ТЕКСТЫ АРАБО-МУСУЛЬМАНСКОЙ ФИЛОСОФИИ В ПРИЗМЕ ВОПРОСОВ ПЕРЕВОДА И ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ

THE SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF QUR'ĀNIC TERMINOLOGY AND ITS TRANSLATION

Grigore Grigore

Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures
University of Bucharest
Romania, Bucharest, Sector 5, 36-46 Mihail Kogalniceanu Blvd, 050107

This study is carried on a special aspect of the translation of the Qur'ān, which starts from Eugen Nida's study on the same type of practical and theoretical aspects in translating the Bible. The vocabulary of the Qur'ān, like the vocabulary of any other sacred book, can usually be divided into religious vocabulary, which carries the very notions contouring the respective religious system, and general vocabulary. Both religious and general vocabulary are subject to an evolution of meaning, the first category as a result of the institutionalization of religion, the second as a result of a normal, expected transformation, accomplished over time, that occurs in any language.

Key words: Qur'ānic Terminology, translation, religious vocabulary, *šarī'a*, *ḫalīfa, al-madīna,* interpretation, semantic analysis of Qur'ānic language.

Moreover, we must add that part of the aspects analyzed in this study, have been generally approached in my work: "Problematica traducerii Coranului în limba română" (*The Problems of Translating the Qur'ān in Romanian*) [5].

The vocabulary of the Qur'ān, like the vocabulary of any other sacred book, can usually be divided into religious vocabulary, which carries the very notions contouring the respective religious system, and general vocabulary. Both religious and general vocabulary are subject to an evolution of meaning, the first category as a result of the institutionalization of religion, the second as a result of a normal, expected transformation, accomplished over time, that occurs in any language.

Therefore, while speaking of the religious vocabulary in the Qur'ān and its translation, it is necessary to distinguish between primary religious vocabulary and the secondary one. "By primary religious vocabulary we mean that vocabulary which is typical of the original documents, which form more or less the historical base for primary religious experience. Secondary religious vocabulary is that type of vocabulary which grows out of the institutional development of the religion" [14. P. 110—111].

Primary religious vocabulary is figurate, offering immediate reality new dimensions through which they try to explain the ultimate reality of events, cosmological and supernatural values. For this reason, this type of vocabulary poses particularly difficult translation problems, for it is the one weaving that mythic atmosphere specific

to sacred writings. We here refer to myth in terms of its meaning of intuitive expression, as opposed to the systematic philosophical expression which acts in secondary religious texts derived from primary text.

The secondary religious vocabulary, derived from the primary one, tends to be explanatory, apologetic, technical and moreover demystifying. This very demystification of the religious vocabulary imposes the return to basic texts and the reconsideration of each and every term. As we very well know, the Bible has been translated in hundreds of languages and a secondary vocabulary sprung up, following a philosophical model; every time they analyze a biblical concept in one of these languages, they start from the meaning and the metaphorical connotations of the original word in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek.

That is why, if a translator replaces the sense of a term in the primary religious vocabulary with the sense of the term derived from it, much more familiar and widespread, this leads to a more technical, demystified text and, ultimately, that ineffable, indirectly suggested part disappears.

In order to see the effects of the substitution of a type of vocabulary with another one in the translation of the Qur'ān, we dwell first of all on translation rendering of the Qur'ānic word: *šarī'a*.

The primary sense of the word *šarī'a,* which occurs once in the Qur'ān, at XLV, 18, designates "way", "road", "path" [15. P. 76]. But it is not just a way; it is the one leading to a spring. Thus, only by following it, a traveler's life can be saved, while all the other ones, that are deceptive, would have led to his perdition. The metaphor of the saving path will designate "God's path", *šarī'atu llāh*, the only one to be followed in order to save one's soul. Departing from this sense, early enough, the Islamic religious institutions established the meaning of this phrase as "God's law", "sacred law", etc. Régis Blachère says that "*šarī'a* est 'voie'. Sens confirmé dans les commentaires. Mais il est évident qu'on est tout près déjà du sens de 'loi' qui sera celui de ce nom plus tard" [2. 1999: 530].

Šarī'a represents the starting point for a great number of metaphors like: *rašada* — "to follow the right path", "to be well guided" with its derivates: *rašīd* — "the one well guided", *muršid* — "guide"*, 'iršād* — *"*guidance", etc., or the derivatives of another root, *hadā,* somewhat synonymous to *rašada,* that is *hudā* — "the right way", "guidance"; *mahdi(n)* — *the one guided (by God).* Moreover, in order to express the deviance from the right path, the Qur'ān uses a serie of words like: *Dalāl* — "straying", *taDlīl* — "leading astray", *murūq* and *māriq* "straying and the person straying" respectively; the secondary meaning is "apostasy", "renegade", etc. Making the word *šarī'a* an equivalent of "law" (divine, sacred) will deprive the Qur'ān text of one of its metaphoric supports by introducing another meaning, different from the original one, and will lead to an absurdity from a dogmatic point of view:

> *ṯumma ǧa'alnā-ka 'alā šarī'at^{in} min al-'amri*
> (Al-Qur'ān, XLV, 18)
> Apoi te vom aşeza deasupra unei legi cu privire la afacerea (credinţei).
> [8. 1912: 437]
> */And now we have put you over a law of (our) commandment/*

Some other translations center themselves on the primary meaning of *šarī'a,* with its entire metaphoric load:

> And now we have set thee on a clear road of (our) commandment
> [16. P. 661]
> Now We have set you [Muhammad] on a clear religious path, so follow it.
> [1. 2005: 325]
> Nous t'avons mis à la direction de l'ordre.
> [3. 1990: 1035]

In a Turkish translation, *šarī'a* is rendered by *yol* (road), but is replaced by *şariat* (low) in the next phrase:

> Sonra seni bir yol üzere me'mur kıldık. Onun için sen o şeriata uy!
> [4. 1981: 501]

The cognate *šir'a* also used once, at V, 48, in parallel to its synonymous *minhāğ* meaning "way" or "path", it is rendered usually by its secondary meaning, "law":

> *likullⁱⁿ ğa'alnā minkum šir'at^{an} wa minhāğ^{an}*
> (Al-Qur'ān, V, 48)
> For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way.
> [16. P. 145]
> We have assigned a law and a path to each of you.
> [1. 2005: 72]

Another example of the development of primary religious vocabulary occurred in connection with the term *ḫalīfa* — "caliph". Its secondary meaning is much more famous than its primary meaning and this one will surface in many of the translations we analyze.

The *ḫalīfa*, derived from the root *ḫalafa*, is word literally meaning "one who replaces someone else who left or died" (English: caliph), "to come after", "to leave heirs" etc. The word *ḫalīfa*, as it appears in the Qur'ān, acquires many other meanings as: "assistent", "succesor", and "heir" in an ambiguity significant to its eventual evolution. *Ḫalīfatu-llāhi,* "God's deputy, representative on Earth" — or *Vicarus Dei,* the way Ludovico Marraci translated it — has been understood by the Muslim leaders as the divine right to the throne, investing with power, with authority coming directly from God.

The institution of caliphate was born on the day after the death of the Prophet when the new head of the community, Abu-Bakr, became in 632 *ḫalīfatu-rasūli-llāhi.* With him, *ḫalīfa* came to mean heir of the prophet, or the keeper of the moral and material heritage left by the prophet, in his double quality of founder of the religion and artisan of the Islamic community and politics, and much less his spiritual quality of prophet and herald of God's Word.

In the context of Islam, however, the word acquires a narrower meaning. The Muslim *ḫalīfa* is the successor (in a line of successors) to Prophet Muhammad's position as the political, military, and administrative leader of the Muslims. The prophetic role of Muhammad is strictly not included in this definition, as the Qur'ān (XXXIII, 40: *ḫātamu l-nabiyyīn* "the Seal of the Prophets") and *Ḥadīṯ* clearly state that Muhammad

was the last of the prophets. *Hilāfa* is a related Arabic word which, in the context of Islam, is used to denote the government of the Muslim state, of which the *halīfa* is the head. The institutionalization of the caliph function is also due, as it seems, to a tradition left by the prophet Muhammad: "After me the caliphs will come, after the caliphs the emirs, after the emirs the kings, and after the kings the tyrants..." [7. V, 155].

With this secondary meaning, of leader of the Islamic community, the word *halīfa* entered English and many other languages as "caliph".

By rendering *halīfa* by "caliph" in the translation of the Qur'ān, an alien, even aberrant meaning in the text is introduced, as this title is given to Judaic kings, as in the next example:

> *yā dāwūd 'innā ǧa'alnā-ka halīfat^{an} fī l-'arDi*
> (Al-Qur'an, XXXVIII, 26)
> O David, Noi te-am fãcut Chalif pe pãmânt...
> [8. 1912: 402]
> **/Oh David, we made you caliph on Earth.../**
> O, Dawud, nous t'avons mis pour calife de la terre.
> [3. 1990: 501]

Blachère rendered this word by "vicaire", but he explains in a footnote: "*halīfa* est très imparfaitement rendu par vicaire. La racine arabe exprime la notion de: succéder à quelqu'un qui n'occupe plus la place. Des l'époque de Mahomet, il est vraisemblable que le nom *halīfa*, à la suite d'un glissement de sens, signifiait lieutenant, vicaire, représentant" [2. 1999: 484].

In this situation the only acceptable equivalent, in my opinion, is based on the primary meaning of the word: "deputy", "successor", as in the next example:

> O David! nous t'avons établi notre lieutenant sur la terre.
> [9. 1921: 93]
> The same term is referring to Adam also (II, 30)

A particularly quite eloquent development in the history of Islam took place with respect to the term *al-madīna* "town", "city", "fortress", referring to a very known name of place in the Islamic world.

Madīna means nowadays just "town", nevertheless it has a more specialized and restrictive meaning in the Qur'ān. This word is derived from the root signifying "law", "trial", "reckoning" and these meanings occur in the Qur'ān [13. 56].

Thus *madīna* — a place name derived from the root *dyn* "low" — was the area supervised by a legislator, *dayyān*. Some of the occurrences of the word *madīna* in the Qur'ān are to be found in the verses on the prophets prior to Muhammad, the meaning here being of "the place where God's law is in force" (IX, 101; 120; LXIII, 8), while four occurrences refer to Yat̲rīb oasis where the prophet and his followers establish the first Islamic dwelling, after being driven away from Mecca. Thus, *madīnatu al-nabī* means "the place where the law brought by the prophet is in force" [13. 57]. Even during prophet Muhammad's lifetime, *al-madīna* replaces the old name of the oasis, Yat̲rīb. In the same Qur'ānic sense, *madīna* will later name, par excellence, Islamic first rank cities: Cairo, Isfahan, Samarkand, Bukhara, while the Abbasid caliphs will make Bagh-

dad known as *madīnatu al-salām* — "the place where peace reigns". Nowadays, even in some Arabic dialects, *madīna* means the center of the town where state institutions are gathered, the old town with its traditions etc.

Moreover the word *madīna* is used in the first centuries of the Islamic state to name the administrative and religious centers of provinces. Only in the Middle Ages was the word extended to non-Muslim cities, thus acquiring the general meaning of town.

Because this secondary meaning prevails now in Arabic, translators of the Qur'ān will choose it, ignoring its primary meaning. Consequently the receptor of such a translation will not even begin to imagine why Ya<u>t</u>rīb oasis, which did not even have the qualities of a fortress by the standards of those times, is named *Al-Madīna, La Città, La Ville, The Town, Oraşul.*

> *wa min ḥawli-kum min al-'a'rāb munāfiqūna wa min 'ahli l-madīna.*
> (Al-Qur'ān, IX: 101)

The sense of town appears in the Pickthall translation where the expression "ahl al-madina" is rendered by townspeople of Al-Madinah, even the opposition indicated by this Verse is between the Idolater Arabs and the Arabs who received the Law:

> And among the Bedouins around you, some are hypocrites, and so are some among the people of *al-Madīna* who persist in hypocrisy...
> [10. 226]
> And among those around you of the wandering Arabs there are hypocrites, and among the townspeople of *al-Madīnah* (there are some who) persist in hypocrisy...
> [16. P. 258]

Keeping the term *al-Madīna* in the translations, with the sense of the toponime only, without any explanation, this annihilates the opposition between those which received the law and the other which did not receive it yet (being the out "the place of law" — *al-madīna*):

> Parmi ceux de Bédouins qui sont autour de vous et parmi les habitants de Médine, il est des hypocrites qui sont diaboliques en l'"hypocrisie".
> [2. 1999: 226]
> Parmi ceux qui vous entourent, il est des A'rab embusqués, comme le clan de Médine, obstinée aux embuscades.
> [3. 1990: 393]

Examples of such words with altered meaning are extremely numerous, setting traps for the translator who has to turn back in time to the meaning the words had in prophet Muhammad's time and to clear away the thicket of meanings — denoting and connoting — eventually built up all around them.

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OF QUR'ĀNIC TERMINOLOGY AND ITS TRANSLATION

Джордж Григоре

Факультет иностранных языков и литературы
Бухарестский университет
Румыния, Бухарест, сектор 5, 36-46 Михаил Когэлничану Bl, 050107

Данное исследование посвящено специальному аспекту перевода Корана, в основе своей восходящей к аналогичному исследованию Юджен Нида практических и теоретических аспектов перевода Библии. Лексический словарь Корана, как и лексика любого другого священного текста, может быть классифицирован на религиозную лексику (которая включает смыслонесущие понятия соответствующей религиозной системы) и общий словарь. И религиозная, и общая лексика в процессе исторического развития могут изменять значения, что связано как с институализацией религии, так и с общими изменениями, характерными для любого языка.

Ключевые слова: терминология Корана, перевод религиозной лексики, Халифа, аль-Мадина, интерпретации семантического анализа языка Корана.