Armor of Doctrines)*, chap. 28 (editions: K. Förstel, *Arctas und Euthymios Zigabenus: Schriften zum Islam. Fragmente der griechischen Koranübersetzung*, Corpus Islamo-Christianum, Series Graeca 7 [Wiesbaden, 2009], 43–83, and PG 130:1331–60).

25 Nicetas Choniates, *Thesaurus orthodoxae fidei*, book 20 (edition: PG 140:105–22).

26 For an overview of the importance of Nicetas's work for much of the later history of Byzantine polemics against Islam, see Ulbricht, “Islam-Diskurs,” 1351–94, esp. 1352–53, and for possible traces even in twentieth-century anti-Islamic writings, 1388–94.

27 Summarized in A. Rigo, “Nicetas of Byzantium,” in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian–Muslim Relations*, 1:751–56, and Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:IX.

28 J. Hergenröther, *Monumenta graeca ad Photium ejusque historiam pertinentia* (Regensburg, 1869), 84: Ἦν δὲ οὗτος ὁ συγγραφεὺς βυζάντιος ἐπὶ τῶν χρόνων τοῦ βασιλέως Μιχαὴλ υἱοῦ Θεοφίλου διαρκέσας μέχρι καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτῆς τοῦ βασιλέως κυρίου Λέοντος τοῦ σοφοῦ (And the author was Byzantine [i.e., from the city of Constantinople], in the years of the emperor Michael, son of Theophilus, up to the reign of the emperor lord [*kyrios*] Leo the Wise). See also Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:156, line 5, 176, line 3 (cf. 1:IX).

29 This suggestion is based on Nicetas's statement: Τί γὰρ πλεόν τοῦ ὑπὲρ ἐντολῆς Θεοῦ κόσμον μισῆσαι καὶ σώμα, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν ἀριθῆλως πρὸς τὰ ὑπερφυῆ μεταθεῖναι (Conf. I, 232–34). Therein, Nicetas rhetorically wonders what would be better than to “hate the world and body” in order to “form the own soul toward the supernatural”; cf. M. Ulbricht, “*At-Tarḡamāh al-ūlā li-l-Qurʾān al-karīm min al-qarn 8/9 al-milādī fī sigāl Nikītās al-Bizantī (al-qarn 9 al-milādī) māʾa l-Islām bi-smi ʾTafīūd al-Qurʾān*,” *Chronos: Revue d’histoire de l’Université de Balamand* 25 (2012): 33–58, at 37.

strict, logical way of argumentation suggests that he was trained in philosophy and dialectics.³⁰ Considering that he is referred to as φιλόσοφος, διδάσκαλος, and πατρικιος (philosopher, teacher, patrikios) in the titles of his writings,³¹ we can infer that he was teaching and may have occupied a high administrative and social position in the imperial capital in the ninth century.³²

Nicetas's text corpus comprises a total of five writings: a treatise against the Latin *filioque*,³³ a letter to the Armenian emir against miaphysite Christology,³⁴ and three writings against Muslims. The latter are two letters in response to a Muslim emir³⁵ and Nicetas's magnum opus, the *Ἀνατροπή τοῦ Κορανίου* (*Refutation of the Quran*).³⁶ It might not be accidental that Nicetas's treatise against the Latins' *filioque* (866–870)³⁷ has obvious parallels with Photius's *Epistle* 2.³⁸ In addition, it is remarkable that Nicetas was commissioned to redact the letter against Armenian miaphysitism (around 877/78) "instead of the Patriarch."³⁹ While the latter's

identity is not specified, it seems that this was Patriarch Photius himself, as the life and working period of both coincide. Additionally, we find many congruences between Nicetas's letter against the Miaphysites and Photius's *Epistle* 298.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Nicetas's two letters to a Muslim ruler were commissioned by Emperor Michael III⁴¹ and his *Refutation of the Quran* has a clear official character.⁴² All this suggests that Nicetas had good connections to the empire's court and that he was surely part of the inner ecclesiastical-political elite of Byzantium, perhaps one of the patriarchate's clerics in the capital.

Looking to the chronology of his works,⁴³ we notice a certain development over time. On the one hand, Nicetas is generally dealing with heterodoxies, represented by his letters against the Latins and the Miaphysites. These works were written in the shadow of the outstanding theological and political personality of Photius,⁴⁴ so we can perhaps suggest that Nicetas may have been in collaboration with him. On the other, with Nicetas's engagement with Islam, we do see a clear, genuine independence in his works. Beyond that, he seems to have grown into the role of an "Islam expert" over the years: while his first two letters to a Muslim ruler deal with Islamic teachings in a very general manner, his *Refutation of the Quran* constitutes a much more detailed and text-immanent engagement with Islam, and is also the longest of his oeuvre. It is probably his final anti-Islamic work, dating to sometime after 856–63.⁴⁵

For some centuries, the fragments of the *Coranus Graecus* seem to have been the only source providing direct access in Greek to the Quran in written form. They had a long reception in later Byzantine sources, thus enduringly shaping the Byzantine-Greek hermenautics of the Quran. Besides Nicetas of Byzantium's

30 See Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:IX.

31 Hergenröther, *Monumenta graeca*, 84: Νικήτα Βυζαντίου πατρικίου καὶ φιλοσόφου καὶ διδασκάλου κεφάλαια συλλογιστικά (The syllogistic chapters of Nicetas Byzantius the patrikios, philosopher, and teacher); and Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:2, line 1: Νικήτα Βυζαντίου φιλοσόφου πρόγραμμα [. . .] (Foreword of the philosopher Nicetas Byzantius's [. . .]). For the meaning of the title patrikios, see A. P. Kazhdan, "Patrikios," *ODB* 3:1600.

32 For possible interrelations between Nicetas of Byzantium and Patriarch Photius, see Ulbricht, "Islam-Diskurs," 1351–94, 1354–56.

33 Hergenröther, *Monumenta graeca*, 84–138. For the dating, see Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:X–XI; for an evaluative overview of this work, see P. Gemeinhardt, *Die Filioque-Kontroverse zwischen Ost- und Westkirche im Frühmittelalter*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 82 (Berlin, 2002), 302–6.

34 L. Allatius, *Graecia orthodoxa* (Rome, 1652), 663–754, and PG 105:587–666. For the dating, see Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:X.

35 Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:155–99; PG 105:807–42; and Mai, *Nova patrum bibliotheca*, 4:409–31.

36 See above, n. 2. For an overview of this work, see Ulbricht, "Arbeitsweise," and Ulbricht, "Islam-Diskurs."

37 For an overview, see Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XIX–XXII.

38 B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, eds., *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitanae: Epistulae et Amphilocheia*, vol. 1, *Epistularum pars prima* (Stuttgart, 1983), 39–53. Cf. Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XX, n. 69.

39 Ἐξ ἐπιτροπῆς τοῦ φιλοχρίστου καὶ εὐσεβεστάτου βασιλέως ἡμῶν. Ἐγράφη δὲ πρὸς τὸν ἄρχοντα ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ Πατριάρχου (With the guardianship of our Christ-loving and most pious emperor, it was written to the ruler by a representative of the Patriarch) (PG 105:587–88; cf. Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XI).

40 See Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XXII–XXIV.

41 Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:156, line 5, 1:176, line 3.

42 Ulbricht, "Arbeitsweise," 37–40.

43 See the up-to-date discussion in J. M. Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and His Encounter with Islam: A Study of the 'Anatropē' and the Two 'Epistles' to Islam" (PhD diss., The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1972), 1–18. See also Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:IX–X.

44 Concerning the works of Photius, see Laourdas and Westerink, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitanae*.

45 A. T. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam: Textes et auteurs (VIII^e–XIII^e s.)* (Louvain, 1969), 111, 117–18, and Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:IX–XI.

Refutation, the *Abjuration* and Theodore the Stoudite's anti-Islamic verses are sources that independently transmit material of the *Coranus Graecus*.⁴⁶ The former short work belongs to the genre of canonical texts of the Orthodox Church and was used for official purpose for the act (*taxis*) of renouncing Islam and embracing Christianity. The *Abjuration* condenses the main anti-Islamic points perceived by Byzantine Christians. Within its anathemas of Islamic teachings and beliefs,⁴⁷ the *Abjuration* contains some material from the Greek translation of the Quran.⁴⁸ The *Abjuration* is transmitted, in contrast to Nicetas of Byzantium's polemic, in a large number of manuscripts.⁴⁹ This points to its intense liturgical use over centuries. Evodius the Monk, probably a monk in Constantinople in the ninth century in the monastery of Joseph the Hymnographer,⁵⁰ seemingly relied on Nicetas's *Refutation* for two of his works: the hagiographic report on *The Martyrdom of the Forty-Two Martyrs of Christ of Amorion* (after 855/56, or between the ninth and tenth centuries)⁵¹ and his anti-Islamic *Chapters from the Forged Book of the Unbelieving Muhammad and of Destitution* (last quarter of the ninth century),⁵² both of which contain some fragments of the Greek translation of the Quran (the former only occasionally). In addition, Evodius's *Chapters* sum up the structure and argumentation of

Nicetas's work in a more approachable way.⁵³ Later Byzantine polemicists apparently relied on Evodius's work. He therefore played an important role in the transmission of Nicetas's anti-Islamic thoughts and the fragments of the translation of the Quran. For example, Euthymius Zigabenus's *Armor of Doctrines*⁵⁴ (tenth/eleventh century) is based on Evodius's *Chapters*.⁵⁵ Thus reproducing Nicetas's anti-Islamic argumentation, Euthymius also integrates a significant number of fragments of the *Coranus Graecus* into his work. The interesting point here is that Euthymius emends the rather colloquial Greek of the quranic fragments into a more classical style by polishing its language.⁵⁶ Nicetas Choniates (ca. 1155–1217) is the last important witness of Nicetas of Byzantium's *Refutation*, thereby preserving fragments of the *Coranus Graecus*.⁵⁷ His polemical work, called *Thesaurus orthodoxae fidei*, is an anti-heretical composition based on older sources. The first paragraphs of the anti-Islamic book twenty⁵⁸ consist of a literal rewriting of John of Damascus's *De haeresibus* (chap. 100) and a reuse of George Monachus's *Chronikon* (chapter nine) and Euthymius Zigabenus's *Armor of Doctrines* (chapter ten to the beginning of chapter thirteen).⁵⁹ In the latter parts, we find, among others, a rewriting of quranic fragments preserved in Nicetas of Byzantium's work.

The *Refutation of the Quran* starts with the introduction, the so-called *Programma*, which highlights the symbiosis between state power and ecclesiastical

46 See above, pp. 222–23, incl. nn. 19–22.

47 Montet, "Un rituel d'abjuration."

48 The quranic quotations and paraphrases deal with the refutation of the prophet Muhammad and a number of other Muslim personages; the conception of quranic paradise; Islamic teachings and laws, such as the pilgrimage and its rites; and the image of God within the Quran.

49 For a provisional overview, see Eleuteri and Rigo, *Eretici, dissidenti, musulmani ed ebrei*, 19–36; see also Rigo, "Ritual of Abjuration," 823.

50 See R.-L. Lilie, C. Ludwig, B. Zielke, and T. Pratsch, *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit Online*, no. 1682, https://db.degruyter.com/view/PMBZ/PMBZ12786?rskey=N7inxV&result=1&dbq_o=1682&dbf_o=pmbz-code-number&dbt_o=keynumber&o_o=AND, and A. Kolia-Dermitzaki, "Euodius the Monk," in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 1:844–47. For the several manuscripts, as well as editions and translations of Evodius, see Kolia-Dermitzaki, "Euodius the Monk," 1:846–47, and A. Rigo, "Euodius the Monk," in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 1:848.

51 Kolia-Dermitzaki, "Euodius the Monk," 1:845–47.

52 Rigo, "Euodius the Monk," 1:848.

53 E. Trapp, ed., *Manuel II. Palaiologos, Dialoge mit einem "Perser"* (Vienna, 1966), 27, and Rigo, "Euodius the Monk," 1:848.

54 Förstel, *Arethas und Euthymios Zigabenos*, 43–83; PG 130:1331–60; and Gerhard Podskalsky, "Euthymios Zigabenos (Zigadenos, 11./12. Jh.)," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE) Online*, 2010, https://db.degruyter.com/view/TRE/TRE.10_557_13?pi=0&moduleId=common-word-wheel&dbJumpTo=euthymios.

55 This is apart from whole passages copied from John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, chap. 100. See Trapp, *Manuel II. Palaiologos*, 20*–21*, and Rigo, "Niceta Byzantios," 163–64; cf. J. Darrouzès, "Bulletin critique," *REB* 22 (1964): 255–86, at 282.

56 Trapp, "Koranübersetzung:," 14.

57 N. Zorzi, "Nicetas Choniates," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 4, 1200–1350, ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Leiden, 2012), 132–44, at 135.

58 PG 140:124–36.

59 Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam*, 249–58, and Trapp, *Manuel II. Palaiologos*, 22*. See also Zorzi, "Nicetas Choniates," 140–41.

hierarchy in fighting against Islam.⁶⁰ After the table of contents, the *Argumentum*, Nicetas explains the Orthodox faith in an apologetic part.⁶¹ The polemic as such is divided into two sections: In *Confutationes* I–XVIII, Nicetas refutes quranic sayings that he quotes literally or freely, or paraphrases or alludes to,⁶² while *Confutationes* XIX–XXX are dedicated to different Islamic teachings that Nicetas argues against.⁶³

Nicetas's polemic is especially important because it preserves a significant number of quranic verses and narrations from several quranic suras in Greek. The single manuscript that preserves the *Refutation of the Quran* is dated to around 900 CE.⁶⁴ The translation itself, which is fragmentarily embedded in Nicetas's polemic, seems to be the oldest complete translation of the Quran ever, dating back to the ninth century CE (second/third century *hijrī*) or potentially even before. This is extraordinarily close to the time of the composition of the quranic text and dates even prior to Ibn Mujāhid's (859–935/36) canonization of the seven readings (sing.: *qirā'a*; pl.: *qirā'āt*) in 934.⁶⁵ The *Coranus Graecus* is, therefore, an important source for early hermeneutics of the Quran.

Methodology

In order to evaluate differences between the *Coranus Graecus* and the Arabic text of the Quran, we first

have to distinguish the different textual layers within the *Refutation of the Quran*. The first step is to extract from Nicetas's text those passages that are not his own polemic but reveal quranic material. The second step is to distinguish between the different philological approaches of his excerpts of quranic contents, which range from verbatim and free quotations to paraphrases and simple allusions.⁶⁶ In the present article, I only rely on the first of the four philological categories: those passages of the *Coranus Graecus* that are characterized as verbatim or literal quotations.⁶⁷ These passages are relatively easy to detect within the overall corpus of Nicetas's work, as they follow a word-by-word technique regarding their translation from Arabic into Greek.⁶⁸ In the following, I will give a short characterization of the philological category of literal quotations before explaining in the next section why Nicetas's transmission of literal quotations is a reliable basis for further philological analysis.

The translation is a very precise work that in most cases translates the Quran into Greek literally and stays very close to the Arabic text both in terms of syntax and semantics.⁶⁹ The translation was made in such a way that it is sometimes difficult to understand the Greek version without the Arabic text beside it because the Arabic is usually translated word for word into Greek without always adapting it to Greek grammar.⁷⁰ For example, one characteristic of the translation is that it often uses prepositions in Greek that are literal translations of the

60 Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:30, and Ulbricht, "Arbeitsweise," 37–40.

61 Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:6–39. For the exact interrelations between the *Apology* and the respective passages from Nicetas's two epistles, see Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XI–XV. See also Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XXV, and Ulbricht, "Arbeitsweise," 33–34.

62 Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:XXX. For how Nicetas uses this quranic material in his polemic, see Ulbricht, "Verwendungsweise." For the classification into the four so-called philological categories (verbatim quotations, free quotations, paraphrases, and allusions), see M. Ulbricht, "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): 125–45.

63 For an overview of the structure and content of the *Refutation of the Quran*, see Ulbricht, "Arbeitsweise," 32–37. For an analysis of the introductory parts of the polemic (i.e., the so-called *Programma*, the *Apology of the Christian Faith*, and the *Explanation of His Methodological Approach*), see Ulbricht, "Arbeitsweise," 37–40, 41–48, 48–55, respectively.

64 Vat. gr. 681; see Devreesse, *Codices Vaticani graeci*, 3:143–44, and Rigo, "Niceta Byzantios," 149–50.

65 See below, n. 96.

66 For the classification into the so-called philological categories, see Ulbricht, "Klassifizierung."

67 For text editions of the literal quotations, see Förstel, *Arethas und Euthymios Zigabenos*, and C. Högel, "An Early Anonymous Greek Translation of the Qur'an: The Fragments from Niketas Byzantios' *Refutatio* and the Anonymous *Abjuratio*," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 7 (2010): 65–119; cf. Trapp, "Koranübersetzung?"

68 See, for example, the Greek fragments in comparison with the Arabic Quran: Conf. I, 93 = Q 2:223; Conf. I, 301–2 = Q 2:125–27; Conf. I, 328–30 = Q 2:168; Conf. I, 362–65 = Q 2:230; Conf. I, 376–77 = Q 2:256; Conf. IV, 45–47 = Q 5:51; Conf. VI, 36 = Q 7:158; Conf. XII, 22–23 = Q 13:30; Conf. XII, 38–40 = Q 13:43; Conf. XIII, 11–12 = Q 14:50; Conf. XVIII, 20–26 = Q 37:1–9; Conf. XVIII, 38–45 = Q 53:1–14; Conf. XVIII, 70–72 = Q 68:1–4; Conf. XVIII, 79–80 = Q 75:1–2; Conf. XVIII, 81 = Q 77; and Conf. XVIII, 85–87 = Q 79:1–6. See also Högel, "Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 69.

69 Cf. Högel, "Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 68–72.

70 Cf. K. Versteegh, "Greek Translations of the Qur'an in Christian Polemics (9th Century A.D.)," *ZDMG* 141 (1991): 64–65.

respective Arabic prepositions, although they do not match the Greek verb they are referring to. So a number of Arabic verbs in combination with the *ḥarf jarr* (preposition) *‘alā* is literally translated into Greek as ἐπάνω (upon), despite the fact that the corresponding Greek verb may be constructed with another preposition.⁷¹ One also notes some tendencies to translate certain Arabic grammatical constructions more or less in the same way in Greek.⁷² Also noteworthy is that the

71 M. Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica am Beispiel der ältesten Koranübersetzung: Die Übersetzungstechnik im *Coranus Graecus* samt Glossar und Konkordanz der wörtlichen Koranzitate (griechisch–arabisch, arabisch–griechisch)” (printed version of vol. 3 of PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2015; see above, n. 18), 90–92. See, for example, ἐπάνω: ἐχθρανεν ~ ὑμών (Conf. I, 357 = Q 2:194), τοῦ κατενέγκαι ~ αὐτῶν γραφῆν (Conf. III, 54 = Q 4:153), ἐκωλύσαμεν ~ αὐτῶν ἄπερ {ἐξόν} αὐτοῖς {ἦσαν} (Conf. III, 70 = Q 4:160), τοῦ ἐντυγχάνειν ~ αὐτῶν τὰ δηλοποιηθέντα πρὸς σέ (Conf. XII, 23 = Q 13:30), τοῦ βλασφημεῖν ~ τοῦ θεοῦ ψεῦσμα (Conf. XV, 11 = Q 16:116), ἐδικαιώθη ~ αὐτοῦ λόγος (Conf. XVI, 21 = Q 17:16), ~ τοῦ πράγματος αὐτῶν (Conf. XVII, 16 = Q 18:21), ἀκουμβίζοντες ἐν αὐτῷ ~ ἀνακλητορίων (Conf. XVII, 25 = Q 18:31), διηγούμεθα ~ σου τὴν ἐξήγησιν ἐν ἀληθείᾳ (Conf. XVII, 32 = Q 18:13), ἀδικώτερος τοῦ βλασφημοῦντος ~ τοῦ θεοῦ ψεῦσμα (Conf. XVIII, 60 = Q 61:7), {εἶσαι} ~ πλάσματος μεγάλου (Conf. XVIII, 72 = Q 68:4), πᾶσα ψυχὴ τῶν ὄντων ~ αὐτῆς {φύλαξ} (Conf. XVIII, 93 = Q 86:4), and τοῦ δεσπόζειν αὐτὸν ~ πάσης πίστεως (Conf. XVIII, 95, 97 = Q 9:33); cf. Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 70–71.

72 For example, the translation equates the Arabic *an al-maṣḍariyya* (i.e., the conjunction *an* in the syntactical function of the verbal noun [*maṣḍar*]) with the Greek infinitive form of the verb, which is the corresponding form for the Arabic *maṣḍar*; in order to express the final aspect of an action, it is placed in the genitive case in Greek. See, for example, sura Q 3:64 (Āl ‘Imrān): *ta ‘ālaw ilā kalimatīn sawā’in baynanā wa-baynakum allā na ‘buda illā llāha wa-lā nusbrika bibī shay’an* – δεῦτε εἰς τὸν λόγον τὸν στοιχοῦντα μέσα ἡμῶν καὶ ὑμῶν, τοῦ μὴ δουλεύειν εἰ μὴ τὸν Θεόν καὶ τοῦ μὴ θείναι αὐτῷ κοινῶν τίποτε (Join together in the word that is in agreement among us and you, that we shall worship none but God and that we shall not make anything like him) (Conf. II, 67–69). The Greek also sometimes uses the *genitivus absolutus* for the status clause *ḥāl* (static accusative) in Arabic: e.g., ὑμῶν συχναζόντων (while you are gathered) (Conf. I, 349 = cf. Q 2:187), ἀμφιβάλοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ (while he was doubting) (Conf. II, 20–21 = cf. Q 3:40), σοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἐκεῖσε (while you were not there) (Conf. II, 26 = cf. Q 3:44), καὶ σοῦ ὄντος ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χώρᾳ (and while you are in that country) (Conf. XVIII = cf. Q 90:2), and τῆς αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς ὑποκαίουσης κάμινον (while his wife was setting the fire alight) (Conf. XVIII, 144 = cf. Q 11:4); see also an example in this context from sura Q 2:187 (al-Baqara): *thumma atimmū l-ṣiyāma ilā l-layli wa-lā tubāshirūhunna wa-antum ‘akifūna fi l-masājidi tilka hudūdu llāhi fa-lā taqrabūhā ka-dhālika yubayyinu llāhu āyātihī li-l-nāsi la’allahum yattaqūna* – Καὶ πάλιν πληρώσατε τὴν νηστείαν ἕως τῆς ἑσπέρας καὶ <μὴ> μίχθητε αὐταῖς ὑμῶν συχναζόντων ἐν τῷ προσκυνητηρίῳ· αὕτη ἐστὶν νομοθεσία Θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐγήγητε αὐτάς (And fulfill again

translator(s) had a sense for translating the same Arabic word differently correspondent with its respective quranic context. For example, the letter *wāw* is translated as *μά* when it is grammatically a *ḥarf gasam* (adjuration particle) in Arabic and as a simple conjunction *καί* in the immediately following verses.⁷³

Once we detect the literal quotations of quranic fragments within Nicetas’s polemic, we then must discuss the extent to which the text of the *Coranus Graecus*, i.e., the version given by Nicetas in his work, also depicts the wording of the original Greek translation of the Quran and is, thus, reliable for further philological and comparative studies. It seems that once Nicetas quotes the translation of the Quran, he just copies the text without modifying the actual wording.⁷⁴ The only modification he apparently does within the literal quotations of the translation is distortion by omission:⁷⁵ in several quotations, Nicetas omits textual passages ranging from whole verses to just a single word. This is, in a narrow sense, not a real modification of the text as such, but it may imply a modification of its meaning. We can infer this from passages where the text of the *Coranus Graecus* does not make any syntactical sense anymore in the way that Nicetas integrated it into his work. For example, the translation of verse

the fast until evening. And do not have intercourse with them while gathered in the prayerhouse. This is the commandment of God, and do not come near them) (Conf. I, 348–50). Note: There is a significant difference between the Arabic quranic text and the Greek translation as transmitted in Vat. gr. 681: the elimination of the negating *lā* in the translation of *lā tubāshirūhunna* reverses the meaning exactly (see Ulbricht, “Verwendungsweise,” 500). Förstel adds in his edition the Greek negation *μή*, in *καὶ <μή> μίχθητε αὐταῖς* (Conf. I, 349). The English translations of the quranic verses are based on Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” if there are any; if not, translations are my own.

73 For example, sura Q 52:1–4 (al-Tūr): *wa-l-tūri, wa-kitābin maṣtūrīn, fi raqqīn manshūrīn, wa-l-bayti l-ma’mūri* – Μὰ τὸ ὄρος καὶ γραφῆν στιχιζομένην ἐν μεμβράνῳ λιτῷ καὶ τὸ ὄσπίτιν τὸ ὠκονομημένον (By the mountain and by the writing that is given in lines on simple parchment) (Conf. XVIII, 33–35); the diplomatic transcription of the Vat. gr. 681, fol. 124r, 12–14, is: *μά τὸ ὄρος· καὶ γραφῆν στιχιζομένην ἐν βεμβράνῳ λιτῷ· καὶ τὸ ὄσπίτιν τὸ ὠκοδομημένον*. For some aspects mentioned in this paragraph, see also the introduction of Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 68–72.

74 For the evidence, see Ulbricht, “Verwendungsweise,” 507–8, passim. See also Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 69–70.

75 For a detailed study on this, see Ulbricht, “Verwendungsweise,” 497–505.

Q 4:161 says in the *Coranus Graecus*: Διὰ τὴν ἀδικίαν τῶν Ἰουδαϊσάντων ἐκωλύσαμεν ἐπάνω αὐτῶν, ἄπερ ἐξὸν αὐτοῖς ἦσαν, καὶ ἠτοιμάσαμεν ἐξ αὐτῶν κόλασιν σφοδρὰν καὶ διὰ τὸ φονεῦσαι αὐτοὺς τοὺς προφήτας ἄνευ δικαίου.⁷⁶ The question here is what ἐξ αὐτῶν (from them) refers to, as it does not make any sense syntactically. But if we compare the wording of the Greek text with the Arabic Quran, we see that it renders the Arabic *minhum* (from them), which refers to *li-l-kāfirīna* (for the unbelievers) before it. As the translation has clear characteristics of a word-by-word translation, we may suppose that the syntagma *li-l-kāfirīna* had also been present in the original Greek translation, but Nicetas omitted it when quoting this verse.⁷⁷

This makes sense in this specific context because the ἐξ in ἐξ αὐτῶν (from them) depends on the restrictive syntagma *li-l-kāfirīna* (for the unbelievers). The sentence is syntactically illogical in Greek without that syntagma. The Greek translation of the Quran tends to reproduce syntactical constructions literally and so ought to have included this passage in its entirety as well. The omission of it, however, complements Nicetas's polemical purposes, as it now appears that punishment is delivered to everyone without restriction, that is, not only "for the unbelievers." One increasingly finds these kinds of omissions in connection with terms positively connotated for Islam⁷⁸ or when the Quran formulates a certain claim to universality as "a scripture for the whole of humanity."⁷⁹ As this regularly occurs in relation to soteriological-theological debates concerning the "right" faith, we may postulate that this pattern of omissions was made by Nicetas in order to strengthen his polemical argumentation against the Quran by leaving out positive connotations of the Quran.

76 Conf. III, 69–72: "Due to the transgression of the Jews, we have made forbidden to them what was formerly possible for them. And we prepared [for] them a heavy punishment because they unrightfully killed the prophets" (Høgel, "An Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 85).

77 See Ulbricht, "Verwendungsweise," 497–98.

78 E.g., *budan* (guidance) in Q 2:185 (Conf. I, 342) and Q 3:96 (Conf. II, 99) or *tayyibāt* (good things) in Q 4:160 (Conf. III, 70); see Ulbricht, "Verwendungsweise," 501–4.

79 E.g., Conf. I, 296–301; Conf. II, 40–44; Conf. IV, 10–15; and Conf. XVII, 3–4 (cf. Ulbricht, "Verwendungsweise," 502–5).

Another example is the discussion on the quranic hapax legomenon *al-ṣamad*.⁸⁰ Nicetas discusses the term in the introductory part of his work and refers to it as δλόσφαιρος (completely round) (Conf. I, 82).⁸¹ Later, however, in the final part of his quotations of quranic verses (Conf. XVIII), he literally cites from the Greek translation and retains the form as δλόσφυρος (Conf. XVIII, 146).⁸² This version is apparently taken from his source, the original translation of the Quran. Nicetas is aware of the difference in terminology, as he tries to harmonize the meaning of both terms (Conf. I, 81–83; Conf. XVIII, 147–48).⁸³ Nevertheless, he is a reliable transmitter, as he does not change the wording of the quranic quotation as such.⁸⁴ This is,

80 For a full discussion of this term, see C. Simelidis, "The Byzantine Understanding of the Qur'anic Term *al-Ṣamad* and the Greek Translation of the Qur'an," *Speculum* 86.4 (2011): 887–913.

81 See Ulbricht, "Islam-Diskurs," 1365–68.

82 For the meaning and translation of this term, see Simelidis, "Byzantine Understanding."

83 So it is arguable that Nicetas really "misread" the word δλόσφυρος as δλόσφαιρος, as Høgel states ("Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 117, n. 78). By contrast, Nicetas seems to have been aware of the different ways of translating *ṣamad* into Greek (see below, n. 84). In addition, it is not "his [sc. Nicetas's] translation of sura 112," as Josef van Ess states ("The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam," in *Kleine Schriften by Josef van Ess*, ed. H. Biesterfeldt [Leiden, 2018], 2:606–30, at 614, n. 32), as the translation of the Quran does not go back to Nicetas (see Trapp, "Koranübersetzung?," 7–17), as mentioned above, but is of unknown authorship.

84 Nicetas's remarks on the quranic hapax legomenon *al-ṣamad* (Q 112:2) are relevant for the early understanding of the Quran in Arabic (see also van Ess, "Youthful God," 613–14). Nicetas takes this lexeme as a starting point for reflections on the nature of God in the Quran, i.e., his nature in the narrower sense (Conf. I, 81–86; Conf. XVIII, 144–48). A corresponding discussion about the anthropomorphism of God in the Quran also arises among Muslim scholars at the time. In the introductory part of his refutation, Nicetas contradicts the supposed quranic statement "that spherical is the divine" (ἐπισφαιρικόν ἐστι τὸ θεῖον)—rather, he writes, "as he [sc. Muḥammad] himself said that God is a full sphere" (ὡς αὐτὸς εἶπεν, δλόσφαιρός ἐστιν ὁ Θεός) (quotations: Conf. I, 81–82, and Conf. I, 82, respectively). For a spherical form presupposes materiality (Conf. I, 83: οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλως τὸ τῆς σφαιράρας ἐδέχεται σχῆμα [for otherwise he could not have assumed the spherical form]; Conf. I, 84: σφαῖρα δὲ ὕλική κατ' αὐτὸν τυγχάνων [according to him being a material sphere]). Accordingly, Nicetas's objection at this point (Conf. I, 81–86) is directed against a "spherical form" of God, since this would make Muḥammad "imagine him [sc. God] as a body entirely" (σῶμα πάντως αὐτὸν οἰόμενος [Conf. I, 82–83]). At the end of his quranic polemic, Nicetas quotes sura Q 112 verbatim from the translation available to him, where the word *ṣamad* is translated as δλόσφυρος (impenetrable; see above, and

therefore, an additional indication that Nicetas stuck quite faithfully to the text of the Greek translation of the Quran.

Actually, his reluctance to alter the quranic text makes sense because there is no reason to suppose that Nicetas possessed any mastery of Arabic. Consequently, he was unable to double-check the Greek translations of quranic verses by himself. Moreover, as a meticulous writer and scholar,⁸⁵ he might not have changed the terminology of his source. The latter point becomes even clearer in other contexts: Nicetas also does not interfere when the same Arabic constructions⁸⁶ or transliterations⁸⁷ are rendered in different manners in different parts of the Greek translation of the Quran.

n. 82) (Conf. XVIII, 146). Nicetas in turn interprets this term as follows: Εἰ μὴ τὸ σχῆμα τῆς σφαίρας δηλοῖ τὸ δρόσφυρον, ἀλλὰ γε τὸ πυκνὸν καὶ πεπιλημένον (If the word “impenetrable” does not denote sphericity, it does denote density and solidity [Conf. XVIII, 147–48]). This, too, implies materiality, since “also that [density and solidity is] a property of the body” (καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦ σώματος ἴδιον [Conf. XVIII, 148]). Nicetas aims to interpret the Muslim image of God as a material one of the actually metaphysical, transcendent God. From a source-critical point of view, it is noteworthy that the word *ṣamad*, which is the starting point of discussion in the two different passages in Nicetas’s work (Conf. I, 81–86 and Conf. XVIII, 144–48, respectively), is rendered differently in Greek in each case; for an overview, see Ulbricht, “Islam-Diskurs,” 1365–68, esp. 1366 (with the table of comparison) and 1367–68 (concerning the reception of the term *al-ṣamad* by later anti-Islamic writers); cf. Simelidis, “Byzantine Understanding.”

85 Cf. Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:IX.

86 E.g., the Arabic expression *tubāshirūhunna/bāshirūhunna* (they have intercourse with them) (Q 2:187) is constructed once with a *praepositio cum accusativo* (μίχθητε εἰς αὐτάς [Conf. I, 346]) and some lines later, on the same folio, with a *praepositio cum dativo* (μίχθητε αὐταῖς [Conf. I, 349]). See also Conf. I, 333–34, where *ikhṭalafū fī* (doubt about) (Q 2:176) is constructed with ἐν as ἀμφιβάλλονται ἐν, while the same Arabic expression of Q 16:124 is translated in Conf. XV, 13–14, with εἰς as τῶν ἀμφιβάλλοντων εἰς. Here, I only quote passages whose differences are easy to recognize, as they appear close to each other within the manuscript.

87 E.g., the prophet Thamūd is transliterated in four different ways (I give here the diplomatic transcriptions of the manuscript Vat. gr. 681): Θαμῶθ (fol. 90v, 2; cf. Conf. VI, 25 = Q 7:73); Θαμούτ (fol. 102r, 14; cf. Conf. VIII, 112 = Q 9:70); Θαιμούδ (fol. 113v, 14; cf. Conf. XIII, 7 [Förstel reads Θαμούδ] = Q 14:9); and Θαμούθ (fol. 126v, 4–5; cf. Conf. XVIII, 75 = Q 69:4). The prophet Shu‘ayb is rendered in two different ways: Σαῖκ (fol. 90v, 13; cf. Conf. VI, 30 [Förstel reads Σαῖκ] = Q 7:85) and Σωαῖπ (fol. 108v, 8; cf. Conf. X, 31 = Q 11:84). The prophet Šāliḥ is transliterated in two different ways: Τζάλετ (fol. 90r, 17; Conf. VI, 24–28 [Förstel reads Ζάλετ] = Q 7:73) and Ζάλεθ (fol. 108r, 7; cf. Conf. X, 23–27 = Q 11:61).

We may thus conclude that once he quotes or paraphrases a quranic passage, Nicetas apparently quite faithfully retains the wording, syntax, and spelling of the Greek original that he had at his disposal. The only alterations are the omission of isolated phrases or words while the rest of the text is kept as it is.⁸⁸

Having discussed (1) the different source layers within Nicetas’s *Refutation* and (2) how to detect the literal quotations from the quranic fragments as such, we will have to face (3) the question of the possible origins of modifications within the quranic passages that have been classified as literal quotations with respect to the Arabic text. Even though the translation was, in general, carefully made, there are nevertheless some instances where its text differs from the Arabic text of the Quran. Furthermore, when I refer to the Arabic text of the Quran in the following, I do not only mean the quranic reading of Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim (short for *qirā’at* Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim),⁸⁹ which today is the most popular in the Muslim world, not least because of the widespread Cairo edition of 1924. I also checked all the other remaining readings of the Quran as they are documented in the most recent major *qirā’āt* works.⁹⁰ The latter comprise all fourteen canonical readings—i.e., *al-qirā’āt al-thalātha al-mukammila li-l-‘ashr*,⁹¹ *al-qirā’āt al-‘ashr*,⁹² and, finally, *al-qirā’āt al-arba’ al-zā’ida ‘alā al-‘ashr*⁹³—as well as the non-canonical,

88 See above, pp. 227–28, and Ulbricht, “Verwendungsweise,” 497–505.

89 This means the text of the Quran as it was read in the way (*riwāya*) of Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān (d. 796), who recited the Quran according to the reading (*qirā’a*) of Abū Bakr ‘Āṣim (d. 745).

90 The following major studies (*muḥṣam al-qirā’āt*) on the quranic readings were consulted for the Muslim tradition: ‘A. S. Makram and A. M. ‘Umar, *Muḥṣam al-qirā’āt al-qur’āniyya*, 8 vols. (Kuwait, 1988), and ‘A. L. al-Khaṭīb, *Muḥṣam al-qirā’āt*, 11 vols. (Damascus, n.d.), as well as the information given in the commentary to the Quran by A. T. Khoury, *Der Koran: Arabisch–Deutsch; Übersetzung und wissenschaftlicher Kommentar*, 12 vols. (Gütersloh, 1990–2001). I also checked the information of printed books with the most recent version of the online database of the project *Corpus Coranicum* (<https://corpuscoranicum.de/>) at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

91 The seven readings; for an introduction, see Makram and ‘Umar, *Muḥṣam*, 91–99.

92 The ten readings; for an introduction, see Makram and ‘Umar, *Muḥṣam*, 73–91.

93 The fourteen readings; for an introduction, see Makram and ‘Umar, *Muḥṣam*, 95–98.

i.e., *al-qirā'āt al-shādhḥa*.⁹⁴ From a methodological point of view, it is crucial to consider all these quranic variants because Nicetas's polemic, into which the quranic fragments are embedded, dates back, as a *terminus ante quem*, to as early as the ninth century CE (second/third century *hijrī*). This means that the historical origins of the translation of the Quran are close to the codification of the Arabic Quran as a written text in the seventh/eighth century CE (first century *hijrī*).⁹⁵ The Greek translation was, additionally, written even prior to the canonization of the seven readings by the Muslim scholar Ibn Mujāhid in 934.⁹⁶ This makes the translation of the Quran not only an extraordinary source of early quranic hermeneutics but also a very precious witness of the quranic text as such, because its translation may reflect alternative readings other than those documented in Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim.

When detecting a discrepancy between the literal quotations in the *Coranus Graecus* and the Arabic text of the Quran, I first excluded the possibility that the Greek refers back to an alternative quranic reading.⁹⁷ We then have to think about other intermediate steps within the transmission chain as possible origins

for textual modifications.⁹⁸ Although the copyist(s) accurately worked on the manuscript, we also have to consider palaeographical lapsus that were apparently committed during the process of copying. For example, the proper noun *al-hijr* in the title of sura 15 is transliterated as τὸν νογερ [*sic*].⁹⁹ The letter nu at the beginning of the word is presumably a diplography because of the nu of the preceding article τόν, resulting in its doubling. In contrast to that, when *hijr* is not preceded by a word ending with nu, it is transliterated as όγερ.¹⁰⁰

However, this is not always as easy as it appears. Sometimes, we may be persuaded to think that an emendation is obviously necessary. However, after a closer look, things appear differently. For example, in Conf. XVIII, 132–33 (according to the manuscript Vat. gr. 681, fol. 129v, 15–16), the Greek text translates Q 100:6 as ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ κυρίου ἀχώριστος (the human is inseparable from the lord). Erich Trapp, Karl Förstel, and Christian Høgel correct ἀχώριστος (inseparable) to ἀχάριστος (ungrateful), as this fits the Arabic sense of verse Q 100:6.¹⁰¹ However, ἀχάριστος is constructed with πρὸς οἱ τινί.¹⁰² This means that the genitive τοῦ κυρίου (of the Lord) (Conf. XVIII, 133) in the Greek text would have been grammatically incorrect if ἀχάριστος had been the original reading of the Greek text; in the case of ἀχάριστος, the genitive should rather have been a dative τῷ κυρίῳ. If ἀχώριστος is indeed the original reading of the Greek translation, τοῦ κυρίου would be correct by understanding it as *partitivus*.¹⁰³

94 The non-canonical readings; for an introduction, see Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam*, 111–18.

95 This happened when the third caliph 'Uthmān gathered the different written fragments of the quranic text and had them consolidated into the so-called *al-muṣḥaf al-'Uthmānī*, i.e., the Quran codex of the third caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (579/83–656, r. from 644).

96 The seven readings as classified by Ibn Mujāhid are the first group of the canonical fourteen readings of the Quran. The three readings after the seven (i.e., the ten readings), notably supported (and added to the canonical seven) by Ibn al-Jazārī (d. 1429), and the four after the ten (i.e., the fourteen readings) were grouped later. See also Aḥmad 'Alī al-Imām, *Variant Readings of the Qur'an: A Critical Study of Their Historical and Linguistic Origins* (Herndon, VA, 1998), 128–31; C. Melchert, "The Relation of the Ten Readings to One Another," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10.2 (2008): 73–87; and Y. Dutton, "Orality, Literacy and the 'Seven Ahruf' Ḥadīth," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23.1 (2012): 1–49. Cf. also the more recent studies by S. H. Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an: The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādhḥ* (Brill, 2013) and *The Second Canonization of the Qur'an (324/936): Ibn Mujāhid and the Founding of the Seven Readings* (Brill, 2020).

97 The alternative readings for the examples given below are stated in the apparatus. For some cases where the Greek translation, indeed, reflects another quranic reading than Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim, see Ulbricht, "Nachweis der Existenz," 547–48; see also Versteegh, "Greek Translations of the Qur'ān," 62–63.

98 I do not agree with the characterization as "errors" when the Greek text does not match the Arabic because this presumes that all the other intermediate steps have been excluded as origins; see R. F. Gleis, "Der Mistkäfer und andere Missverständnisse: Zur frühbyzantinischen Koranübersetzung," in *Frühe Koranübersetzungen: Europäische und außereuropäische Fallstudien*, ed. R. F. Gleis (Trier, 2012), 9–24, at 13, and Høgel, "Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 69–70.

99 Vat. gr. 681, fol. 114v, 6 (Conf. XIV, 2).

100 Vat. gr. 681, fol. 127v, 12 (Conf. XVIII, 96): τοῖς όγερ [*sic*].

101 Trapp, "Koranübersetzung?," 10; Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz*, 1:116; and Høgel, "Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 115.

102 LSJ, s.v. ἀχάριστος. See also W. Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin, 1958), s.v. ἀχάριστος, but nothing about πρὸς οἱ τινί; G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), s.v. ἀχαριστέω; and E. Kriaras, *Λεξικό της Μεσαιωνικής Ελληνικής Δημιώδους Γραμματείας*, vol. 3 (Thessaloniki, 1973), s.v. ἀχάριστος.

103 Cf. LSJ, s.v. ἀχώριστος; Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, s.v. ἀχώριστος; Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. ἀχώριστος; Kriaras, *Λεξικό*, s.v. ἀχώριστος.

As such, an error by the copyist appears rather unlikely, and the emendations by Trapp, Förstel, and Høgel seem wrong. It is noteworthy that the editio princeps by Angelo Mai preserves the original ἀχώριστος but with a footnote.¹⁰⁴ This is a term of great Christological relevance,¹⁰⁵ and we will come back to this context and especially this example later.

Once we exclude these differences between the Arabic and Greek texts that might result from another quranic reading or from palaeographic error, the next possible step in the transmission chain is Nicetas himself. I already showed that he apparently did not intervene in the text of the literal quotations except by omitting passages or words. It is here where we find certain patterns that give us the possibility of differentiating the different kinds of omissions in the quotations of the *Coranus Graecus*.¹⁰⁶ First, we find some differences between the Arabic and Greek versions that recur in connection with two specific key topics of anti-Islamic polemics: sexuality and the quranic image of God. For example, there are several verses that lack the negative¹⁰⁷ or interrogative particles¹⁰⁸ found in the Arabic text. In their respective contexts, these omissions lead to diametrically opposed, sometimes even salacious, statements within the Greek translation, and the description of the quranic God is pejoratively connoted. We may attribute these kinds of modifications (i.e., omissions) to Nicetas because the modified statements now fit his polemical agenda. Second, the same seems to occur with omissions of subordinate clauses that relativize quranic sayings.¹⁰⁹ This leads to statements that are formulated much harsher than intended in the Quran. In addition, distorted separations of verses¹¹⁰ or the inappropriate collation of two independent verses of

the Quran¹¹¹ also permit Nicetas to polemically attack the quoted holy book. The relative regularity in which these phenomena occur suggests that these modifications were made by Nicetas for two reasons: First, it is easy to omit textual passages without actually intervening in the text (of the translation as such), that is, the original of which Nicetas was not able to check because of his lack of Arabic. Second, these kinds of modifications serve Nicetas's polemical aims.

There is, however, also a third kind of modification within the *Coranus Graecus* that cannot be convincingly attributed to Nicetas. It repeatedly occurs in quranic verses dealing with theological issues with respect to Muslim and Christian dogmas. Here, instead of omissions, we repeatedly find additions to the quranic text and/or a certain interpretation of its content. The result of these additions and specific interpretations might be characterized as a Christian hermeneutical reading of the Quran.

In the following, I will philologically analyze these alterations to contextualize them historically in the conclusion. I will first give some examples where quotations related to Jesus Christ and his soteriological role in the Quran and Christianity are given in a modified manner in the *Coranus Graecus*. I will then focus on translations of technical terms of the Christian liturgical tradition that demonstrate the sensibility of the translator(s) for transporting the religious connotations into a Christian context. Lastly, I will discuss sample passages that depict the ability of the translator(s) to deeply understand Muslim worship practices. Based on this philological examination, I will finally formulate my conclusions on the cultural-religious background of the translator(s) of the Quran and try to sketch a composite picture of his/historical environment.

The examples will be given in a Greek–Arabic synoptical way with English translations. The Greek text of the following examples is taken from Förstel's edition but was, however, also checked against the manuscript.¹¹² The Arabic text is according to the quranic reading of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim with all the remaining readings (fourteen

104 Mai, *Nova patrum bibliotheca*, 4:388, n. 4, and PG 105:776, n. 74.

105 See the *horos* (definition) of Chalcedon (451): ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαρέτως, ἀχώριστως (H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 27th ed. [Freiburg, 1999], 71).

106 For the following, see Ulbricht, "Verwendungsweise," 497–505.

107 See, for example, Conf. I, 255–62 (Q 2:102); Conf. I, 349 (Q 2:187); and Conf. IV, 36 (Q 5:46–47).

108 See, for example, Conf. II, 105–6 (Q 3:144), and Conf. XVI, 53–54 (Q 17:40).

109 See, for example, Conf. I, 362–65 (Q 2:230).

110 See Ulbricht, "Verwendungsweise," 495–97.

111 γυναίξι, φησι, λελευκασμέναις τε καὶ εὐφθάμοις συγγινόμενων, . . . καὶ τὸ φρικτότερον, Θεοῦ κατενώπιον (Conf. I, 141–43 [Q 2:25–26]); cf. PG 105:711, n. 26, and Mai, *Nova patrum bibliotheca*, 4:349, n. 2. See also Ulbricht, "Verwendungsweise," 492–93.

112 If there are significant differences between Förstel's edition and the manuscript, both readings are given.

canonical and non-canonical) in the apparatus. The English translations, which are to be seen only as a support for the reader and not as a basis for the examination of the texts, aim to stress the main points of my argumentation.¹¹³

The *Coranus Graecus*: A Christian Hermeneutical Reading of the Quran?

We have already stated that the *Coranus Graecus* follows an interlinear method of translating from Arabic into Greek. This also extends to the use of the definite article, meaning that the definite article is usually translated into Greek where it is also written in Arabic and vice versa.¹¹⁴ Most cases in which there is no definite article *al-* in the Arabic (while there is one in the Greek) are genitive constructions in Arabic.¹¹⁵ That means that the article is correctly written in Greek while not present in a written form in Arabic because the Arabic word is semantically defined by the following word (*majrūr bi-l-idāfa* [genitive construction]). Very few cases are found in the *Coranus Graecus* where the rendering of the article in Greek does not correspond to the grammar of the Arabic text. These alterations occur in passages related to theological terms and expressions, including Christological statements and dogmatic differences between Christianity and Islam.

Examples of omitting the definite article are linked to proper nouns present in the Greek text but not in the Arabic.¹¹⁶ Here, we find word-for-word translations that refer to frequently used expressions and denominations of persons of the scripture, such as *rasūl Allāh* (the messenger of God) and *ibn Maryam* (the son of Mary). They are consistently rendered word-for-word into Greek (i.e., without the article) as ἀπόστολος Θεοῦ

113 The English translations were originally based on Sahih International for the quranic text, quoted after <https://quran.com/>, and Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 65–119; however, I modified both of them, when necessary, in order to point out the differences.

114 For a full list of the corresponding uses of the articles, see Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 139–71 (for the words that have the definite article in Greek), 235–49 (for the syntagmata translating the Arabic article *al-* into Greek).

115 For a full list of these cases, see Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 389–98.

116 See all the entries where the definite article ὁ, ἡ, τό (the) and its derivatives are used within the translation: Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 139–71. See also above, n. 115.

(God’s messenger)¹¹⁷ and υἱὸς Μαρίας (Mary’s son),¹¹⁸ respectively. The reason for this deviation from the rule might be that these expressions are frequently used in theological contexts and are therefore common in religious language in Greek.¹¹⁹

But we also find examples where the definite article is added in Greek where it is not intended in the Arabic text. This disproportionately high percentage of anomalies with respect to the word-for-word translation in the rest of the *Coranus Graecus* is linked to contexts of theologically relevant terms like λόγος (word), εὐαγγελίζω (evangelize), and υἱός (son). Of course, it is indeed important to consider that the use of articles particularly differs from one language to another. However, the text of the *Coranus Graecus* is very accurate in rendering articles and even particles from Arabic into Greek,¹²⁰ and these expressions all refer to Jesus Christ himself in the respective quranic contexts. Furthermore, through the addition of the article, the text in Greek takes on a theological-dogmatical cast that not only was not intended in the Arabic quranic text but moreover implicates Christian associations of these quranic passages that contrast with Islamic teachings. One may wonder if these alterations are only by chance or if we may distinguish a certain pattern related to the translated quranic contents.

Looking at sura Q 3:45 (Āl ‘Imrān), which deals with the relation of Christ with the term “Word of God” (λόγος), we read the following:¹²¹

117 For example: Conf. III, 80, 102–3, and Conf. IV, 15. See Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 36–37 (for a full list and glossary of ἀπόστολος), 103–6 (for Θεός).

118 For example: Conf. I, 220; Conf. II, 29; Conf. III, 79, 102; and Conf. XVIII, 56. See Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 127–28 (for a full list and glossary of Μαρία), 208–9 (for υἱός).

119 The exact phrases ἀπόστολος Θεοῦ and υἱὸς Μαρίας are not attested in the New Testament, but the recurring phrases ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ and ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ also lack the article (see Englishman’s Greek Concordance, <https://biblehub.com/greek/>, and Abarim Publications, “Greek New Testament Concordance— with Strong Index Numbers,” <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Concordance/index.html>). See also Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, s.v. ἀπόστολος, and s.v. υἱός, (esp. under υἱὸς Θεοῦ).

120 For a detailed concordance and Arabic-Greek synopsis of all lexemes used in the *Coranus Graecus* in relation to the quranic text, see Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 26–399.

121 Cf. Ulbricht, “*At-Tarǧamāh*,” 46–47. In the tables, the following abbreviations are used: MQQ = Makram and ‘Umar, *Mu’jam*; MQ = al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam*; and KK = Khoury, *Der Koran*; see above, n. 90.

Sura Q 3:45 (Āl Imrān)	Vat. gr. 681, fol. 69v, 12–16 (Conf. II, 28–30)
<p>[. . .] <i>inna llāha yubashshiruki bi-kalimatīn minhu smuhu l-masīhu ʿĪsā bnū Maryama wajīhan fī l-dunyā wa-l-ākhirati</i></p> <p>[<i>wa-mina l-muqarrabīna</i>]</p>	<p>Ὁ Θεός [. . .]¹²² εὐαγγελίζεται σε τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ· Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Μαρίας ἐπιτυγχάνων ἐν τῷ βίῳ τούτῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι ὑπάρχων.</p>
<p>[. . .] Indeed, God brings you good news of a word from him, his name is the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, distinguished in this world and the hereafter.</p> <p>[and from those who are near.]</p>	<p>God brings you [. . .] good news of his word, Christ, Jesus, son of Mary, meeting in this life and existing in the coming life.¹²³</p>
<p><i>inna</i> : <i>anna</i> (MQQ 2:30 = 1030; MQ 1:494); <i>inna llāha yubashshiruki</i> : <i>inna llāha la-yubashshiruki</i>, <i>inna llāha la-yubshiruki</i> (MQ 1:494; KK 4:104); <i>yubashshiruki</i> : <i>yabshuruki</i>, <i>yubshiruki</i> (MQQ 2:30 = 1031, 2:28 = 1015; MQ 1:494, 488); <i>bi-kalimatīn</i> : <i>bi-kilmatin</i> (MQQ 2:30 = 1032, 2:28 = 1017; MQ 1:494, 489); phon. (<i>imāla</i>) (MQQ 2:31 = 1033; MQ 1:494); <i>wajīhan</i> : <i>wijīhan</i>, <i>wajhiyyan</i> (MQ 1:494); phon. (<i>imāla</i>) (MQQ 2:31 = 1034; MQ 1:494); phon. (<i>imāla</i> et al.) (MQ 1:494)</p>	

The translation construes the expression *bi-kalimatīn minhu* (a word from him) as τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ (his word). We thus have a definite article in Greek where the Arabic text does not have one. In order to evaluate this addition, it is necessary to first ask if the Greek syntax allows for the construction of a (possessive) genitive added to an indefinite noun and if the translation also translates elsewhere compounds like *minhu* into the genitive alone. Other examples within the *Coranus Graecus* indeed show that the Arabic *minhu* is translated with a literal construction, such as ἐκ/ἐξ plus the genitive.¹²⁴ In this specific context, it is clear that the intended referent of the quranic verse is Jesus Christ. Therefore, the modification of the Arabic text means

that Jesus Christ becomes, in the Greek text, “the Word of God” (literally “his Word,” τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ), while in the Quran, he is just “a Word of God” (*kalimatīn minhu*). On the one hand, the term λόγος is one of the most important epithets of God’s second hypostasis, the Son Jesus Christ; on the other, we do not find any other example within the *Coranus Graecus* of a translation of *minhu* as a definite construction in Greek.¹²⁵ Therefore, I suggest not considering this modification as a simple lapsus or haphazard faulty reading—be it by Nicetas or a possible copyist—but to take it as one puzzle piece of the whole picture, as we will see in the following.

I say this because introducing the formulation λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ (Word of God) to a Greek version of the Quran reminds us of the genuine Christian concept of Christ’s sonship of God¹²⁶ and that Christ is

122 Square brackets [. . .] mark omitted passages or words.

123 Here, Høgel’s translation “who succeeds . . . and will live . . .” (“Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 81) has been modified. The translator seems to understand the Arabic verb based on the root *w-j-h* in the sense of “being face to face” and, subsequently, as in *wājaba*, “to meet.” The Greek verb ἐπιτυγχάνω has the connotation of “something happening unexpectedly,” which is also used for “meeting with” (see LSJ, s.v. ἐπιτυγχάνω). My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify this passage.

124 See, e.g., Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 79–83. For the combination of *min* plus *damīr* (pronoun), like *minhu*, *minkum*, etc., and its translations into Greek, see, e.g., Conf. III, 81, 104; Conf. IV, 47 (twice); Conf. VI, 61, 71; and Conf. IX, 5.

125 See above, n. 124, especially the passages concerning Conf. III, 81 (Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 356); Conf. III, 104 (Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 357); and Conf. VI, 61 (Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 355); cf. Conf. III, 71; Conf. IV, 47; and Conf. IX, 5 (constructions in plural).

126 To give proof for this self-evident quotation seems redundant in this context. As an example, we may refer to the hymn “Ὁ μονογενὴς υἱὸς καὶ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ” (The Only-Begotten Son and Word of God), whose authorship has been attributed to the emperor Justinian I (482–565 CE, r. from 527 CE) (H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich* [Munich, 1959], 378) and which is

“[his] only-begotten son, born of the Father before all ages . . . and one with the Father in essence.”¹²⁷ So we may think that the *Coranus Graecus* indirectly reflects these meanings in the quranic content as if the concepts of Christ’s filiality and divinity were also present in Islam. In contrast, these Christian dogmas par excellence are categorically rejected by the Quran itself.¹²⁸

We find the addition of the definite article in Greek in the same context (i.e., in combination with the word *kalima*/λόγος) a little further on in the *Coranus Graecus* in the very same sura: the expression *kalimatīn sawā’in* (a word that is equitable) in sura Q 3:64 (Āl ‘Imrān) is translated as “the word that is equitable.” Here again, a definite article was added (τὸν λόγον τὸν στοιχοῦντα), while the Arabic text has the indefinite form.¹²⁹

Sura Q 3:64 (Āl ‘Imrān)	Vat. gr. 681, fol. 72r, 6–10 (Conf. II, 67–69)
[. . .] <i>ta’ālaw ilā kalimatīn sawā’in baynanā wa-baynakum allā na’buda illā llāha wa-lā nushrika bihī shay’an</i> [. . .]	δεῦτε εἰς τὸν λόγον τὸν στοιχοῦντα μέσα ἡμῶν καὶ ὑμῶν, τοῦ μὴ δουλεύειν εἰ μὴ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ τοῦ μὴ θεῖναι αὐτῷ κοινωνῶν τίποτε.
[. . .] Come to a word that is equitable between us and you, that we shall worship none but God and not associate anything with him. [. . .]	Come to the word that is equitable between us and you, that we shall worship none but God and that we shall not put any associate with him whatsoever.
<i>ta’ālaw</i> : <i>ta’ālū</i> (MQ 1:512); <i>kalimatīn</i> : <i>kilmatin, kalmatin</i> (MQQ 2:38–39 = 1075; MQ 1:512); <i>sawā’in</i> : <i>sawā’an, ‘adlin</i> (MQQ 2:39 = 1076; MQ 1:513; KK 4:132)	

This is especially interesting because the term λόγος appears within the literal quotations of the *Coranus Graecus* only in seven passages. Four of them are a translation of the Arabic *maṣḍar* (verbal noun/infinitive) *qawl* (root *q-w-l*),¹³⁰ and the remaining three all translate the Arabic term *kalima* (word).¹³¹

As in Christian-Arabic terminology, the respective word for λόγος is *kalima*; what interests us in this context are the three latter cases (Q 3:45, 3:64; Q 4:171). All of them are related to Christological passages in the Quran,¹³² in contrast to the former four. In the *Coranus Graecus*, the word *kalima* is defined both times where it is indefinite in the Arabic Quran (Q 3:45, 3:64).¹³³ The third case (Q 4:171) is already definite in Arabic through a genitive construction that is rendered word by word into Greek (without the written article).¹³⁴ Therefore, I contend that there is a tendency within the *Coranus Graecus* to make the word *kalima* definite when mentioned in the Quran. We may suppose that the goal was to make the quranic concept of “God’s Word” accessible or more familiar

sung in the Holy Mass between the second and third ἀντίφωνον, thus being part of the Byzantine Orthodox liturgical practice.

127 As in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, . . . ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ (G. L. Dossetti, *Il simbolo di Nicea e di Costantinopoli: Edizione critica* [Rome, 1967], 244).

128 See suras Q 5:72–75, 5:116–117 (al-Mā’ida), and Q 4:171–172 (al-Nisā’), passim.

129 See Ulbricht, “*At-Tarḡamab*,” 47.

130 See Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 124: Conf. VIII, 16–17 = Q 9:30 (twice) (ὁ λόγος αὐτῶν διὰ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν· ἰσοφωνοῦσι τοῖς λόγοις τῶν ἀρνησαμένων) (This is their speech through their mouths. They liken their speech to the deniers of old); Conf. XVI, 21 = Q 17:16 (ἐδικαιώθη ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ λόγος) (And the saying about it is done right); and Conf. XVI, 37 and 54 = Q 17:40 (ὁμῆς δὲ λέγετε λόγους μεγάλους) (But you utter frightful speech).

131 See Ulbricht, “Graeco-Arabica,” 325: Conf. II, 29 = Q 3:45 (ὁ θεὸς εὐαγγελίζεται σε τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ); Conf. II, 67 = Q 3:64 (δεῦτε εἰς τὸν λόγον τὸν στοιχοῦντα μέσα ἡμῶν); and Conf. III, 103 = Q 4:171 (ὁ Χριστὸς . . . λόγος αὐτοῦ ὃν ἔρριψεν πρὸς τὴν Μαρίαν).

132 Q 3:64 is preceded by the Christological passage about his birth, childhood, miracles, and ascension (Q 3:45–57) and a soteriological-eschatological narrative (Q 3:58–63) where reference is made to Christ (Q 3:59).

133 With τὸν λόγον in both passages.

134 Q 4:171: *innamā l-masīhu ‘Isā bnu Maryama rasūlu llāhi wa-kalimatuhū alqābā ilā Maryama wa-rūḥun minhu* = Ὁ Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Μαρίας ἀπόστολος Θεοῦ ἐστι καὶ Λόγος αὐτοῦ, ὃν ἔρριψεν πρὸς τὴν Μαρίαν, καὶ Πνεῦμα ἐξ αὐτοῦ (The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is God’s messenger and his word, which he hurled to Mary, and spirit of him) (Conf. III, 102–4).

to non-Muslim readers. By defining the term λόγος, a Christian reader would associatively understand the quranic passage in relation to Jesus Christ as “the Word of God.” Independent from this is the question of whether the modification was done intentionally or unintentionally.

We find a similar case of modification concerning the definite article in the *Coranus Graecus* that again occurs in the context of a Christological passage. Sura Q 9:30 (al-Tawba) refers to the expression “Son of God” and its meaning for Jews and Christians. The same Arabic construction is rendered in two different ways grammatically:¹³⁵

Sura Q 9:30 (al-Tawba)	Vat. gr. 681, fol. 96v, 1–5 (Conf. VIII, 15–17)
<p><i>wa-qālati l-yahūdu</i> ‘Uzayruni bnu llāhi <i>wa-qālati l-naṣārā</i> l-masīhu bnu llāhi <i>dhālika qawluhum</i> <i>bi-afwābihim [...]</i></p>	<p>Λέγουσιν Ἰουδαῖοι, ὅτι Ἰσραὴλ ἐστὶν υἱὸς Θεοῦ. καὶ λέγουσιν οἱ Χριστιανοί, ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστὶν ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ Τοῦτό ἐστιν ὁ λόγος αὐτῶν διὰ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν.</p>
<p>The Jews say ‘Uzayr [i.e., Ezra] is the son of God [lit. “the God”], and the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God [lit. “the God”]. That is their speech through their mouths. [...]</p>	<p>The Jews say that Israel is a son of God [lit. “a God”], and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God [lit. “the God”]. This is their speech through their mouths.</p>
<p><i>‘uzayruni</i>: phon. (MQQ 3:14 = 3032; MQ 3:368); <i>‘uzayruni bnu llāhi</i>: <i>‘uzayru bnu llāhi</i> (MQQ 3:14–15 = 3033; MQ 3:368–70; KK 7:310); <i>al-naṣārā</i>: phon. (<i>imāla</i>) (MQQ 3:15 = 3034; MQ 3:370); phon. (<i>idghām</i> et al.) (MQQ 3:15 = 3035; MQ 3:370); <i>bi-afwābihim</i>: <i>bi-yafwābihim</i> (in pausa) (MQ 3:370)</p>	

If both syntagmata were seen to be isolated in their respective languages, there would be no need to perceive a difference. The meaning in Greek does not necessarily deviate from the Arabic text because the role of definite and indefinite articles in Greek allows for some flexibility. However, what is striking here is that, first, there is a difference between both passages in Greek, though the Arabic construction is completely the same. Second, the definite article is added in the analogous expression only some lines later, so a lapsus or a different translator (and thus translating technique) may be excluded. Third, and most important, the modification again occurs in a Christological context, that is, the sonship of God. So at first glance, this purely grammatical difference seems worthy of examination under a different (i.e., dogmatical) prism. Let us look at this in detail.

The Quran states in Arabic in both syntagmata that Ezra (*‘Uzayr*)/Israel¹³⁶ and Christ, respectively, are “the Son of God” (lit. the God), as the Arabic *ibn* (son) is defined by its genitive construction with *Allāh*. However, when referring to the Jews, the translation of *‘Uzayruni bnu llāhi* becomes Ἰσραὴλ ἐστὶν υἱὸς Θεοῦ in Greek, without the definite article before υἱός. If taken literally, this would mean “Israel is a son of a God.” In contrast, the expression *al-masīhu bnu llāhi* appears in Greek as in the Arabic text where “son” is definite: ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστὶν ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ.

136 To understand this translation is a major challenge. To my knowledge, there is no indication why the Arabic *‘Uzayr* has been rendered as Israel. It is also noteworthy that Muslim exegesis is not quite clear about who or what might be *‘Uzayr*. Of course, one might always suspect that the Greek translation has been made from a different *rasm* (i.e., text body in defective scripture), although in this instance this does not seem to be the case (see “44 Manuscripts for Q 9:30,” *Corpus Coranicum*, accessed 15 August 2023, <https://corpuscoranicum.de/en/verse-navigator/sura/9/verse/30/manuscripts>).

135 See Ulbricht, *at-Tarğamāh*, 48.

Comparing both syntagmata, the expression “a son of a God” (concerning the Jews) would allow the existence of another son (υἱός) because the word is indefinite. By contrast, Christ would be the only son (of God) because the word is grammatically defined by the definite article (ὁ υἱός). So we see a tendency within the *Coranus Graecus* to point to the uniqueness of Christ’s sonship in comparison to other (non-Christian) traditions.

In principle, we might argue that the addition or lack of an article might be either a copyist’s lapsus or Nicetas’s own modification. That this modification originated with a copyist is very unlikely because the manuscript has been copied extremely carefully, and I have already demonstrated that this kind of modification primarily occurs in theologically relevant contexts. It seems similarly unlikely that this specific modification of the quranic text goes back to Nicetas. If in this specific case Nicetas changed the wording of the original Greek translation of the Quran, he surely did this with a specific aim (i.e., with a polemical target). But by contrast, Nicetas does not discuss the grammatical status of the word υἱός in this context. He only refers to the different concepts of the sonship of God in Judaism and Christianity (Conf. VIII, 20–89).

However, that the use of the definite article is indeed not marginal but rather a central point of argumentation for Nicetas becomes clear in his own explanations some lines later. Toward the end of the very same *Confutatio* VIII, he quotes verse Q 9:61 (Conf. VIII, 106–7) and discusses in this context the use of the definite versus indefinite status in combination with the word υἱός. In his interpretation of verse Q 9:61, Nicetas states:

Μετ’ ὀλίγον δέ, ὅποι φέρεται αὐτῷ ὁ σύμπαρ τῆς θεομαχίας σκοπός, ἔκδηλος γίνεται. Ὁ γάρ τοι ἕως τοῦ νῦν δισχυριζόμενος, ὅτι Θεὸς Υἱὸν οὐκ ἔχει, οὐ θαρρῶν ἑαυτῷ ταῦτα φιλονεικοῦντι, ἀλλὰ διαλογισάμενος, ὅτι τυχὸν καὶ ἔχει, οὐκ ἀναδύεται ἑαυτῷ τοῦτο προσάψαι τὸ πρόσωπον, εἰ καὶ ἐκ πλαγίου τοῦτο ἐπήγαγεν καὶ προσποιεῖται οἰονεὶ σχηματίζεσθαι βλακίαν [102Γ] πάνυ αἰσχροῦ, καὶ φησιν· «Τινὲς σιαινουσιν τὸν προφήτην καὶ λέγουσιν, ὅτι + αὐτὸς Υἱὸς Θεοῦ ἔστιν.» + Καὶ οὐκ εἶπεν, ὅτι ὁ Υἱὸς ἔστιν, λογιζόμενος, ὃν ἀνελεῖν ἀγωνίζεται, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς παντελῶς τοῦ δόλου καταλειφθεὶς συσκευισθῆ, ἀλλ’, ὅτι αὐτὸς Υἱὸς

ἔστιν· ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγεν, ὅτι Ἐἰ θέλετε Υἱὸν Θεοῦ ὁμολογεῖν, ἐγὼ τοῦ λαλουμένου ἐγγύτερον.¹³⁷

Nicetas seems not to pay any attention to this grammatical difference in Q 9:30 with respect to the Arabic Quran (which he might not have even been aware of because he did not know Arabic). Therefore, if it was Nicetas who added or omitted the definite article in Conf. VIII, 15–17 (Q 9:30), then it is hard to explain why he does not refer to this grammatical difference there but does so when discussing the later quranic verse, Q 9:61 (Conf. VIII, 101–9). Therefore, we may suppose that he did not make this modification; instead, we may assume that it goes back to an earlier step within the transmission process of the Greek translation, that is, back to the translator himself. If the difference in the use of the article in this passage does not originate with Nicetas, then there is no reason to suppose him to also be behind the additions of articles in the other cases mentioned above (Q 3:45, 3:64).

A modification analogous to the abovementioned also occurs with the term “God” (θεός) within the translation of Q 9:30. In the first case (of the Jews, when “son” is indefinite), “God” has also no article in Greek; in the latter case (of Christ, when “son” is grammatically defined), “God” gets the definite article, too. This may be explained best with an attempt to harmonize both cases (of the Jews with their Son and God, and of the Christians, respectively) and to stress the exclusiveness of the relation between the specific God and his Son in the Christian understanding.

Of course, we must keep in mind the loose use of the article in Greek, not least in the case of θεός. Nevertheless, it is not the single observation that makes the argument—it is the sum of the parts that allows us to draw a picture of possibilities, and those consist of the following points. First, the Greek translation of the

137 Conf. VIII, 101–10: “Shortly thereafter it becomes quite obvious what his [sc. Muhammad’s] whole intention in the fight against God aims at. For he, who up to now has asserted that God has no son, does not trust himself to claim that, but in setting forth that he may have <one> after all, he does not hesitate to ascribe to himself this role, while he also introduces it covertly and presumes to display a quite shameful simplicity, as it were. He says, ‘Some cause trouble to the prophet and say + that he is son of God + [cf. Q 9:61].’ In saying this, he did not say that he is *the* Son because he was thinking of the one he was striving to eliminate, lest he be left utterly exposed by his cunning and brought down, but only that he is Son. This is as if he said, ‘If you will confess that there is a Son of God, I am closer to <him> than the one named’ (translation my own).

Quran follows a method of interlinear translation, closely following Arabic grammar and syntax. That means that even small aberrations from this concept might be of importance. Second, the divergences in the use of the article largely occur in the context of the word *kalima*/λόγος, and this term has special importance to Greek readers, as it associatively refers to Christological issues.

A further example in this context relates to another theologically relevant term. The word *bashīr* (“bringer of good news,” translated as εὐαγγελιζόμενος) in sura Q 5:19 (al-Mā’ida) is indefinite in the Quran. In the *Coranus Graecus*, however, it is again given a definite article.¹³⁸ The respective verse is as follows:

Sura Q 5:19 (al-Mā’ida)	Vat. gr. 681, fol. 83v, 12–13 (Conf. IV, 17)
<p>ya abla l-kitābi qad jā akum rasūlunā yubayyinu lakum ‘alā fatratin mina l-rusuli an taqūlū mā jā anā min bashīrin wa-lā nadhīrin fa-qad jā akum bashīrun wa-nadhīrun wa-llāhu ‘alā kulli shay’ in qadīrun</p>	<p><...>¹³⁹ τοῦ μὴ λέγειν ὑμᾶς . . . οὐκ ἦλθεν ἡμῖν ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος <...></p>
<p>O people of the Scripture, there has come to you our Messenger to make clear to you after a period of messengers, lest you say, there came not to us any bringer of good news, or one who warns. But there has come to you a bringer of good news and one who warns. And God is over all things competent.</p>	<p><...> so that you will not say, [. . .] there came not to us the bringer of good news <...></p>
<p>jā anā : phon. (imāla) [MQQ 2:200 = 1824; MQ 2:248]</p>	

Once again, a definite article is added to a word of theological-soteriological significance, in this case the predication of God’s messenger. The expression “any bringer of good news” (*min bashīrin*) is translated into Greek as “the bringer of good news” (ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος). The Greek rendering of the Arabic word *bashīr* with εὐαγγελίζομαι is obvious and shows the linguistic sensibility of the translator. However, for a Christian reader of the Quran in Greek, the word εὐαγγελίζομαι/εὐαγγέλιον is connoted with a certain theological understanding: it evokes an association not only to the Christian Holy Scripture, the εὐαγγέλιον, but also to Jesus Christ himself as “the [one and only] bringer of good news” (ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος), who was identified by John the Baptist when he “bore witness about him and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, he . . . comes after me’” (John 1:15).

So far, we have observed a number of differences between the quranic text in Arabic and Greek.

Though they are all arguable from a linguistic standpoint when seen separated one from the other, the sum of these observations within their specific source (i.e., the *Coranus Graecus*), which has specific characteristics (i.e., of a word-by-word translation), and in their respective contexts (i.e., of theologically relevant terms) allows us to postulate the following: these modifications may have a certain significance for the understanding of the quranic text in Greek, and they were not made by lapsus. This could be explained by the fact that certain associations, maybe originating from the cultural-religious background of the translator(s), impacted the interpretation of certain quranic contents in Greek.

An example for the latter suggestion might be sura Q 3:44 (Āl ‘Imrān), which contains information not found in the Quran. It is again related to a theologically relevant person in Christianity, as it deals with the story of the Virgin Mary:¹⁴⁰

138 See Ulbricht, *at-Tarğamab*, 48.

139 Angle brackets < . . . > mean that these quranic passages are not transmitted in the *Coranus Graecus*.

140 See Ulbricht, *at-Tarğamab*, 49–50.

Sura Q 3:44 (Āl Imrān)	Vat. gr. 681, fol. 69v, 7–11 (Conf. II, 26–28)
[...] <i>wa-mā kunta ladayhim</i> <i>idh yulqūna aqlāmahum</i> <i>ayyuhum yakfulu Maryama</i> <i>wa-mā kunta ladayhim</i> <i>idh yakhtaṣimūna</i>	σου μὴ ὄντος ἐκεῖσε, ὅταν ἤπλωσαν αὐτῶν τὰς ἀγκάλας ἄγγελοι, ποιὸς ἐξ αὐτῶν προσδέξεται τὴν Μαρίαν, καὶ οὐκ ἦς ἐκεῖσε. <...>
[...] And you were not with them when they cast [lots with] their pens [as to] who among them should be responsible for Mary, nor were you with them when they disputed.	You were not there when the angels spread out their arms, who among them should receive Mary, and you were not there. <...>
<i>ladayhim</i> : <i>ladayhum, ladayhumū</i> (MQQ 2:30 = 1028; MQ 1:493)	

In this Mariological passage (Q 3:42–47), the quranic wording “they cast their pens” (*idh yulqūna aqlāmahum*) is rendered in Greek as “the angels spread out their arms” (ὅταν ἤπλωσαν αὐτῶν τὰς ἀγκάλας ἄγγελοι). The modification is not understandable in the context of the quranic verse, although the syntax is continued congruently and logically despite this modification. One possibility would be that the word *aqlāmahum* (pens) was translated as ἀγκάλας (arms) for the phonetic proximity between / aqlā- / (*aqlāmahum*) and / aḡkalā- / (ἀγκάλας). Moreover, “the angels” are an addition to the Greek text with no equivalence in the Quran in this particular verse. However, the logical subject implicit in Arabic is not “the angels” but the men who are throwing the pens of the oracle.¹⁴¹ The word ἄγγελοι might have been included because otherwise the subject of ἤπλωσαν would have been unknown. If so, the one who inserted the angels into the Greek text might have referred to Q 3:42, a verse Nicetas quotes as a paraphrase shortly before,¹⁴² where the angels are mentioned as those who are speaking to Mary.¹⁴³

We cannot know who the author of this modification of the quranic text is. However, the person who inserted ἄγγελοι did not insert the right subject according to the quranic context, namely, “they” who “cast their pens.” The quranic story (and therefore “they”) is unknown in the canonical Christian tradition.

141 Khoury, *Der Koran*, 106–7.

142 Ἐφεξῆς δὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους εἰς (69ν) ἀγει πρὸς Μαρίαν εἰρηκότας, ὅτι . . . (And in the following, he [sc. Muḥammad] introduces the angels, saying to Mary that . . .) (Conf. II, 23).

143 *wa-idh qālati l-malā'ikatu yā maryamu . . .* (And when the angels said, “O Mary . . .”) (Q 3:42).

However, we indeed know this story from the Christian apocryphal tradition that has its liturgical manifestation as the feast of Mary’s Presentation in the Temple (21 November).¹⁴⁴ The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew mentions angels in relation to “pens,”¹⁴⁵ to which Q 3:44 refers intertextually.¹⁴⁶ So the combination of both elements, the “pens” and “angels” (as the subjects casting the pens), and the substitution of the quranic subject of ἤπλωσαν/*yulqūna* (i.e., the men) by “the angels” in the Greek text, could be seen as a result of an unconscious association with Christian intertexts that led to the misinterpretation of the quranic text.

We also find textual alterations subconsciously evoking Christian associations among Greek readers in the rendering of other passages. For example, the title of sura Q 3 (Āl Imrān) refers to the quranic figure *Imrān*. However, his name is not transliterated according to the Arabic text, in contrast to many other cases of quranic

144 For the liturgical texts concerning this feast, see B. Koutloumousianos Imbrios, *Μηναῖον τοῦ Νοεμβρίου* (Athens, 1993), 386–418.

145 See C. Marksches and J. Schröter, *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, 7th ed. (Tübingen, 2012), 993. The liturgical texts about Mary in the *Mēnaion* at her religious feasts (in particular 25 March, 15 August, and 31 August), in contrast, do not mention pens (see the respective volumes above, n. 144), while a majority of the apocryphal Mariological literature does. Besides, there seems to be no Syriac rendering of that Quran verse (my thanks for this information from Bert Jacobs, 8 May 2020, personal communication) that might shed light on the Syriac tradition of this passage.

146 See also D. Kiltz, Y. Kouriyhe, and S. Teber, “Lebensgeschichte der Gottesmutter Maria - TUK_0035,” *Corpus Corsicanum*, beta version, 15 August 2023, <https://corpuscoranicum.de/de/verse-navigator/sura/19/verse/28/intertexts/37>.

proper names.¹⁴⁷ The name 'Imrān has rather been interpreted as the biblical figure Abraham, rendering the sura's title as "εἰς τοὺς τοῦ Ἀβραάμ" (to those of Abraham).¹⁴⁸ It is noteworthy that, due to this modification, we now have two suras in the *Coranus Graecus* referring to the same figure (Abraham), because the title of sura 14 is written (in agreement with the Arabic version) as "εἰς [...] τὸν Ἀβραάμ" (To Abraham).¹⁴⁹

Of course, there is always the possibility of attributing this modification to the copyist¹⁵⁰ or to claim that Nicetas himself changed the text he copied from the Greek translation of the Quran. However, with respect to the former, the orthographical difference between Ἀβραάμ and Ἰμβράν in Greek minuscule would be a rather significant change, and more than one error in copying has to be assumed. This seems unlikely.¹⁵¹ As for the latter, we already tried to illustrate that Nicetas did indeed pick out different passages from the Greek translation, but, once he quoted them, he actually did not change the original text as far as we can tell.¹⁵² However, the main argument here again is to evaluate the overall picture of small variances that occur within the *Coranus Graecus*. The alteration from 'Imrān to Abraham again demonstrates a shift from a Muslim conceptualization toward a Christian reading of the Quran. The translator(s) apparently transferred the quranic figure 'Imrān, unknown to the Christian tradition, into his/their own Christian frame by understanding the former name as one known in the Bible.

The last aspect we shall examine is the skill of the translator(s) for finding adequate and equivalent translations, especially of theological terms. I will give two examples that might open new venues for discussions of the cultural-religious background of the translator(s).¹⁵³ First, sura Q 2:23 (al-Baqara) refers to the linguistic characteristics of the revelation. Therein, God in the Quran

asks, "And if you are in doubt about what we [sc. God] have sent down upon our Servant [sc. Muḥammad], then produce a sura the like thereof."¹⁵⁴ The term *sūra* has been translated into Greek as ᾠδή (ode),¹⁵⁵ which at first glance is not such an obvious translation. However, the translation shows in this way a remarkable understanding of the liturgical-performative character of both Muslim and Christian worship practices and very accurately renders the Arabic meaning into Greek, for "ode" is a *terminus technicus* par excellence of Byzantine liturgy, indicating a certain genre of hymn.¹⁵⁶ The ode was ever-present in liturgical life—whether as the nine Biblical Odes¹⁵⁷ or as part of the canon.¹⁵⁸ Odes were loudly recited in a melodic way during religious rites in both the synagogue and the church.¹⁵⁹ That is what the translator must have associated the term *sūra* with while translating it into Greek; the sura—that is, a part of the Muslim liturgical text used for worship (i.e., the Quran)¹⁶⁰—is recited during Muslim prayer in a similarly melodic way (*tajwīd/qirā'a*). That is the reason the translator interpreted the word *sūra* with a term

154 *wa-in kuntum fī raybin mim mā nazzalnā 'alā 'abdinā fa-tū bi-sūratin min mithlibī* (Q 2:23).

155 Conf. I, 184.

156 K. Onasch, *Lexikon Liturgie und Kunst der Ostkirche unter Berücksichtigung der alten Kirche* (Berlin, 1993), s.v. Oden.

157 Like the Magnificat, Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου . . . (My soul doth magnify . . .) or Benedictus, Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεός (Blessed be the Lord . . .) (edition: R. Hanhart, ed., *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, rev. ed. [Stuttgart, 2006], 164–83).

158 Nine odes form a canon (κανὼν), the poetical masterpiece of Byzantine hymnology (Onasch, *Lexikon Liturgie und Kunst*, s.v. Kanon; Kanon, Goldener; and Kanon, Großer). One of the canon's most famous authors is John of Damascus himself with his well-known "Golden Canon" of the Easter Feast (see Onasch, *Lexikon Liturgie und Kunst*, s.v. Kanon, Goldener). The Byzantine odes originally derive from the nine Biblical Odes and their later performance in the Jewish synagogue liturgical practice that found its way into Orthodox rites.

159 The Greek terms are *psallein* and *psalmōdia*, from which arose the English term "psalm."

160 The word *sūra* originally did not necessarily mean the whole of a "chapter" of the Quran, as we understand it today (e.g., sura al-Baqara, sura Āl 'Imrān, etc.), but it referred to any kind of section of the Quran of non-defined length in general (A. Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. J. D. McAuliffe [Cambridge, 2006], 97)—like how an ode is also just a section of a larger text, the canon.

147 See above, n. 87, and Høgel, "Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 71.

148 Vat. gr. 681, fol. 68r, 10–11. Förstel corrects the manuscript to Ἀβραάμ (Conf. II, 2–3) and Mai to Ἀμρὰν (PG 105:724). Both emendations obliterate the essential point of the transcription of the manuscript.

149 Vat. gr. 681, fol. 113v, 4 (Conf. XIII, 2).

150 In Greek minuscule, there are indeed some similarities between mu (μ) and beta (β) as well as mu (μ) and nu (ν).

151 See above, p. 230.

152 See above, pp. 227–29, 231.

153 See Ulbricht, *at-Tarǧamah*, 52.

related to religious chants in Greek.¹⁶¹ This can only mean that he did not merely know the meaning of the technical term within Christian liturgical understanding but that he also was acquainted with the Muslim analogous function of a sura, that is, its liturgical use through its recitation during Muslim prayer.

In addition, the term *ῶδή* in Greek is a highly technical term, the general meaning of which is profane singing;¹⁶² it is used only within a very restricted framework for religious songs.¹⁶³ Using this specific term in a Greek translation of a religious text (like the Quran) implies a Christian background for the translator because in Byzantine-Greek culture, the word *ῶδή* mainly appears in liturgical and hymnological contexts. A general knowledge of religious parlance or the use of Greek as the mother tongue would not be enough to reasonably argue that somebody who was not deeply acquainted with the technical language of Byzantine-Orthodox worship would have used this specific term.

These observations also shed light on another translation of an equally liturgically relevant term: the quranic term *al-Qur'ān* is translated as τὸ ἀνάγνωσμα (the reading) in the verse *shahru ramadāna lladhī unzila fīhi al-Qur'ānu hudan li-l-nāsi* (Q 2:185; cf. Conf. I, 342).¹⁶⁴ The Greek meaning fully reflects the semantics of the Arabic root *q-r-'* of the word *Qur'ān*, both implying reading/recitation.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, it is indeed an obvious and simultaneously sensitive choice to translate the name of the Muslim holy book. It moreover fits into the interlinear character of the translation, which renders the Arabic text not only in

terms of syntax but also semantics.¹⁶⁶ However, this translation is nevertheless noteworthy because of two reasons: First, other (albeit later) polemical works, like the *Abjuration* and the *Elenchus* (the latter written by Bartholomew of Edessa), do not use this term but refer to the Quran as τὸν [...] Κουράν¹⁶⁷ and κουράνιον,¹⁶⁸ respectively. Second, the translator would have had the possibility of using a lexical alternative, such as the synonym ἀνάγνωσις. This term was also used in liturgical contexts;¹⁶⁹ nevertheless, the translator decided to use the term ἀνάγνωσμα. There also might be a reason: analogous to the translation of *sūra/ῶδή*, the term ἀνάγνωσμα bears in its meaning a liturgical-performative dimension, too. This is the technical term used within the Christian liturgy (and not ἀνάγνωσις) that is written in liturgical books over the respective pericope to be read during service, describing the “reading” of the scripture (Lat. *lectio*).¹⁷⁰ So having in mind both translations of *sūra* and *al-Qur'ān*, it indeed seems that the translator(s) consciously chose these options in Greek. This points to a performative understanding of both terms and their respective liturgical use in Islamic rites, giving us some hints as to the cultural-religious background of the translator(s).

Conclusion:

A Christian Background of the Translator(s)

We do not know who commissioned and/or authored the translation, nor do we know what the motivation or historical background was behind this undertaking. Different opinions on the authorship have been expressed,¹⁷¹ though without an overall and systematic

161 It is noteworthy that oral and aural transmission play a highly important role in learning quranic sciences (such as for Byzantine hymnology [ὑμνολογία] and the intonation of the psalms [ψαλμοψοδία]), especially when it comes to the sound pronunciation (*tajwīd*) and recitation (*qirā'a*) of the Quran.

162 LSJ, s.v. ῶδή, and Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. ῶδή, no. 2.

163 See Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. ῶδή, no. 1.

164 “The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for the people” (Q 2:185). For the interpretation of this verse, see also Ulbricht, “Klassifizierung,” 133–35, and Ulbricht “Verwendungsweise,” 500–502.

165 Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, ed. M. M. Shākir and A. M. Shākir (Cairo, 1954), 1:94, quoted in W. A. Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qur'ān,’” *Die Welt des Islams* 23–24 (1984): 361–77, at 364, n. 14 (see also 365), and Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 233–34; cf. also the Latin *legere*, like the German “lesen.”

166 See above, pp. 226–27, and Högel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 68–72.

167 Montet, *Un rituel d'abjuration*, 149, lines 12–13; see also PG 140:128, where it is written as Κουράν.

168 ἐν αὐτοῦ Κουρανίου σου (K.-P. Todt, *Bartholomaios von Edessa: Confutatio Agareni. Kommentierte griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe* [Würzburg, 1988], 6, line 13, and PG 104:1385).

169 For the identical meaning of both terms, see Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. ἀνάγνωσις and ἀνάγνωσμα. See also LSJ, s.v. ἀνάγνωσις and ἀνάγνωσμα. For the liturgical use of ἀνάγνωσις, see especially Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. ἀνάγνωσις, nos. A.2.b., d., e., and B.2.

170 E.g., Πρὸς . . . ἐπιστολῆς Παύλου τὸ ἀνάγνωσμα.

171 Gleit, “Der Mistkäfer und andere Missverständnisse,” 24; Högel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 67, 73; C. Högel, “The Greek

philological-theological analysis of the remaining fragments in the *Coranus Graecus*. Sidney Griffith has proposed, without giving textual evidence, “that the *Qur’ān* translations were supplied by some one of the numerous refugees from Palestine in Constantinople in the ninth century, especially monks from the Holy Land monasteries, who already had experience in Muslim/Christian dialogue.”¹⁷² Indeed, the passages I presented before substantiate Griffith’s assumption of the cultural-religious origin of the Greek translation of the Quran: the fragments, which were modified, all deal with central points of discussion between Islam and Christianity. So we may conclude that these modifications are not made by chance but that they originate in a certain hermeneutical reading of the Quran.

This conclusion is the result of the analysis of selected examples of quranic verses in Greek and Arabic that are related to Christian–Muslim interreligious topics based on the manuscript evidence as preserved in the Vat. gr. 681 (without any editorial interpretations because of possible emendations, corrections, etc.) and on the Arabic text of the Quran (including the different *qirā’āt*). It is obvious and, thus, known that the translator(s) generally rendered the Arabic text accurately into Greek in terms of syntax and semantics.¹⁷³ However, the examples provided above furthermore demonstrate a highly sensitive method of translating the liturgically relevant terms and dogmatically relevant content of the Quran into a genuinely Byzantine-Greek context. Therefore, it does not appear convincing to give this translation a Muslim origin.¹⁷⁴ It is hardly possible that a Muslim would have modified crucial names, expressions, and concepts of Islam into expressions bearing genuine Christian connotations and evoking dogmatical associations as documented in the *Coranus Graecus*. In contrast, a Muslim would have paid special attention to these important points of disagreement with Christianity.

In addition, one would have had to explain the motivation for a Muslim environment to translate its sacred book into Greek language. The Arabic language is directly linked to the quranic text, and it is seen as the holy language of God’s revelation to humankind that had originally been sent down by God διὰ ἀραβικῶν γραμμάτων (through Arabic letters).¹⁷⁵ If, as Høgel states, the origin of the translation had been in “a religious community whether for liturgy, missionary activities, or as help for the non-Arabic believer,”¹⁷⁶ special attention would have been paid to theologically relevant contexts in order not to leave dogmatic ambiguities, particularly in Christological and thus soteriological passages. As for the mentioned possible liturgical use, it remains unclear what kind of Muslim worship practice would use a Greek translation of the Quran, since Islamic prayer and worship (*ṣalāt*, *dhikr*, et al.) are exclusively performed in Arabic language due to their sacred nature in Islam.

Another possibility would be to assume an official origin of the translation, such “as an administrative tool in a Muslim, but (at least partly) Greek-speaking state.”¹⁷⁷ However, it is not clear what need there would be for such a translation within Muslim administration. An argument against the translation’s official origin might be its lack of homogeneity concerning transliterated proper names and the rendering of syntactical constructions; we find a number of different Greek transliterations of Arabic names,¹⁷⁸ and the very same Arabic syntagmata are constructed differently in the Greek version throughout the *Coranus Graecus*.¹⁷⁹ If there was “a need for a precise way of referring to the holy book also in the administrative language,”¹⁸⁰ we might expect that the translation would have been homogenous and coherent in itself regarding transliterations and grammatical constructions. In addition, the use of vulgar and colloquial Byzantine Greek within the translation is remarkable, as there are several expressions and constructions

Qur’an: Scholarship and Evaluations,” suppl., *Orientalia Suecana* 61 (2012): 173–81, at 174; and Versteegh, “Greek Translations of the Qur’ān,” 64–66.

172 S. H. Griffith, “Byzantium and the Christians in the World of Islam: Constantinople and the Church in the Holy Land in the Ninth Century,” *Medieval Encounters* 3,3 (1997): 231–65, at 263.

173 Cf. the general remarks in Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 68–72 (introductory chapter).

174 In contrast to Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 67, 72–74, esp. 67, 73, and Høgel, “Greek Qur’an,” 174.

175 *innā anzalnāhu Qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan* (Q 12:2); cf. Conf. XI, 8–9.

176 Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 72.

177 Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 72 (see also 73); cf. Gleis, “Der Mistkäfer und andere Missverständnisse,” 24.

178 See above, n. 87.

179 See above, n. 86.

180 Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 73.

deriving from non-classical Greek.¹⁸¹ We may object that other kinds of official documents (e.g., papyri) also make use of everyday language. However, the lack of homogeneity and coherence of the whole translation, as well as the use of non-erudite Greek, may point to a milieu other than the official administrations of the Eastern Roman Empire. We indeed find a more classical, reworked version of this quranic translation in the later work of Euthymius Zigabenus (mid-tenth/eleventh century) that is based on Nicetas's *Refutation of the Quran*. Euthymius wrote his *Armor of Doctrines*¹⁸² at the command of Alexius I (ca. 1057–1118, r. from 1081), redacting an official work. He therefore systematically polished the colloquial Greek into classical forms.¹⁸³ Based on the philological characteristics of the *Coranus Graecus*, I am not convinced that the Greek translation of the Quran has official (imperial) origins in the Byzantine administration.

I rather expect it originated in another social milieu; the lack of homogeneity and inconsistency of the translation point to a group of authors rather than a single person.¹⁸⁴ The question is what their motivation was in translating the whole Quran¹⁸⁵ and what group would have the resources and, of course, the time to dedicate themselves to such an endeavor. We have also seen that the translator(s) undoubtedly also had intimate knowledge of Christian rites and their *termini technici* as well as Islamic rituals and everyday worship practices.¹⁸⁶ For example, the term *tayammama* (to prepare for prayer, rub yourself with earth

instead of water) (Q 5:6) is rendered in the *Coranus Graecus* as καθαρίζειν [...] χώματι (to clean with soil) (Conf. IV, 7–8), which is a perfect paraphrase in Greek of the technical term for Muslim worship practice.¹⁸⁷ As Nicetas's paraphrases of the quranic text are based on the actual Greek translation,¹⁸⁸ this means that the translator of this passage must have not only known both languages very well but must have also been acquainted with the practical application and terminology of religious worship in both religions.

Therefore, a Christian environment is the most probable milieu for the origin of the early Greek translation of the Quran. Since there were many monasteries in the Eastern Mediterranean region and it was an area with an active spiritual life in late antiquity, it might be reasonable to suggest a monastic environment as the point of intellectual origin for the translation; maybe a monastic community in the *Oriens Christianus* was working on translating its neighbor's holy scripture. This would not only explain the differences in passages in the Greek text, which are identical in Arabic, but it would also reasonably explain the sensibility for liturgical terms and the knowledge of their *Sitz im Leben* in the respective religion, such as ἀνάγνωσμα (reading) for *al-Qur'ān* and ᾠδή (ode) for *sūra*. Eastern Christians could have easily been acquainted with this knowledge from first-hand experience through a lived religious coexistence with Muslims. In addition, clerics and especially monks who were living in the Islamic world would have had a motive to translate the whole Quran: they wanted to understand the holy book of their new rulers and make its contents understandable to fellow Christians. As addressees of the Greek translation of the Quran, I therefore regard a Christian readership as plausible. We know about the same kind of heresiological interest in Islam since the very beginning of Christian–Muslim relations, such as in the argumentation of Anastasius of Sinai, followed by the sharp treatise of John of Damascus and the sophisticated dialogues of Theodore Abū Qurra. Translating the Quran could have been part of this larger scholarly interest among the monastic clergy in studying “the other.” Besides that, monks were often multilingual, and they had the time, resources, and motivation to undertake such an endeavor.

181 αὐτὸς (Conf. I, 328–30 [cf. Q 2:168]; Conf. XII, 3–4 [cf. Q 13:2–3, 13:12, 13:17]); ἀπὸ (Conf. I, 328–30 [cf. Q 2:168]); ἄσπερον (Conf. I, 342–50 [cf. Q 2:185–87]); μέσα (Conf. II, 66–69 [cf. Q 3:64]); εἰς (Conf. II, 98–100 [cf. Q 3:96–97]; Conf. XX, 23–27 [cf. Q 11:6, 11:61–68]; Conf. XV, 13–14 [cf. Q 16:124]; Conf. XVIII, 46–47 [cf. Q 53:26]; Conf. XVIII, 112–14 [cf. Q 95:1–5]); σκυλὶν (Conf. XVII, 12–19 [cf. Q 18:18, 18:21–22]); and ὀσπίτιν (Conf. XVIII, 33–36 [cf. Q 52:1–6]). See also the study by Trapp, “Koranübersetzung?,” 11–14.

182 See above, n. 24.

183 Trapp, “Koranübersetzung?,” 14; cf. Förstel, *Arethas und Euthymios Zigabenus*, 14.

184 See Høgel, “Early Anonymous Greek Translation,” 72: “Whoever produced the translation (and more than one person may well have been involved in the process), it should be stressed that, despite the mentioned linguistic features that may seem to point to a humble origin, it is actually of high quality.”

185 For evidence that the Quran was translated in its entirety, see Ulbricht, “Nachweis der Existenz.”


186 See above, pp. 239–40.

187 We also find exegetic insertions in quranic verses that regulate religious practices such as fasting (see Conf. I, 342–50 = Q 2:187).

188 See Ulbricht, “Verwendungsweise,” 513–17.

In my opinion, there is no need to think a proselyte made the translation. A Muslim converting to Christianity would have known about the differing concepts in the two scriptures and it is thus difficult to explain why he should change the original meaning of the Quran in Greek.¹⁸⁹ For social reasons, it was more attractive for a Christian to become a Muslim, but a Christian convert to Islam would have also paid special attention to the theological differences. Regardless, the author(s) of the Greek translation of the Quran seem(s) to have read the Quran through a Christian prism. The translation was not necessarily intended as an attack on Islam, but it might rather be seen as the result of a translation process that was influenced by a Christian background. I have documented various philological indications for the argument presented here. Other estimations of the translation's possible origin are, in my opinion, difficult to support with the source material. Of course, I cannot prove unequivocally whether all the modifications within the transmitted text of the *Coranus Graecus* were done on purpose or by unconscious associations of the translator(s) due to his/their

189 In one passage Nicetas mentions a person “who has come over to the Christians” (Conf. I, 318–19). But Nicetas actually only says the following: Ὡς δὲ παρά τινος ἐξ αὐτῶν εἰς Χριστιανοὺς ἐλθόντος ἐμάθομεν, εἰδῶλόν τι λίθινον κάθηται δῆθεν μέσον τοῦ οἴκου· καὶ οἱ τὴν πρόσταξιν τοῦ δαιμονιώδους τούτου πληροῦντες κεκλικότες τοὺς ἀθλίους αὐτῶν ἀγένας καὶ τὴν χεῖρα ὄρθιον πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐκτετακότες τῆ τε ἑτέρα τὸ οὖς αὐτῶν κατέχοντες κυκλοτερῶς εἰλοῦνται, μέχρις ἂν σκοτοδινίᾳ ληφθέντες καταπέσῃσι (As we have learned from one of their people who has come over to the Christians, a stone idol sits in the middle of the house. So the people who fulfill the instructions of this man possessed by the demon bow their miserable necks, stretch one hand out up to the idol, hold with the other their ear, and run in circles until they fall down gripped by giddiness) (Conf. I, 318–23).

 THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION during a Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship (May 2019 to October 2021) of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. I thank the foundation for its generous support as well as the host institution, the Department of Byzantine Philology and Folkloristics at the National

cultural-religious background. What is undisputed, however, is that the translation was not intended for polemics but rather that its author(s) held a sincere interest in and had knowledge of the religious customs, concepts, and worship practice of both Christianity and Islam. All this points to an Eastern Christian milieu of authorship.

The question of the intellectual origin of the translation, however, must be viewed independently from the question of where it was made geographically. The undertaking might have been realized in the capital of Constantinople by a Christian from the Middle East, as Griffith has proposed, although the text itself gives no indication of that.¹⁹⁰ Another question is how the translation finally found its way to Nicetas. Of course, we know about the rich library of Arethas of Caesarea (fl. first half of the tenth century), and it might be worth thinking about intellectual contexts like that in order to trace the provenience of the Greek translation. However, this would require additional research, including a wide-ranging study of the relevant manuscripts. These are aspects which lead the discussion into other directions worthy of study in different contexts. In any case, there are any number of tantalizing avenues for further exploration.

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190 Griffith, “Byzantium and the Christians in the World of Islam,” 263.

and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Faculty of Philology), for its hospitality during my research fellowship. I thank Christian Høgel and Theodora Antonopoulou for their critical remarks on an earlier version of this article as well as the anonymous reviewers.