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The Transmission Chain of the *Coranus Graecus* (Vat. gr. 681)

On the Possible Origins of the Divergences between the Greek Translation of the Qur'an and the Qur'anic Reading Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim

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Abstract: The earliest Greek translation of the Qur'an is preserved only partially, mainly by way of an anti-Islamic polemic by Nicetas of Byzantium (9th/10th century CE) titled *Refutation of the Qur'an*. The text of this so-called *Coranus Graecus* does not, however, wholly conform to the Arabic reading of the Qur'an as transmitted by Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim. Since Nicetas' work survives only in a single manuscript, Vat. gr. 681, these textual departures may have originated at multiple stages in the transmission history of the *Coranus Graecus*.

The present paper aims to provide a systematic account of the textual differences between the Arabic Qur'an and its early Greek translation. It presents several case studies from the *Coranus Graecus* and discusses the possible origins of the divergences found in these instances. Four categories of textual variance are identified, namely modifications arising from: a qur'anic reading or readings diverging from Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim; the translation process as such; simple copying errors of the Greek text; and, finally, Nicetas' tendentious use of the translation. On this basis, I propose a systematic categorization of the textual variants according to several stages of the transmission chain: Arabic base text, Greek translation, copying errors, and the translation's use.

Introduction

The Qur'an describes itself as "being clear" (*mubīn*) and as revealing the divine message in a comprehensible way. The medium of this knowledge transfer from God to humans is, as explicitly stated in the Qur'an itself, the Arabic

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language.¹ According to Muslim tradition, the scripture itself was revealed and transmitted orally to the prophet Muḥammad by means of the angel Gabriel. Only later were God's revelations of the Qur'an written down as a text. Past efforts at reconstructing the history of "the Qur'an as Text"² have primarily consulted Arabic sources. Many of the early non-Arabic sources on the Qur'an, however, provide valuable insights into its textual history and even reception history,³ since every translation reflects an interpretation of its source text.

One of these witnesses is the early Greek translation of the Qur'an which Nicetas of Byzantium (9th/10th century CE) uses in his *Ἀνατροπή τοῦ Κορανίου* (*Anatropē tou Koraniou*), *Refutation of the Qur'an*.⁴ The work is preserved only in the *codex unicus* Vaticanus graecus 681.⁵ Nicetas extensively quotes, paraphrases, and alludes to qur'anic passages,⁶ and his work, though polemical, preserves numerous shorter and longer fragments of the early Greek translation of the Qur'an.⁷ The translation

1 See Q 12:2, "And we sent it down as a lecture in Arabic." In this article, the English renderings of the Qur'an are partially based on the Sahih International translation when translating the Arabic; for rendering the Greek qur'anic fragments, I rely, when available, upon Høgel, "An early anonymous Greek translation of the Qur'an." Otherwise, translations are mine. However, I have modified both translations, when necessary, in order to point out differences between the Arabic and Greek text.

2 An allusion to the title of Stefan Wild's edited volume, *The Qur'an as Text*; see also Neuwirth, "Two Faces of the Qur'an."

3 For example, the case of surah al-Fātiḥah and the question whether it was included in the Greek translation of the Qur'an, or not. See Ulbricht, "A Byzantine Reading of the Qur'an."

4 Manuscript: *codex unicus* Vat. gr. 681, fols. 1r–165v. Editions: A. Mai, *Nova Patrum Bibliotheca*, 4:321–429 (*editio princeps*); PG 105, cols. 669A–806D; Förstel, ed., *Niketas von Byzanz*. For an overview and an introductory bibliography, see Ulbricht, "Der Islam-Diskurs bei Niketas von Byzanz," 1354–55 n13. The authorship, motivation, and circumstances as well as the date and geographic origin of the original translation are unknown, but since Nicetas' *Refutation of the Qur'an* was written in the ninth century, the translation must be older. It seems to be the very first preserved translation of the Muslims' holy book. The *Refutation* is Nicetas' *opus magnum* and was most probably composed by order of the Byzantine emperor Michael III (r. 842–867). Although writers before Nicetas refer to qur'anic contents, such as John of Damascus, Theodor Abū Qurrah, and Theophanes Confessor, Nicetas is the very first Byzantine author to deal with Islam based on the Qur'an as an actual text. See also Ulbricht, "The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation," 221.

5 For a description and dating of this manuscript, see Devreesse, *Codices Vaticani graeci*, 3: 143–44; Rigo, "Niceta Byzantios, la sua opera e il monaco Evodio," 149–50.

6 On the different kinds of *Textübernahmen*, i. e., forms in which the original qur'anic material was embedded in Nicetas' work, see Ulbricht, "Die Klassifizierung in ‚Philologische Kategorien‘."

7 See Ulbricht, "Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung." Nicetas goes through the Qur'an verse by verse, tendentiously interpreting handpicked verses on topics of his interest. Although the qur'anic material preserved is fragmentary, the remnants allow us to partially reconstruct the original translation. The result is a fairly accurate picture of the characteristics of this early Greek translation of the Qur'an and its interpretive approach, which are only indirectly reflected in Nicetas' polemic.

employed by Nicetas dates to approximately the eighth to ninth centuries CE (*terminus ante quem*), a period that is not long after the codification of the Qur'an in the late seventh century and is contemporary with attempts to codify its reading traditions, the most famous being that of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936).⁸ In addition, it seems to represent the very first complete translation of the Qur'an.⁹

The text of this translation had undergone a multi-step transmission chain, and many of the details of which remain unclear: firstly, we do not know which Arabic base text was used; secondly, the qur'anic text underwent a process of interpretation when it was translated into Greek; thirdly, there are various paleographical errors in Vat. gr. 681 that may originate in the copying process of the translation; finally, the translation was used for polemical purposes by Nicetas of Byzantium, wherefore some modifications might owe to his biases.

The original manuscript containing the Greek translation of the Qur'an is now lost. There is no further manuscript evidence for its exact wording, which can only be reconstructed hypothetically on the basis of the qur'anic fragments extracted from Nicetas' work. We differentiate, therefore, between the version of the translation documented in the work of Nicetas of Byzantium,¹⁰ and the hypothetical reconstruction of the original text of the Greek translation of the Qur'an. To methodologically address this difference, I refer to the former as *Coranus Graecus* (CG), and to the latter as "Greek translation of the Qur'an."¹¹

Any conclusions concerning the characteristics and form of the original text of the Greek translation must be drawn carefully, because we only know the Greek version as it is preserved in Nicetas' text after having been subject to a complex transmission chain. Nicetas' work is a polemic against the Qur'an, and his approach to the Qur'an might already be distorting. In addition, his *Refutation of the Qur'an* is the only source that extensively preserves fragments of the Greek translation;¹² this

8 Nasser, *The Second Canonization*, 9.

9 See Ulbricht, "Nachweis der Existenz." As a translation always also reflects a hermeneutical process, the *Coranus Graecus* contains one of the most valuable non-Arabic testimonies of an early understanding of the Qur'an.

10 For an evaluation of Nicetas' anti-Islamic polemic, see Ulbricht, "Der Islam-Diskurs bei Niketas von Byzanz"; idem, "Theologisches (Selbst-)Verständnis."

11 See Ulbricht, "The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation," 222–23 n18.

12 Only the so-called *Abjuration* (a formula of the Orthodox Church to be read by proselytes during the rite of rejection of the Muslim faith in order to become Christian) and some anti-Islamic verses by Theodore the Studite (759–826) preserve independently from Nicetas fragments of the Greek qur'anic translation. Editions of and studies on the *Abjuration*: Montet, "Un rituel d'abjuration" 145–63 (partial edition containing only the anathemas); PG 140: 124–36; and Sylburg, *Saracenica siue Moamethica*, 74–91. A critical edition of the *Abjuration* is still a desideratum; see Rigo, "Ritual of Abjuration"; Freidenreich, "Muslims in Canon Law, 650–1000"; and Eleuteri and Rigo, *Eretici, dis-*

means that we have no choice but to primarily rely on Nicetas' text. Finally, Nicetas' work is documented in a but single manuscript,¹³ so we cannot cross-check the Greek text with other Greek variants. This means that any variants found between the Greek text (as handed down in Vat. gr. 681) and the Arabic text of the Qur'an (as documented in the different readings of the Qur'an) raise the question of which stage of the transmission process such a variant might be attributable to.

Kees Versteegh already addressed this issue in his 1991 publication on the "Greek Translations of the Qur'an in Christian Polemics (9th century A.D.)." Concerning the translation preserved in Nicetas' polemic, he stated:

Where there are differences between the text of the *Qur'an* as we know it and the Greek translation used by Nicetas, these differences may have been caused by insufficient knowledge, biased interpretation, or simple oversight on the part of the translator. But in some cases the discrepancy may be due to the fact that the translator followed a different reading of the text.¹⁴

Versteegh's cautious approach and preliminary categorization of the possible origins of the textual differences did, however, not have an impact on later studies of the fragments of the Greek translation. Differences detected between the Arabic and Greek text of the Qur'an were often homogeneously—and somehow uncritically—labelled "errors."¹⁵ Likewise, comparisons in previous studies have been based only on the so-called standard Cairo version, which merely reflects one qur'anic reading tradition (*qirā'ah*, pl. *qirā'āt*), namely that of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Aṣim. At the time that the Qur'an was translated into Greek, however, the systematization of different readings of the Qur'an had only recently been undertaken, for example, by Ibn Mujāhid in 932.¹⁶ So, there is no reason to base any comparison of the Greek translation with the Arabic text on the qur'anic reading of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Aṣim alone.

sidenti, musulmani ed ebrei a Bisanzio, 53–59. Concerning Theodore's verses, see Rigo, "La sezione sui musulmani dell'opera di Teodoro Studita;" manuscript: Athos, Great Lavra, ms. Q 44 (1854), fols. 149v–151r (see Rigo, "Ritual of Abjuration," 821–24, esp. 823). See also Ulbricht, "The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation," 222–23.

13 See above note 4 above.

14 Versteegh, "Greek Translations of the Qur'an," 62.

15 See, for example, Gleis, "Der Mistkäfer und andere Missverständnisse," 13, and Høgel, "Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 69–70; cf. Ulbricht, "The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation," 230 n98. More measured evaluations of the Greek translation also exist, e.g., Simelidis, "The Byzantine Understanding."

16 See above page 3. See also Al-Imām, *Variant Readings of the Qur'an*, 128–31; Melchert, "The Relation of the Ten Readings to One Another"; and Dutton, "Orality, Literacy and the 'Seven Aḥruf' Ḥadīth." See also Shady H. Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings*; idem, *The Second Canonization*.

The objective of the present article is to further elaborate Versteegh's approach in differentiating the textual differences between the Greek translation of the Qur'an as transmitted in the Vat. gr. 681 and the qur'anic reading Ḥaḥṣ 'an 'Aṣim, aiming to better understand the discrepancies between the *Coranus Graecus* and the Arabic Qur'an. Through several textual examples, I will systematically explore the possible origins of these discrepancies and establish a framework for analyzing the transmission chain of the qur'anic fragments preserved in the Vatican manuscript. This study will thus contribute to a clearer picture of the original textual form of the Greek translation of the Qur'an and the various stages of its textual transmission.

Any difference we may find in the text preserved in the Vat. gr. 681 with respect to the Arabic Qur'an presumably goes back to one of, at least, four steps in the transmission chain. It might originate in: the unknown original Arabic text of the Qur'an that was used for the translation;¹⁷ the interpretation of the Arabic text that was transferred into Greek by the translator(s) and has been fixed in the original Greek translation;¹⁸ possible copyist's errors while copying from the Greek manuscript containing the original translation of the Qur'an to the copy at Nicetas' disposal and/or directly used in his work; the use by Nicetas of Byzantium and his possible polemical appropriation(s) and/or (mis-)understanding(s) of the qur'anic translation,¹⁹ as Nicetas' aim was to reject the Qur'an as holy scripture.²⁰

For each of these possible transmission steps, I will give textual examples taken from the *Refutation of the Qur'an*. Each example will clarify one of the above-mentioned transmission phases and illustrate my proposed systematization. In theory, each of the variants found in the *Coranus Graecus* can be assigned to one of the probable intermediate steps. The systematization of variants is an important precondition to the evaluation of textual differences found in the preserved translation of the early Greek Qur'an.²¹

I will begin by elaborating on (I.) hermeneutical features, which most probably originate in the process of translation. I will then illustrate (II.) cases in which we may state that differences originate in Nicetas' use of the translation for his apologetical-polemical purposes. Next, I will discuss (III.) divergences between the

17 For some preliminary results, see Ulbricht, "Nachweis der Existenz," 545–48.

18 For further details, see Ulbricht, "The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation."

19 For an overall evaluation of Nicetas' use of the qur'anic translation, see Ulbricht, "Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung."

20 At least one more step might be added: the transmission of Nicetas' actual text. However, we do not have any indication that his text was copied, as we possess only a single codex. It is possible that the Vat. gr. 681 is indeed an autograph, because it is dated very close to the date of origin of Nicetas' work, although this cannot be proven. I exclude this last possibility for the purpose of the present article because there is simply not enough evidence regarding whether Nicetas' text has been copied or not.

21 Ulbricht, "Die Klassifizierung in ‚Philologische Kategorien,“ 126–28.

Arabic and Greek text of the Qur'an that are of disputable origin. I will, furthermore, discuss (IV.) some cases of textual modifications which might go back to the original process of translating the Qur'an from Arabic to Greek, before (V.) presenting some probable errors due to the copying process from the Greek translation into the polemic of Nicetas, or another intermediate copy. Finally (VI.), I will briefly indicate some passages in the *Coranus Graecus* that clearly do not stem from the Qur'anic reading Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim.

Categories of Textual Differences Between the Arabic Qur'an and the *Coranus Graecus*

I. Hermeneutical Features Originating in the Translation Process

Some of the divergences found in the Greek Qur'anic text as documented in the *Coranus Graecus* would seem to originate in the process of translation. The translation is very accurate not only in terms of lexicographical and philological rendering, which takes a word-for-word approach, but also with respect to its hermeneutics of Qur'anic content. From a linguistic point of view, each Arabic lexeme consistently corresponds to a respective Greek lexeme.²² Even the syntax of the Arabic sentences is mostly preserved in the Greek version.²³ There is, furthermore, a consistent tendency to translate certain kinds of syntagmas, i. e., certain phrases or expressions within a sentence, with the same structure in Greek. For example, the Arabic construction of *ḥāl* is usually rendered with the *genitivus absolutus*, and the *'an al-maṣḍariyyah* as an infinitive with article.²⁴

With regard to hermeneutics, the translator(s) demonstrated a deep understanding of the meaning of the Qur'an.²⁵ Several passages provide interesting trans-

22 See the bilingual glossary of all literal Qur'anic fragments in Ulbricht, *Graeco-Arabica*.

23 See also Høgel, "An early anonymous Greek translation," 69. Of particular interest is the verbatim translation of certain particles, such as *qad* as γάρ and *'inna* as δέ, and even the transliteration of the exclamation mark *yā* in Q 7:158 (particle to address, roughly: "o!") as ἄε (Conf. VI, 36: ἄε ἄνθρωποι, ἐγὼ ἀπόστολός εἰμι Θεοῦ πρὸς ὑμᾶς πάντας [...]). The abbreviation "Conf." (*confutatio*) refers to a chapter of Nicetas' *Refutation* (in Latin numbers), followed by the line in Förstel's edition (see above note 4).

24 Ulbricht, *Graeco-Arabica*, 13.

25 This leads us to the question of what exegetical literature, apart from philological, the translator(s) had access to, if at any all; see Versteegh, "Greek Translations of the Qur'an," 61–62.

lations of specific Arabic terms. For example, the term *al-furqān* (Q 3:4) is translated as σωτηρία (Conf. II, 6), which is an uncommon way to interpret it; however, this meaning finds support in early Qur'an commentaries, where the term is read as a synonym of *najāh* ("salvation").²⁶ Furthermore, grammatically complicated cases of the *lā al-zā'idah* are understood not as oaths but as the negations.²⁷ It is also worth mentioning that the surah names are included, although these are secondary to the qur'anic text. The title of Q 7 (al-'A'rāf), for example, has been attributed by the translator to the Arabic radical 'r-f ("to know") and rendered with the correspondent Greek root Εἰς τὰ γνωρίσματα (Conf. VI, 2), although the qur'anic term is usually understood as "ridges, heights, elevated places."²⁸ While the conventional understanding is indeed reflected in the qur'anic text itself, divergences of this kind apparently originate in the translation process and are due to specific qur'anic interpretations. The question is how to characterize these alterations: are they due to "misunderstandings" of the original Arabic text, therefore to be classified as "errors"? Or do they reflect a different hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an? Perhaps they convey a very early understanding of the qur'anic text, later obscured by the "mainstream" interpretation found in contemporary works of qur'anic exegesis?

The following passages reflect qur'anic hermeneutics that do not correspond to the mainstream understanding but rather preserve alternative, though less known, meanings of the lexemes. These cases are particularly interesting because the translation dates back to the time when qur'anic philology and exegesis was not yet fully developed. The examples below, taken from the *Coranus Graecus*, illustrate different translation techniques that the translator(s) applied in order to render the Arabic text into its Greek context. I will start with the transl(ite)ration of qur'anic terms, which are used within the enigmatic patterns of the oath-questions in the surahs towards the end of the qur'anic corpus preserved by Nicetas.²⁹ These terms are usually left untranslated when present in the following pattern of qur'anic questions and answers ("teaching question"):

²⁶ See, for example, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4:42–43. See Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, 546; Ahrens "Christliches im Quran," 31–32; Donner, "Quranic *Furqān*"; and Rubin, "The Case of *al-Furqān*." Donner sees an Aramaic influence on *furqān* from the Aramaic *purqānā* on the one hand and a reading from *puqdānā* (Greek ἐντολή) on the other. See also Ulbricht "Authorship of the Early Greek Translation," 221–22.

²⁷ Conf. XVIII, 79–80, translating Q 75:1–2: Οὐκ ὀμνύω εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς ἀναστάσεως καὶ οὐκ ὀμνύω εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν τὴν μεμφομένην. ("I do not swear by the day of the resurrection, and I do not swear by the censuring soul.")

²⁸ Ambros, *Koranic Arabic*, 187, s.v. 'r-f. See also Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, 196.

²⁹ Conf. XVIII, 74–75.92–93.135–36.

Q 101:1–4 Conf. XVIII, 135–136
(Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim) (Vat. gr. 681, fol. 129v, 18 – 130r, 3)

الْقَارِعَةُ⁽¹⁾ Καρέ·
مَا الْقَارِعَةُ⁽²⁾
وَمَا أَتْرَكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ⁽³⁾ καὶ τί οἶδες, τί ἐστι καρέ;
يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ⁽⁴⁾ Ἡ ἡμέρα, ἐν ἣ γίνονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὡς ψώρα
δισεπαρμένη.

⁽¹⁾ The *qāri’ah*. *Kare* (transliterating: *qāri’ah*).

⁽²⁾ What is the *qāri’ah*?

⁽³⁾ And how do you know what the *qāri’ah* is? And how do you know what *kare* is?

⁽⁴⁾ A day when mankind shall become as moths Or the day in which all men become like
scattered. dispersed itch.

In this surah, the only term transliterated is the word *qāri’ah*.³⁰ This is noteworthy in two ways. First, all other words are translated into Greek and their meanings adequately rendered. Secondly, we find the same phenomenon in other surahs translated into Greek. For example, in Q 69 (al-Ḥāqqah), which has the same syntactical form,³¹ the term *ḥāqqah*,³² being part of the “Lehrfrage”³³ (“teaching question”), is not translated into Greek, but only transliterated:

Q 69:1–4 Conf. XVIII, 74–75
(Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim) (Vat. gr. 681, fol. 126v, 3–5)

الْحَاقَّةُ⁽¹⁾ Τῷ ἄκκά·
مَا الْحَاقَّةُ⁽²⁾ Τί ἐστι τὸ ἄκκά;
وَمَا أَتْرَكَ مَا الْحَاقَّةُ⁽³⁾ Καὶ πόθεν οἶδες, τί ἐστιν τὸ ἄκκά;
كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ وَعَادُ بِالْقَارِعَةِ⁽⁴⁾ Καὶ ἐψευδοποίησεν Θαμούθ καὶ Ἄδ εἰς τὴν
ῥαν.

⁽¹⁾ The *ḥāqqah*. The *akka* (transliterating: *ḥāqqah*).

⁽²⁾ What is the *ḥāqqah*? What is the *akka*?

⁽³⁾ And how do you know what the *ḥāqqah* is? And how do you know what the *akka* is?

⁽⁴⁾ Thamūd and ‘Ād belied the *qāri’ah*. And Thamouth and Aad belied the hour.

Words from within the above-mentioned oath-patterns are the only instances in which Arabic words (other than proper nouns) are transliterated rather than trans-

³⁰ For this surah, see Neuwirth, *Frühmekkanische Suren*, 177–84.

³¹ For this surah, see Neuwirth, *Frühmekkanische Suren*, 548–66.

³² Ambros, *Koranic Arabic*, 75, s.v. *h-q-q*: “*al-ḥāqqa(t)* uncl[ear], prob[ably] ‘the thing that is due to happen’.”

³³ Neuwirth, *Frühmekkanische Suren*, 178.

lated. One might possibly conclude that these terms were unknown to the translator(s), and were therefore left transliterated. This assumption could be supported by the fact that these terms are rather obscure in qur'anic exegesis. However, this might be the very key to decoding these passages: in Q 69:4 the word *qārī'ah* is mentioned again, but here it is translated into Greek as τὴν ὥραν, which proves that the translator(s) indeed knew the meaning of the 'question term' *qārī'ah* (Conf. XVIII, 75). The translator(s) apparently left it untranslated on purpose in the context of the oath-questions of surah Q101:1–4, but translated it properly in other contexts when not part of the typical oath-question structure, as in Q 69:4.

This observation also sheds light on the transliteration of *ḥāqqah* and all other transliterated terms in analogous syntactic patterns. Rather than attesting to the translator(s) ignorance of the qur'anic lexicon, the opposite seems to be the case: the translator(s) apparently wanted to render the enigmatic character of the qur'anic passages into Greek when certain terms appeared in the question structures of oaths. This, in consequence, would mean that the translator(s) had a deep understanding of the Qur'an, as evidenced by the ability to differentiate the analogous contexts.

In addition, the translator(s) apparently also knew qur'anic traditions that explain certain passages or topics in the Qur'an. We find several of these passages translated from Arabic but, at the same time, enriched with additional material in the Greek version, apparently for the purpose of illustrating them and making them clearer for the Greek reader. For example, the qur'anic figure Dhū l-Qarnayn is usually equated with Alexander the Great in exegesis, although he is not explicitly identified as such in the Qur'an; however, in the Greek text, he is identified as Alexander by name.³⁴ So, the translator or Nicetas must have been acquainted with the Muslim traditional understanding of this expression.

Interpretations of religious duties mentioned in the Qur'an are also witnessed by the Greek translation. For example, the command to perform ablution before prayer mentioned in Q 5:6 is preserved as a paraphrase. The Arabic text uses in this context the verb *tayammama*, which became a *terminus technicus* in the Islamic tradition, meaning to rub oneself with soil in preparation for prayer, instead of water.³⁵ This rather rare verb is correctly interpreted in the *Coranus Graecus* as καθαρίζειν [...]

34 Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μακεδών (Conf. XVII, 27–28.30) referring to Q 18:83; context Conf. XVII, 27–31. This fragment is not a quotation (verbatim, literal, or free), but a paraphrase of the Greek translation of the Qur'an preserved in Nicetas' text, so this modification might also go back to Nicetas. But Nicetas, in turn, must have had knowledge from somewhere of the Muslim tradition that understands the qur'anic Dhū l-Qarnayn to be Alexander the Great, and it seems possible that the translation already pointed to this understanding.

35 See Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, 490. Cf. Ambros, *Koranic Arabic*, 300, s.v. *y-m-m*: "to turn to s.th., to seek or to choose s.th. ([...] 5/6 a place)."

χώματι (“to clean by soil”).³⁶ As the technical term *tayammama* has no single-word rendering in Greek, the original Greek translation of the Qur’an likely had the paraphrastic expression καθαρίζειν [...] χώματι, too, which then was reused by Nicetas in his paraphrase of this passage. In addition, the paraphrase is syntactically very close to the Arabic text, as in many other cases when Nicetas paraphrases the qur’anic text.³⁷ So, we can attribute the hermeneutical rendering of *tayammama* in Greek to the translator with some certainty. This, in turn, leads us to the conclusion that the translator also possessed knowledge of Muslim worship practices.

II. Polemical-Apologetical Appropriation of the Qur’anic Translation by Nicetas

Some alterations of the Arabic Qur’an in the *Coranus Graecus* share certain contextual patterns that suggest they stem from Nicetas’ tendentious reading of the Qur’an. These modifications can be classified into different categories, such as the combination of verses, exclusion of key words, and interpretation of qur’anic passages. Nicetas does not edit the original text of the Greek translation as such, but uses it selectively. Nicetas’ main intent seems to be to rebut the Qur’an’s claim to divine inspiration and to strengthen his anti-Islamic arguments.

For example, Nicetas makes certain omissions which serve to present the Qur’an in a negative light. On one occasion, he omits the syntagma “for the unbelievers” (*li-l-kāfirīna* in Arabic, Q 4:161), which in all likelihood existed in the Greek translation itself as demonstrated by the syntactical structure in this passage.³⁸ This leads the statement in the Qur’an to appear much crueler, because now not merely “the unbelievers” would be subject to “a heavy punishment,” but everyone. By cutting out this particular syntagma and modifying the Greek original, Nicetas is able to exploit

³⁶ The whole context (Conf. IV, 7–8): Καὶ καθαρίζειν αὐτοὺς εἰς εὐχὴν ἰόντας βούλεται, εἰ μὲν πάρεστιν, ὕδατι, εἰ δὲ οὐ πάρεστιν, χώματι. English translation: “He [scil. Muḥammad] requires that they purify themselves when they go to prayer with water, if it is available, or if it is not available, with soil.” See also Ulbricht, “The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation,” 242.

³⁷ This fact indicates that Nicetas generally uses the qur’anic text itself when he paraphrases passages rather than quoting them. See Ulbricht, “Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung,” 513–17.

³⁸ Omitted in Conf. III, 71; see the whole context (Conf. III, 69–71): Διὰ τὴν ἀδικίαν τῶν Ἰουδαϊσάντων ἐκωλύσαμεν ἐπάνω αὐτῶν, ἅπερ ἐξὸν αὐτοῖς ἦσαν, καὶ ἡτοιμάσαμεν ἐξ αὐτῶν κόλασιν σφοδράν (Q 4:160–61). English translation: “Due to the transgression of the Jews, We have made forbidden to them what was formerly possible for them, and We prepared them a heavy punishment.” *Nota bene*: The manuscript states: ἅπερ ἐξ ὧν αὐτοῖς εἶπαν (Vat. gr. 681, f. 80r, 6). For a full discussion of these cases, see Ulbricht, “Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung,” 491–519; for this paragraph and the following example, see *ibid.*, 497–98.

this phrase for his polemical purpose without introducing any further changes to the translation. We find similar omissions of words and expressions in other passages as well. One may therefore plausibly state that Nicetas is the author of these omissions, since they serve his polemical aims and would have required minimal effort.

Likewise, a tendency can be observed in Nicetas' work to omit small particles such as negations. This is, on the one hand, an easy textual intervention on the Greek qur'anic text Nicetas had at his disposal; on the other, the omissions allow him to distort the meaning of qur'anic verses.³⁹ This kind of alteration largely occurs within a confined range of topics, mostly related to salaciousness, violence, or qur'anic theology in its stricter sense.⁴⁰ The following example illustrates how, through the omission of a whole syntagma, Nicetas gives the qur'anic text an unfavorable nuance.⁴¹

Q 2:230 Conf. I, 362–365 (Ḥafṣ 'an 'Aṣim) (Vat. gr. 681, fol. 66v, 4–10)	
فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تُحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدُ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يَتَرَاجَعَا [إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ] وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ	Ἐάν τις ἀπολύσῃ γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, οὐκέτι ἐξέσται αὐτῷ μετὰ τὸ ἀπολυθῆναι αὐτήν, ἕως ἂν ζευχθῇ ἀνδρὶ ἐτέρῳ. Καὶ ἐὰν ἀπολύσῃ αὐτήν ὁ δεύτερος, οὐκ ἔστι κατάκριμα ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, ἐὰν ἐπιστρέψωσι πρὸς ἀλλήλους· οὗτοι γάρ, [φησιν,] νόμοι Θεοῦ.
If someone divorces <i>her</i> , then she is not allowed for him <i>afterwards</i> until she has married another husband. And if <i>he</i> divorces her then there is no shame on them to turn to each other again [as long as they feel they are able to maintain the limits of God.] [And] these are the limits of God, [which he makes clear for a people of knowledge.]	If someone divorces <i>his wife</i> , she will no longer be allowed for him <i>after he divorced her</i> , until she has married another husband. And if <i>the second</i> divorces her, there is no condemnation on them if they turn to each other again. These are, [he says,] the laws of God.

³⁹ See Ulbricht, "Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung," 499–500.

⁴⁰ For example, the Qur'an's depiction of God, or its claim to universal authority.

⁴¹ Text given in italics type signifies free quotations, while plain type signifies literal quotations.

By eliminating the subordinate clause *ʾin ẓannā ʾan yuqīmā ḥudūda llāhi*,⁴² the translation of this verse is given a salacious coloring. The exclusion of this key phrase gives the impression that no limitations were set at all.⁴³ Remarkable in both examples mentioned in this chapter is that the actual (hypothetical) text of the Greek translation has not been changed. The modifications are, by contrast, made only by omitting single words or passages. In cases of omissions, one may assume that Nicetas is the author of the discrepancies. One may conclude this, on the one hand, because these kinds of modifications are easily made and, on the other, because they fulfil a polemical aim as they reflect a tendentious understanding of the Qurʾan.

III. Modifications of Disputable Origin

The next example, however, is ambiguous, as one cannot determine with certainty to which stage of the transmission chain the modification ought to be attributed:

Q 2:194 Conf. I, 356–357 (Ḥafṣ ʾan ʾĀṣim) (Vat. gr. 681, fol. 66r, 7–8)	
[...] فَمَنْ أَعَدَّيْ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَعِدُّوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا أَعَدَّيْ عَلَيْكُمْ [...] <i>Καὶ ὅστις δὲ μνησικακεῖ ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, ἐχθράνατε ἐπ' αὐτόν, καθὼς ἐχθρανεν ἐπάνω ὑμῶν.</i>	
[...] And who is hostile to you, And who bears a grudge against you, be hostile to him as he is hostile to you. [...] be hostile to him as he is hostile to you.	

This fragment of the *Coranus Graecus* subtly draws a violent picture of Muslims' behavior against Christians. While the Arabic text uses the same verb (*iʿtadā*) three times, the Greek version differs ever so slightly: in the second and third instance the verb is given in a semantically adequate way, rendered with the Greek ἐχθραίνω meaning “to be hostile.”⁴⁴ In the first instance, however, it is rendered as μνησικακέω, which carries the weaker meaning “to bear a grudge.” The syntagma is now pejoratively distorted in Greek by the use of two verbs of different intensity because the precondition that justifies being hostile is lower in Greek than in Arabic: it is sufficient that your enemy just “bears a grudge against you” in order for you “to be hostile” to him. In Arabic, however, the condition and consequence are equal. The notion of this fragment thus becomes more violent in Greek, as it

⁴² “As long as they feel they are able to maintain the limits of God” (Q 2:230).

⁴³ According to Deut 24:1–4, such a sequence of affairs is explicitly prohibited to Israelites. That may give even more reason to distance oneself from the qurʾanic ruling.

⁴⁴ See here and in the following Ulbricht, “al-Tarjamah al-ūlā li-l-Qurʾan,” 46.

presents the Qur'an as encouraging "being hostile" towards those who merely "bear a grudge."

This modification occurs once again within a context of a highly polemical topic, the *jihād* against Christians.⁴⁵ Nicetas would have had a motivation to change the first verb of this qur'anic verse: he would have much to benefit in making Muslims appear more hostile than their "enemies" (scil. the Christians), especially by playing up the tension between the Qur'an and the biblical Sermon on the Mount. Nevertheless, the possibility of a tendentious alteration by Nicetas stands in contrast to his overall use of the qur'anic translation, as he usually quotes the Qur'an very literally, without altering the words of the Greek translation. Yet, the lexicographical discrepancy in this fragment is not typical of the translation, which is generally word-to-word. It is difficult to imagine why a translator would choose two different translations for one verb that in Arabic appears three times closely one after the other. The aim of the translator(s) for a high level of accuracy and exactness is, furthermore, apparent throughout the whole *Coranus Graecus*, and for the most part is achieved. At the end, it remains unclear if this modification is to be attributed to Nicetas or may have already originated in the process of translating the Qur'an. What we can safely exclude is a different qur'anic reading (*qirā'ah*) or qur'anic text (*rasm*), as we do not find any such Arabic variant attested.⁴⁶

The next example, like the previous one, does not allow us to definitively determine who originated the differences between the Greek and Arabic text. In fragment Conf. I, 342–350, for instance, the syntagma ἐν τῇ νηστείᾳ ("in the fast," Q 2:187) is an epexegetic addition in the Greek text.⁴⁷ It clarifies the context without

45 In addition to the different translation of the verb, the qur'anic context of this topic (Q 2:191–194) is highly reduced in Nicetas' polemic (Conf. I, 354–357): only parts of Q 2:191 (beginning) and 194 (middle) are quoted in his *Refutation*. By contrast, the long descriptions in between (from Q 2:191 end until verse 194), which put several conditions for the use of violence, are—once again—omitted by Nicetas. This way, he makes the Qur'an appear more violent.

46 There is no other *qirā'ah* attested for *i'tadā*. See Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 1:266; Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 1:150; Khoury, *Der Koran*, 2:284–85; <https://corpuscoranicum.de/de/verse-navigator/sura/2/verse/194/manuscripts> (last accessed 16/04/2025).

47 Μῆν Ῥαμίδα ἐστίν, ἐν ᾧ κατήχθη ὑμῖν τὸ ἀνάγνωσμα. Νηστεύσατε αὐτόν. Ἐξέσται δὲ ὑμῖν ἡ νύξ τῆς νηστείας εἰς μίξιν τῶν γυναικῶν ὑμῶν· αὐταὶ γὰρ ὑμῶν εἰσι σκεπάσματα καὶ ὑμεῖς αὐταῖς ἐστε σκεπάσματα. Ἐγνώ γὰρ ὁ Θεός, ὅτι παραβουλεύετε ταῖς (65v) ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ νηστείᾳ, καὶ ἕως ὑμῖν γίνεται. Μίχθητε εἰς αὐτάς εἰς παράκλησιν καὶ φάγετε ἐσπέρας καὶ πίετε, ἕως ἂν τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους φαινόμενον ῥάμμα μέλαν διὰ τῆς ἡμέρας φανῇ ἄσπρον. Καὶ πάλιν πληρώσατε τὴν νηστείαν ἕως τῆς ἐσπέρας καὶ <μη> μίχθητε αὐταῖς ὑμῶν συχναζόντων ἐν τῷ προσκυνητηρίῳ· αὕτη ἐστὶν νομοθεσία Θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐγγίσητε αὐτάς. English translation (Høgel, "An Early Anonymous Greek Translation," 78): "The month of Ramaḍān is the one in which the reading was sent down to us. Fast in it! The night of the fast will be (the time) for you to have intercourse with your wives. For they are a covering for you, and you are a covering for them. For God knows that you risk your souls during

a corresponding phrase in the Arabic Qur'an. Another modification is found in the syntagma *fa-tāba 'alaykum wa-'afā 'ankum* ("so in repentance he received you and forgave you," Q 2:187). It is modified in Greek and separated into two parts: the first *fa-tāba 'alaykum* is literally translated as καὶ ἔλεως ὑμῖν γίνεται ("and is gracious to you"); the second *wa-'afā 'ankum* ("and forgave you") is apparently rendered in a paraphrased form as εἰς παράκλησιν ("as consolation"). However, the Arabic expression *wa-'afā 'ankum*, in the Qur'an, appears before μίχθητε εἰς αὐτάς.⁴⁸ By putting εἰς παράκλησιν after μίχθητε εἰς αὐτάς,⁴⁹ the original qur'anic sense is modified in a salacious manner because in the Greek translation εἰς παράκλησιν ("as consolation") no longer refers to the "repentance" (*fa-tāba 'alaykum*), but now refers to the sexual act μίχθητε εἰς αὐτάς. This kind of alteration found in the *Coranus Graecus* again raises the question of authorship. It does not change the text in a strict sense, i. e., the words are not actually altered;⁵⁰ the distortion of the meaning originates in the modified syntax. Thus, it remains unclear who the author of this additional information is, the translator or Nicetas.

IV. Modifications Originating in the Translation Process

Among the divergences between the *Coranus Graecus* and the Arabic Qur'an, those originating in modifications of the qur'anic text itself by the translator(s) are perhaps the most interesting, as they give us a window into the cultural and religious background of the translator(s). One may classify such instances as follows: the use of a term with explicitly Christian connotations; the paraphrase of qur'anic content with Christian-connoted key words in verses that do not contain these words in the Qur'an; direct quotations of the Septuagint for the account of qur'anic passages; and the modification of qur'anic verses in a way that reflects Christian hermeneutics. I will illustrate each of these categories with some examples.⁵¹

the fast, and He is gracious to you. Have intercourse with them according to the command, and eat and drink during the night, till the thread that seems black due to the darkness appears white due to the daylight. And fulfil again the fast until evening. And do not have intercourse with them when you must be gathered in the prayerhouse. This is the command of God, and do not come near them." For a Greek-Arabic synoptical comparison of this fragment with commentary, see Ulbricht, "Die Klassifizierung in ‚Philologische Kategorien‘," 133–35.

⁴⁸ This means, in the Greek text, εἰς παράκλησιν would hypothetically be between καὶ ἔλεως ὑμῖν γίνεται and μίχθητε εἰς αὐτάς.

⁴⁹ "mingle with them," scil. with the wives.

⁵⁰ They are merely paraphrased in Greek, rendering the Arabic text with different words.

⁵¹ For the following, see Ulbricht, *Graeco-Arabica*, 19–21.

In any translation process, it is a perpetual question how to render certain terms in a way that yields the desired connotations in the target language and new socio-cultural context. In some cases, the best choice is obvious. For example, it seems logical to translate qur'anic terms like *dīn*,⁵² *ālāmīn*,⁵³ and *tawbah*⁵⁴ as πίστις (“faith”), αἰών (“age”), and μετάνοια (“repentance”) respectively, since these are concepts shared by both religions. It might be difficult to find equivalents in Greek not bearing Christian connotations. However, certain terms or expressions may result in a different association, or even in a shift in meaning created by the translation.

There are also some cases in the *Coranus Graecus* where one may fairly question whether there were no alternatives to the way a word or expression was translated. For example, the translator identifies the qur'anic figure 'Imrān with Ἀβραάμ,⁵⁵ although this is a different person in the Qur'an. This is noteworthy because proper names of qur'anic figures are usually transliterated in the Greek text. The use of the biblical name Abraham (instead of 'Imrān) carries an obvious Christian association. It even results in the name of this biblical figure being used for two different surahs, as Q 14 (Ibrāhīm) is titled Εἰς μὲν τὸν Ἀβραάμ (“To Abraham”).⁵⁶ Also the qur'anic name of Yūsuf, corresponding to the biblical Joseph, is rendered with the additional adjective σώφρων (“prudent”).⁵⁷ The latter is a common epithet for biblical names in Orthodox liturgical texts. There are similar kinds of exegetical additions in other contexts. For example, the story of the Seven Youths is embellished with such remarks as τῶν ἁγίων ἑπτὰ τῶν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ (“the holy Seven [Youths] of Ephesus”),⁵⁸ which convey information not given in the Qur'an (i. e., their precise number and place of origin). These data are introduced from a Christian tradition. Such modifications cannot be attributed with certainty to either the translator(s) or Nicetas.⁵⁹

52 Q 2:256; Conf. I, 376. See Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, 293–300; see also Goudarzi, “The Qur'an's Cultic Decalogue”; idem, “Unearthing Abraham's Altar.”

53 Q 3:42; Conf. II, 24. See Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, 520–28.

54 Q 9 (al-Tawbah); Conf. VIII. See Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, 160–63.

55 Q 3 (Āl 'Imrān); Conf. II, 2–3. *Nota bene*: Förstel corrects this form in his edition to Ἀμβράμ (see also his *apparatus criticus*). This way, he is ignoring the main point of the translator's choice.

56 Conf. XIII; Q 14 (Ibrāhīm).

57 Q 12 (Yūsuf); Conf. XI, 2–3: Εἰς τὸν Ἰωσήφ, διηγείται δὲ τὰ περὶ τοῦ σώφρονος Ἰωσήφ.

58 Q 18:10; Conf. XVII, 3–4.

59 For the context of this narrative, see Griffith, “The Narratives of ‘the Companions of the Cave’.” There are other cases where they can be attributed to the translator(s) without doubt, e. g., the translations of ὡδή for *sūrah* or ἀνάγνωσμα for *qur'ān*: these *termini technici* may only have been acquainted in a certain cultural-religious and intellectual environment; see Ulbricht, “The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation,” 239–40; idem, “Der Islam-Diskurs bei Niketas von Byzanz,” 1370; and idem, “al-Tarjamah al-ūlā li-l-Qur'ān,” 52.

When paraphrasing qur'anic verses, we often find key words in the Qur'an translation that derives from Christian theology, especially when the subject concerns creation and soteriology. For example, the verb *khalaqnākum* ("we created you")⁶⁰ is translated with the Greek syntagma τὴν ἀρχέγονον [...] ὑπόστασιν ("the primordial essence of existence").⁶¹ This is an obvious recourse to the vocabulary of inner-Christian Trinitarian discussions. It occurs in a passage where the Qur'an is not referring to what is denoted by either the term ἀρχέγονος or ὑπόστασις. Another example is the qur'anic act of creation in Q 2:30 where the expression *'innī jā'ilun fi l-'arḍi khalīfatan* ("I shall place on the earth a successor") is translated as περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου γενέσεως ("about the creation of man").⁶² the qur'anic concept of the human as being a "successor" (*khalīfah*) of God on earth is rendered with an expression frequently used in Patristic literature,⁶³ while simultaneously alluding to the biblical report of Gen 1:27.⁶⁴ In addition, the use of antithetical pairs of words in the Greek text linked to "dead" and "resurrection," is noteworthy, e. g., νεκρῶν ἀναστάσεως ("resurrection of the dead")⁶⁵ or θάνατον – ἀνάστασιν ("death" – "resurrection").⁶⁶ The former fragment (Q 2:258), for example, refers to Abraham as an example of a true believer, while the latter one to the Seven Youths of Ephesus (Q 18:11–12). The qur'anic content may mention the concepts "death" and "resurrection" in both passages; however, they are not the main points to which the Qur'an refers. The use of the Greek terms implies a soteriological interpretation of the respective qur'anic verses, while in the Qur'an these verses are only indirectly dealing with the topic of soteriology.

A special case of Christian appropriation may be found in qur'anic paraphrases within the *Coranus Graecus* that employ literal quotations from the Septuagint. For example, the qur'anic account of the world's creation in Q 16:5–8 is rendered with the formulation of Gen 1:25 καὶ ὅτι ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὰ κτήνη ("God created cattle").⁶⁷ Verse Q 13:3 is given with the words of Gen 1:1 ὅτι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν ὁ Θεὸς ἐποίησεν ("God created heaven and earth").⁶⁸ Whoever translated these pas-

60 Q 7:11.

61 Conf. VI, 7.

62 Conf. I, 202.

63 See the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (<https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/index.php>) under "Search text"/"Proximity".

64 See Ulbricht "Die Klassifizierung in ‚Philologische Kategorien‘," 137–38. Note the alternative interpretation of *khalīfah* as "viceroys" in Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, 260.

65 Conf. I, 379, alluding to Q 2:258. See Ulbricht, "Die Verwendungsweise der griechischen Koranübersetzung," 513–514.

66 Conf. XVII, 4, alluding to Q 18:11–12.

67 Conf. XV, 5–6.

68 Conf. XII, 3–4.

sages into Greek, the author was definitively reading the Qur'an through a Christian prism. Perhaps the translator was even trying to make the Qur'an accessible for a Christian audience. This last possibility is supported by a range of qur'anic verses that are translated into Greek in a Christianizing manner.⁶⁹

V. Copyist's Errors Preserved in Vaticanus graecus 681

Until now, we have had a look at modifications that might have originated in the process of translating or in the use of the translation. In what follows, I will shed light on some differences that might go back to simple lapses while copying from the original Greek translation of the Qur'an to the Vatican manuscript, or perhaps to Nicetas' original text, which would then have been written down in the Vat. gr. 681. The manuscript itself is very carefully written, including the *stixis* (punctuation), which is set quite meticulously; therefore, any deviation within the punctuation patterns⁷⁰ deserves to be pointed out. The following example might give insight to a possible alternative understanding of Q 37:4–5 based on a different use of punctuation marks.

Q 37:1–5 (Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim)	Conf. XVIII, 20–23 (Vat. gr. 681, fol. 123v)
(1) وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا (2) فَالَّذِينَ جَرَتْ زَجْرًا (3) فَالَّتِي لَيْتَ دُجْرًا (4) إِنَّ إِلَهُكُمْ (5) لَوَجْدُ رَبِّ الْسَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَرَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ	Mà tà φολῑ κῆ τῶν φορκῶν, καὶ προσθήματα ῑ προσθημάτων, καὶ ἐντυγχανόμεῑνα μνήμη· Θεὸς γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστίν εἷς ῑ Κύριος τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ ῑ τῶν μέσα αὐτῶν· καὶ Κύριος τῶν ἀνατολῶν ῑ

⁶⁹ See Ulbricht, "The Authorship of the Early Greek Translation," *passim*; idem, "al-Tarjamah al-ūla li-l-Qur'ān," *passim*: for example, it is remarkable that discrepancies within the Greek translation apropos the Arabic Qur'an appear particularly in expressions related to doctrinal questions in Islam and Christianity, e. g., through a Christianization of passages referring to Jesus Christ using phrases such as ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ and ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

⁷⁰ For their general usage in Byzantine texts, see Noret, "L'accentuation Byzantine;" idem, "Notes de ponctuation et d'accentuation byzantines."

(¹) By the rows of rows,	By the rows of the rows,
(²) and the request of requests,	and requests of requests,
(³) by what is read aloud in remembrance.	by what is read aloud in remembrance.
(⁴) For your God	For your God
is one, (⁵) Lord	is one Lord
of the heavens and the earth and what is	of the heavens and the earth and what is
between them, and Lord of the East.	between them, and Lord of the East.

The example is a literal quotation of Q 37 (al-Şāffāt). Text and punctuation are given according to the transcription of the manuscript Vat. gr. 681.⁷¹ We notice that, in the Greek text, there is a punctuation mark at the end of each verse, except in Q 37:4, which has no mark. If the punctuation is taken literally, this results in a different syntax and understanding of Q 37:4–5: while the Arabic affirms that “God is one” and then specifies with the following apposition that this very one God is (also) the “Lord of heavens and the earth,” the Greek text does not reflect this understanding. By omitting the punctuation mark after εἷς, the Arabic predicative noun⁷² *la-wāḥid* becomes in the Greek text the numeral adjective εἷς to the following noun κύριος. Thus, the Greek translation combines the content of both verses (Q 37:4–5).

However, this analysis is based on the omission of a single dot. Whether or not such an omission was intentional is uncertain: it might go back to an error during the copying process, especially since no other qur’anic variation attests to this different reading.⁷³ In addition, there is no indication why the copyist or Nicetas should have changed the qur’anic text.

Another alteration apparently going back to the copying process concerns the transliteration of *al-ḥijr*, once as a simple noun (meaning “intelligence”) and again as a proper noun (the toponym al-Ḥijr).⁷⁴ In Q 15 the word *al-ḥijr* is clearly a toponym—whether we are speaking of *ʿaṣḥāb al-ḥijr* in Q 15:80, whence the surah’s name, or the name of the surah itself (i. e., Sūrat al-Ḥijr).⁷⁵ In Conf. XVIII, 96, *ḥijr* as

71 This is done for the sake of staying very close to the Greek text, without any intermediate interpretation on the part of the editor. Förstel does not render the *stixis* but, rather, standardizes it. In the transcription above, the *mesē teleia* (middle point) is rendered as a comma (according to the modern understanding of a *mesē teleia*), the *anō teleia* (·) is left as such (marking a full stop in modern understanding). The sign “|” means here the end of the line in the manuscript.

72 In Arabic grammar: *ḵabar ʿinna*.

73 See Khaṭīb, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 9:3–4, esp. 4; Makram and ʿUmar, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 5:227; Khoury, *Der Koran*, 11:38.

74 Q 89:5 and Q 15 (al-Ḥijr) respectively.

75 Al-Ḥijr here is the ancient Ḥegrā, and it was known to Greek authors as Ἐγπα (e. g., Ptolemy VI 7, 29; Pliny, NH VI, 132). But the Greek translator(s) did not make, or know of, the connection.

it appears in Q 89:5 is left untranslated and is, instead, transliterated as ὄγερ.⁷⁶ It might be that the transliteration arises from familiarity with the Arabic name Ḥujr as this name is attested in Greek in pre-Islamic times already with multiple spellings.⁷⁷ However, in Conf. XIV, 2, the title of Q 15 (al-Ḥijr) is transliterated as εἰς τὸν νογερ.⁷⁸ The added *nyn* in the latter case seems to be a result of doubling the final *nyn* from the definite article in Greek. As the name obviously points to the qur'anic *ḥijr*, we are apparently dealing with a copyist error.⁷⁹

VI. Readings of the Arabic Qur'anic Text

One final question concerns which Arabic text of the Qur'an was the original that the translator(s) used for the Greek. Concluding this paper, I wish to shed light on this issue by discussing the text form of some passages that do not reflect the qur'anic reading Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ The manuscript does not have a *spiritus* (Vat. gr. 681, fol. 127v, 12). Förstel standardizes as ὄγερ. Full context: Ἄρα ἔστιν ἐν τούτοις ὄρκος τοῖς ὄγερ; (Conf. XVIII, 96; see Q 89:5). See also note 78. There is no *qirā'ah* attested with the reading *ḥujr* (instead of *ḥijr*), which would be closer to the Greek *oger*. See Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 11:417 (no. 9997); Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 8:139; Khoury, *Der Koran*, 12:442. For a possible explanation of the use of *omikron* (in the Greek *oger*) instead of an *iōta* (for the Arabic *ḥijr*), see above next sentence and the following note 77. In addition, it is noteworthy that the Arabic word *ḥijr* ("intelligence," "expertise") has not been translated into Greek but transliterated (in both cases, i. e., Conf. XVIII, 96 and Conf. XIV, 2).

⁷⁷ Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, see index, s.v. "Hujr."

⁷⁸ Also here the manuscript (Vat. gr. 681, fol. 114v, 6) does not have full accentuation as in Förstel's text, which presents: Εἰς τὸν Νόγερ (see also note 76). It seems that the translator(s) and/or copyist(s) deliberately refrained from using full accentuation in both cases, i. e., using only ὄγερ/νογερ instead of ὄγερ (or ὄγερ)/νόγερ. One explanation for this could be that the translator(s)/copyist(s) did not want to meddle in the transliteration of proper nouns (as, for example, with biblical names in the Septuagint).

⁷⁹ It must be noted that throughout the manuscript there are relatively few abnormalities in the use of accentuation. One copyist error concerning accentuation may be found in Vat. gr. 681, fol. 50r, 4–5 (τῇ τοιαύτῃ γραφῇ), corresponding to Förstel's edition: Conf. I, 115: τῇ τοιαύτῃ γραφῇ. The circumflex on the second *ēta* (in lin. 5 in the manuscript) can be explained by the position of τῇ at the beginning of the line as a *Verschreibung*. The copyist probably assumed that it was the article due to the line break. Other examples of copyist's errors may include the use of ἄρα ("consequently"/"therefore;" Conf. III, 19 = Q 4:88) instead of the question particle ἄρα. This deviation can be explained as a simple mistake, especially since the two words are phonetically identical. However, it is important to stress that in the latter case (i. e., Conf. III, 19 = Q 4:88) the qur'anic question is changed here into a declarative sentence in the translation.

⁸⁰ For the following, see also Ulbricht, "Nachweis der Existenz," 545–48.

Versteegh already pointed to some non-canonical readings that are documented in the Greek translation of the Qur'an.⁸¹ Other passages confirm that the Arabic original from which the translation was made does not agree with Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim.⁸² For example, the translation of Q 18:86, which reads θερμόν ("hot"), does not render the Arabic *ḥami'ah* ("muddy") of the reading Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim but, rather, the *ḥāmiyah* ("hot"), which is attested in other readings.⁸³ Another alternative reading of the Qur'an is attested in Q 18:18 (Conf. XVII, 12–15). Here, the Arabic *nuqallibuhum* is in the first person plural⁸⁴ while in Greek, ἀναστρέφεις αὐτούς⁸⁵ is in the second person singular. A number of readings instead of *wa-nuqallibuhum* are recorded: in addition to variants in the first person plural (*wa-naqlibuhum*) as well as the third person singular (*wa-yuqallibuhum*, *wa-yaqlibuhum*), we also find a series of readings with the second person singular (*wa-taqlibuhum*, *wa-taqallubahum*, *wa-taqallubuhum*, *wa-tuqlibuhum*).⁸⁶ Another example is the conjunction 'aw ("or") in Q 77:6. It corresponds to the Greek καί ("and"), which indeed has a parallel in a qur'anic reading.⁸⁷ One may also point to the use of the expression διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος.⁸⁸ It translates the Arabic expression *bi-rūhi l-quḍusi*⁸⁹ in Q 2:87. It is constructed in Arabic with the noun "holiness" as an *īḍāfah* construction.⁹⁰

⁸¹ Versteegh, "Greek Translations," 62–63.

⁸² Conf. XVI, 9–10, translating Q 17:13: Καὶ ἐκβαίνει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἀναστάσεως γραφὴ ὑπαντῶσα αὐτῷ αὐτῇ· for the Arabic *wa-nukhriju lahū yawma l-qiyāma kitāban* ("And on the day of resurrection a writing meets him, encountering in such words: 'Read your writing'"); see Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 6:26–28; Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 3:311–12 (no. 4496); Khoury, *Der Koran*, 9:126–27. See also Versteegh, "Greek Translations," 62–63.

⁸³ Conf. XVII, 29 (Q 18:86). See Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 6:290–91; Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 4:9–10 (no. 4880); Khoury, *Der Koran*, 9:253. See also Ulbricht, "Nachweis der Existenz," 548.

⁸⁴ Q 18:18: "we turn them around."

⁸⁵ Conf. XVII, 13: "you turn them over."

⁸⁶ Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 6:169–71; Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 3:353–54 (no. 4697); Khoury, *Der Koran*, 9:208. Versteegh and Høgel were not quite sure about this difference: "In the same way [i. e., that it might originate in another meaning] one is tempted to explain the translation of Q. 18/18 *wa-nuqallibuhum dāt al-yamīn* with ἀναστρέφεις αὐτούς ἐπὶ δεξιόν (765D) through a variant reading *wa-tuqallibuhum* which, however, as far as we know, is not attested in the exegetical literature" (Versteegh, "Greek Translations," 63); "The second person singular in ἀναστρέφεις ('you turn') is hard to explain in view of the first person plural of *nuqallinu-hum* [sic!]" (Høgel, "An early anonymous Greek translation," 98 n62). Høgel's transcription is wrong: it should be *nuqallibu-hum*. See also Ulbricht, "Nachweis der Existenz," 547–48.

⁸⁷ Conf. XVIII, 83. See Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 11:237; Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 8:34 (no. 9727); Khoury, *Der Koran*, 12:322.

⁸⁸ Conf. I, 221: "by the holy Spirit."

⁸⁹ Literally "by the spirit of holiness."

⁹⁰ 'Genitive construction.'

The Greek text, however, renders the expression with an adjective as an attributive construction. The choice of the adjective ἅγιος seems obvious in this context, due to the fact that the expression in Greek is more common, especially in the liturgical realm. The literal Greek would be τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἁγιότητος. Yet, indeed, there is also a qur'anic reading with *rūḥi l-quddūsi* attested,⁹¹ which corresponds exactly to the Greek translation. But in this case again, it remains questionable whether the translation goes back to a qur'anic reading other than Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim or whether it has been translated this way because it is using the usual Greek form of this expression.

Conclusion

In the present paper, I analyzed various passages of the Greek translation of the Qur'an, which is mainly preserved in the manuscript Vat. gr. 681, a qur'anic witness known as *Coranus Graecus*. They display various kinds of divergences in the Greek with respect to the Arabic text according to the qur'anic reading Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim. These case studies revealed a complex transmission history of the *Coranus Graecus*.

I have demonstrated the steps in the transmission chain at which the various kinds of divergences most likely originated. A modification may have originated in the translation process as such; in Nicetas' use of the translation; in a lapse while copying from the original Greek Qur'an to Nicetas' polemic; or even in a different qur'anic reading from Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim. Systematizing these differences allows us to better differentiate and understand the textual discrepancies found in the preserved version of the Greek translation of the Qur'an.

We have seen that the translator(s) had a deep understanding of the qur'anic text. This became clear from a number of choices regarding the translation of qur'anic concepts and words into adequate Greek. Nicetas, however, who used this translation for his anti-Islamic polemic, worked selectively with the qur'anic text available to him. Hence, some differences found with respect to the Arabic Qur'an may be attributed to him as author. At the same time, passages of the *Coranus Graecus* contain Christian interpretations of qur'anic verses, although the origins of these alterations are not always obvious. These modifications are evident in the translation's use of vocabulary, its habit of utilizing Christian key words, and allusions to Patristic texts and citations of the Septuagint. Another aspect to consider is copyist errors, which one may find in the manuscript of Nicetas' work itself. Examples were given in which we may suppose a scribe's lapse rather than a purposeful

⁹¹ *al-quḍusi, al-quḍsi, al-quddūsi*. See Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 1:148; Makram and 'Umar, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 1:85 (no. 281).

distortion of the text. Finally, I have drawn attention to the Arabic text of the Qur'an by illustrating that the qur'anic text of the Arabic original was different from the wide-spread qur'anic reading Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim.

Using this methodological framework, research can now differentiate between the various textual modifications found in the *Coranus Graecus*. We would do well to avoid, for example, ascribing discrepancies to the original Greek translation of the Qur'an when they might originate in a different step in the transmission chain. For a proper evaluation of this early Greek witness of the qur'anic text, it is important to distinguish between the different steps of its textual history. Honoring these distinctions allows us to adopt a more cautious evaluation of the textual evidence as codified in the *Coranus Graecus*, the author's (or authors') knowledge of Islam, the translation methods applied, and the motives behind the effort to translate the entire Qur'an into Greek.

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