

John of Segovia and Religious Language / Interreligious Communication*

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John of Segovia was a diligent and careful reader and an eloquent and exhaustive speaker. Yet, he was not safe from the abyss of language. This can best be seen by having a look at an example that shows John of Segovia's way of thinking about language and more exactly his thinking within and with language. As John of Segovia liked quoting the Qur'ān in order to interpret it thoroughly, the example is taken from one of his countless quotations of the Qur'ān together with his own interpretation of it in his enormous treatise *De gladio divini spiritus*, written in about 1453 after the fall of Constantinople.

The devilish men listened and said: We believe that the Alcoran, which is wonderful to listen to, teaches the right way and we do not impose God the sublime to have a winged or a son as participant. Therefore, we have the opinion that neither human beings nor devils will impose God anything false.

In these words John of Segovia obviously attacked the Christians saying, that even devilish people who believe in the Alcoran do not want to confess three persons in God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, whom he denotes figuratively under the name "winged."¹

Some things sound quite strange and not only for us 500 years after John of Segovia. Does the Qur'ān really mention the Holy Spirit, who appears according to the New Testament as a dove, indeed a winged bird? Does the Qur'ān consider devilish or diabolic people to be true Muslims believing in the one God? John of Segovia himself has doubts and continues his reflections with the following restriction: "if it sounds like that in Arabic, as the Latin translation says"². It

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Editions and manuscripts frequently referred to:

John of Segovia: *De gladio divini spiritus*, ed. in: Johannes von Segovia, *De gladio divini spiritus in corda mittendo Sarracenorum. Edition und deutsche Übersetzung mit Einleitung und Erläuterungen* von Ulli Roth (= Corpus Islamochristianum. Series latina 7), Vol. 2, Wiesbaden 2012;

Johannes von Segovia: *Epistula ad Nicolaum de Cusa*, ed. in: Davide Scotto, "Via pacis et doctrine". *Le Epistole sull' Islam di Juan de Segovia*, PhD Firenze 2012, 2-81 (partly edited in: Darío Cabanelas Rodríguez, *Juan de Segovia y el problema islámico*, Madrid 1952, 303-10);

John of Segovia: *Praefatio in translationem*, ed. in: José Martínez Gázquez, "El prólogo de Juan de Segovia al Corán (Qur'ān) trilingüe (1456)", in: *Mittelaltinisches Jahrbuch* 38 (2003), 389-410;

John of Segovia: *Replica magne continencie ad Iohannem Cabilonensem episcopum*, ed. in: Scotto, "Via pacis et doctrine", loc. cit., 82-281 (partly ed. in: Rodríguez, *Juan de Segovia*, loc. cit., 331-5);

V: Rom, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vaticanus latinus, 2923.

1 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 2,30-34. 37-40: "[...] homines diabolici auscultando dicebant: Nos Alchoran mirabilem auditu, viam rectam edocentem credimus nec alitem deo sublimi nec filium [...] participem ponimus [...]. Nos igitur opinati sumus nec homines nec diabolos quodpiam deo falsum imposituros. [Sura 72,1-5 (Bibliander 178,8-13)]: [...] In hiis quidem verbis manifeste invehit contra Christianos dicens, quod homines etiam diabolici Alchoran credentes confiteri nolunt tres personas in deo patrem, filium et spiritum sanctum, quem figurate designat sub nomine 'alitis' [...]" Cf. *Epistula ad Nicolaum Cusanum* (V 7v; Scotto 10). The Latin translation of the Qur'ān of Robert of Ketton is quoted according to Theodor Bibliander (ed.): *Machumetis Saracenorump principis, eiusque successorum vitae, doctrina, ac ipse Alcoran*, Basel 2nd edition, 1550. For a general survey see my introduction to John of Segovia: *De gladio divini spiritus*, XIX-XCIX.

2 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 2,45-48: "Quae sola denominatio [sc. homines diabolicos], si ita sonat in Arabico, quomodo Latina interpretatio inquit, testimonium profecto sufficiens est ad cognoscendum, quales sunt et fiunt li-

would be a self-contradiction, if the Qurʾān really called the Muslims “diabolic men”. This logical problem makes John of Segovia hesitate and doubt the translation of the Qurʾān, even before he had ever seen or read another translation or the original. Yet he is sure that the same sura mentions the Holy Spirit as a winged bird – which one will not read in the Arabic Qurʾān. Why did not he question this idea, too? Is it because there was no chance for him to find out, that this is nothing but a scribal mistake? Instead of *aliquem* “somebody” a scribe had written *alitem* “winged.” John of Segovia could also find this variant in the manuscript of the Qurʾānic translation which John of Ragusa had brought from Constantinople and which John of Segovia consulted and thought to have been correctly transcribed. Or was it because the meaning of “winged” fitted perfectly into the context which John of Segovia as an erudite theologian expected to find? One year after this text he recalled his personal experience. The Muslim he had talked with had questioned the Trinitarian belief of the Christians, obviously pointing to the pictures of God with three faces. Islam rejects the Trinitarian concept of God, and the sura mentions the son explicitly and therefore quite consequently the Holy Spirit, too. In this statement there is no logical or theological problem for John of Segovia as in the expression “diabolic men” for Muslims.

These few lines of John of Segovia’s treatise lead us to the three main questions that we have to consider, if we want to understand John of Segovia’s way of thinking with and about religious language.

1. First of all, what did he know about the Islam and the Qurʾān and what was the epistemological interest which made him read the Qurʾān?

Talking about the historical and biographical background leads us to a second question:

2. Did John of Segovia’s own reading and translation of the Qurʾān influence his religious language and his way of thinking or writing?

The results of this part of my investigation will lead to a third question:

3. What status did John of Segovia attribute to religious language at all? Was not religious language a means to an end for him, not aiming at religious conversation but conversion?

1

Born circa 1393, John of Segovia started a career in theology at the University of Salamanca. He became a master of arts and of theology. He probably was the first to hold the chair for Bible lectures at the faculty for theology. Later he remembered that he gave the standard lectures on Petrus Lombardus in the morning and in the evening and that he held two chairs simultaneously. So we can be sure that John of Segovia was a well trained theologian and an expert in scholastic theology and Bible interpretation, as well. That information is important to know, because the way John of Segovia read and interpreted the Qurʾān as the main source of the religious law of the Saracens, was more or less the same as he read and interpreted the Old and New Testament.

From the beginning, the university esteemed him for his skills and knowledge and sent him to Rome for various negotiations. There, the curia gave him the title of a *referendarius* of the pope and tried to keep in papal service. Yet, his loyalty towards his king, John II of Castile and Léon (1405–1454), and his theological interests led him another way. In 1431, he accompanied the king and came into contact with Muslims in Córdoba and in Medina del Campo. The first

bro Alchoran credentes, dum liber ipse vocat eos homines diabolicos [...]” Cf. Robert of Ketton’s translation of sura 114,6 (Bibliander 188,28).

encounter was quite disappointing, but the second one resulted in long discussions with the ambassador of the Emir of Granada. During these discussions John of Segovia was able to explain some of the most important Christian truths with the result that this Muslim was very impressed by John of Segovia's clear and convincing explications. He exclaimed. "By God! There is nobody among the Christians, who can explain this, but only you."³

It is therefore not surprising, that this encounter had a great impact on John of Segovia's thinking about religious encounters and inter-religious communication. Even after more than 20 years he remembered its details. He expanded it into a kind of prototype for further inter-religious disputes with Muslims in his book *Liber de praeclara notitia*. On the other hand, this contact and the four months working on the translation of the Qur'an together with Iça Gidelli were more or less the only occasions for him to have deeper encounters with Muslims. So on the one hand we can agree with Anne-Marie Wolf's conclusion that John of Segovia's contact with Muslims until 1431 – and I would add even after 1431 – "had not been extensive"⁴ (134). On the other hand John of Segovia often pointed to his rich and direct experiences with Muslims in Spain, for example in his controversy with Jean Germain (about 1400–1461), bishop of Chalons-sur-Saône and counsellor of Duke Philip the Good (1396–1467).⁵ Even in the earliest writings from his university teaching dating back to 1427, we find John of Segovia occupied with the question of the salvation of the Muslims. Yet, at that time he had neither read the Latin Qur'an nor ever seen a copy of this book.⁶

It required a new set of inspirations, contacts and formation of ideas, for John of Segovia to start his examination of the Qur'an and Muslim belief. This happened during the Council of Basel, where John of Segovia spent about 16 years from 1433, two years after its beginning, until 1449. Because of his skills he soon became one of the main figures of the council. Especially after the schism between the majority of the council, which stayed in Basel, and the minority, which followed the translocation of the council to Ferrara and Florence, John of Segovia played an important role as spokesman. In 1439, he nearly became the antipope of Eugenius IV. Yet, his main function during the council was more theological and ecclesio-political. Important for our concerns are his works on the deputation of faith. John of Segovia was involved in the disputations with the Hussites and the preparation of meetings with a delegation of Greek Orthodox Christians. Both groups were thought to be heretics, the Hussites, because they differed in their concept of the church and the eucharist, the Greeks, because they rejected the addition in the western Creed, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the father and the son. How shall we distinguish the words *ex*, *et* and *per* in the inner-trinitarian life of God? Truth and heresy depend on the correct use of the smallest words of human language. On behalf of the council, John of Segovia composed the *Concordantiae partium sive dictionum indeclinabilium totius Biblie* (1437), a concordance of all indeclinable words such as prepositions and conjunctions.⁷ This more or less purely

3 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 4,119–120; cf. *Replica magne continencie* (V 63v; Scotto 134).

4 Anne-Marie Wolf, *Juan de Segovia and Western Perspectives on Islam in the Fifteenth Century*, Ph. D. Diss. Department of History, University of Minnesota 2003, 134.

5 Cf. *Replica magne continencie* (V 57v–58r. 62r. 100r; Scotto 121f. 131–132. 209), where he points to 40 years of experience.

6 Cf. *Replica magne continencie* (V 58r; Scotto 122).

7 Cf. John of Segovia, *Concordantiae*, Straßburg 1529, Prologus: "Itaque si ad minimam literam, uel minutissimum punctum diuinae scripturae attentius inspiciendum est [...] inuigilare debet sacrarum literatum studiosus perscrutator, tanto ampliori cum diligentia, quanto dei uerba recte intelligenti, inaestimabilis gaudij merces, sentienti uero de illis peruerse, incomparabilis supplicij debetur dolor."

philological book was published in 1437 in order to provide a solid biblical foundation to solve genuine theological questions, especially in the negotiations with the Greek Church. The common opinion at that time was that in the Bible one always finds a deep and inseparable connection of a certain meaning and its correct verbalization. The concordance became one of John of Segovia's most successful books. We should thus not wonder that this man would evaluate each word, either in the Bible or in the Qur'ān.

However, the Council of Basel did not only confirm John of Segovia in his theological way of working and thinking, it provided him with new ideas and confronted him with situations in which he had to clarify his theological opinions. Therefore we should have a close look at one of the items of the Council of Basel. Settling the conflict between the church and the Hussites and bringing peace to Bohemia and the surrounding regions after more than twenty years of warfare was one of the main tasks of this council. However, the established way of communicating with official heretics was fruitless. John Hus had been burned in 1415 by the Council of Constance, and all repressive measures of King Václav and King Sigismund against the ever increasing protests failed. John of Segovia and others stated that the Hussites could not be defeated by war and violence. The Council of Basel decided to negotiate with the Hussites and to open discussions with a heterodox group which the church had condemned as heretics. In November 1433, the so called *Compacta of Prague* were accepted by both sides. Although disputes and warfare did not end, this contract was of great importance. John of Segovia repeatedly points to the real essence of these negotiations: The church had agreed to negotiate with heretics and thus approved this non-violent way to deal with those, whose convictions and belief were more or less contrary to its own one, especially Giuliano Cesarini, the papal legate and president of the Council of Basel, who had voted for this new way of negotiation. Cesarini, who himself had accompanied the unsuccessful crusade against the Hussites in 1431, accepted that these enemies could not be overcome by violence. He thus supported the idea of peaceful and theological debates in a truly Christian spirit – in order to “work with all diligence for [their] conversion and the salvation of [their] souls”, “because it is necessary to cure the ill”⁸, as Cesarini said, or “to save their souls, not to ruin them,”⁹ as John of Segovia would write with regard to the Saracens. Cesarini's formulations can be found in one of his famous letters from 1432. Gerald Christianson holds it to be “a stunning document, perhaps without precedent in the later Middle Ages.”¹⁰ It is preserved in John of Segovia's history of the Council of Basel. John even incorporated the document in his collection of the materials on the Islam, which he sent to Enea Piccolomini in the year of John's death.¹¹ John of Segovia promoted the *via pacis et doctrinae*, “the way of peace and teaching,” for all negotiations with the heretic Saracens as the only promising and Christian alternative to the *via belli*, the unsuccessful way of crusades. This *via pacis et doctrinae* had its predecessor and model in the negotiations with the Hussites. John of Ragusa (1395–1443) called this way *via veritatis et pacis*, “the way of truth and peace,” thus using nearly the same formulation regarding the Hussites as John of Segovia did regarding the Saracens.

Although the threat against Constantinople by the Ottoman armies was well known at the Council of Basel, there are only a few hints to what the council fathers thought of the reli-

8 Giuliano Cesarini's letter edited in: John of Segovia: *Historia gestorum generalis synodi Basiliensis*, in: *Monumenta Conciliorum Generalium Seculi decimi quinti*, hg. v. der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vol. II-IV, Wien 1873–1935, vol. II, 111.

9 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 1,35 with Luke 9:56.

10 Gerald Christianson, *Cesarini: The Conciliar Cardinal. The Basel Years, 1431–1438*, St. Ottilien 1979, 51.

11 Cf. John of Segovia, *Historia gestorum*, *Monumenta Conciliorum* vol. II, 109–117; V 137r–145r.

gion of the Muslims in the 1430s and 1440s. After 1453, the most important treatises about the fall of Constantinople are from former Council members – Nicolaus Cusanus, John of Torquemada, John of Segovia, Jean Germain. Yet, Islam was discussed privately-if-not-officially in the assemblies. And it is not surprising, that John of Segovia mentions several occasions in his history of the Council when Islam was discussed. We know that John of Ragusa brought a Latin translation of the Qurʾān from his journey to Constantinople as legate of the Council. He also had an Arabic Qurʾān in his luggage, which nobody in Basel was able to read.¹² However, his letters from Constantinople were read publicly in the assemblies, and Ragusa's notices about Muslims are preserved in these letters. John of Ragusa even started to write a refutation of the Islam which was left unfinished at his death in 1443. And we know from John of Segovia himself, that the council fathers keenly discussed these scarce reports about the Islam. Because John of Ragusa mentioned a prediction that the Saracens would soon convert to Christianity John of Segovia had ordered a copy of Robert of Ketton's Latin translation of the Qurʾān. He personally proofread it in order to find this prediction in 1437 during the Council of Basel.¹³

In the same year he borrowed another manuscript with the Latin Qurʾān from Nicolaus Cusanus. Not only in the 1450s, when Cusanus had written his famous book *De pace fidei*, John of Segovia discussed with him about the Islam. During the council they discussed theological subjects such as the rationality of the belief in the Holy Trinity¹⁴ and exchanged manuscripts, among others the Latin Qurʾān. In these years, John of Segovia began to compose his *Errores legis Mahumeti*, a collection of the most important errors he could find in the Qurʾān. He also inserted a long chapter on Islam into his book *Liber de magna auctoritate episcoporum in concilio generali*, a genuine ecclesiological treatise. He did this in the 1440s until 1453, before he totally devoted himself to fighting against a new crusade and convincing important clergymen of a new initiative for converting the Saracens with the “sword of the divine Spirit,” as he called his treatise *De via belli et doctrinae*. Even this biblical formulation “sword of the Spirit” (*gladius spiritus*), reflects the language of the Council where it occurs – according to John of Segovia's history of the Council – on many occasions. “The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17), is a part of the spiritual armor in the Epistle to the Ephesians. For John of Segovia, it symbolised the *via pacis et doctrinae*, because this sword is God's own word and the spirit it stands for is the spirit of peace. Thus the sword of the divine spirit and its way of peace and teaching is opposed to the iron sword of mankind which leads into the *via belli*, the way of war, and the crusades full of violence and destruction.

Thus we can conclude that John of Segovia was interested in the Saracens and their belief from the beginning of his ecclesiastical career. Direct contacts with Muslims were few and he had only one in depth conversation with Muslims which nevertheless had a lasting impact on his

12 Cf. Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation. Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa*, Beirut / Stuttgart 1995, 237–62, but it was the Latin translation, not the Arabic Qurʾān, as Bobzin thinks, which was sent to John of Segovia from Basel.

13 Cf. Roth 2012, XXXIXf.; a later, but similar prophecy is studied in Monica Colominas Aparicio: “The End of Muhammad's Law in a Prophecy in the El Escorial”, Paper presented at the International Medieval Meeting Lleida 26th – 29th of June, 2012 (Publication in progress).

14 Cf. Nicolaus Cusanus, *Epistula ad Johannem de Segobia* (ed. Raimund Klibansky / Hildebrand Bascour, *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia*, iussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita 7: *De pace fidei cum epistula ad Ioannem de Segobia*, Hamburg 1959, 97): “Spes est quod omnes Teucri acquiescerent fidei sanctissimae Trinitatis ex rationibus tactis in scripto reverendissimae paternitatis vestrae, quas et alias Basileae a divi a vobis, quando mihi Richardum de Sancto Victore laudastis.”

thinking. His way of approaching the Muslim belief was primarily influenced and shaped by his education and his ethos as a professor of theology and a member of a general church council. The Council of Basel strengthened the conviction that conflicts with dissenters could not be solved by weapons, but only by the force of arguments and negotiations. The encounter with the Muslims in Medina del Campo in 1431 and the disputes with the Hussites at the council in the following years had convinced John of Segovia, that non-violent dialogues could be far more successful than violence.

The more John of Segovia read about the thoughts of the Saracens, the more he devoted himself to the project to save souls and lives instead of destroying and exterminating heretics. Should that not influence and shape his way of talking and thinking? We then have to answer our second question: Did John of Segovia's own reading and translating the Qur'ān influence his religious language and his way of thinking or writing?

2

"If it sounds like that in Arabic, as the Latin translation says," this formulation shows that John of Segovia had endeavoured to get authentic and valid information about the Qur'ān. It is not only his personal eagerness and love of truth which bring him to seek the true sources. The verification of sources and source criticism were one of the main instruments in the theological debates of the 15th century. Nicolaus Cusanus had unveiled the famous falsification of the Donation of Constantine already in 1434. In his works about the procession of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Maria, John of Segovia combined logical arguments with historical and philological demonstrations. The same holds true for his treatise *De gladio divini spiritus*.

As professor of Biblical studies, he was acquainted with the problems of translations. The Holy Scripture he used to quote was the Latin Bible and thereby nothing but a translation, a fact he points to himself.¹⁵ As a professor of theology he knew that the Holy Scripture had the highest authority of all sources for proofs. And he was well aware that all these proofs had to be taken in the literal not the figurative sense. His experiences as a negotiator had convinced him that "nothing obstructs the return of heretics more than to impose them a false testimony regarding their sayings."¹⁶ For those, who wanted to convert the Saracens to the Christian truth on the way of peace and doctrine, it was not only useful, but necessary to have a genuine knowledge of their scripture and law, as John of Segovia continues to say.

He reproaches nearly all books of Christians about Islam for having one failure in common: Their knowledge of the Qur'ān was incomplete, their quotations selective and often misleading or sometimes obviously false.¹⁷ Even the works of Riccoldo da Monte di Croce or the so-called *Apology of Pseudo-Al-Kindi* were criticised.¹⁸ A biblical scholar always had to consider the

15 Cf. *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 38,443–4.

16 *Praefatio* lin. 179–181: "[...] nichil etenim officit magis ad reductionem hereticorum quam illis circa dicta sua falsum imponere testimonium [...]." Cf. further *ibidem* lin. 183–9: "Quocirca, intendere cupientibus ad Sarracenorum conversionem in sacramenta catholice fidei per uiam pacis et doctrine [...] admodum reuera utile, quin et necesse uidetur ut ueram habeant notitiam quid lex dicat eorum [...]." And *De gladio divini spiritus*, Praef. 261–263: "Quod maxime officit circa disputationes catholicae fidei adversariis vera credere reuenticibus, dum vident, quod falsum illis imponitur testimonium."

17 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Praef. 259–60: "Sed tamen auctores, quantum apparet ex scriptis ipsorum, non viderint librum Alqurani, multa namque illi imponunt non vera."

18 Cf. *Replica magne continencie* (V 58r; Scotto 121–2).

complete set of all biblical texts concerning his problem because the whole Bible was the context of every sentence. The same was required when reading the Qurʾān. If not, all arguments became worthless and turned out to be nothing but insinuations. John of Segovia quoted a saying of Muslims in Spain against the arbitrariness of Christians in their polemics against them: “Christians paint as they like (*pingunt sicut volunt*).”¹⁹

Thus, in his criticism the translation of Robert of Ketton, John of Segovia applies the normal scientific standards of his time. But that he does so with regard to the doctrine of a sect and to the scripture of heretics whom others tried to eradicate from earth, is extraordinary and due to John of Segovia’s own convictions. That scientific standards were a determinative factor for John of Segovia, can also be deduced from the observation that he had queried the Latin translation of Robert of Ketton before he came in contact with his own Arabic translator in 1455. In the prologue to the trilingual Qurʾān, John of Segovia narrates how he had come to start a new translation of the whole Qurʾān. There he also mentions that “the style, the procedure, the composition and the content” of the Latin translation had made him think that it was not true. Thus, inner arguments were the first to make him suspicious. At that time, John of Segovia had not read the Robert of Ketton’s preface to own his translation. Later he could see, that Robert admitted that he “had nothing changed considerably if not for a [better] understanding.”²⁰

John of Segovia also could have been warned by the glosses to the Latin translation. He found many of them in the manuscript of John of Ragusa he had borrowed from Basel about 1454.²¹ But even before this time he had probably read some of those numerous notes transmitted in the manuscripts together with the Latin Qurʾān. One of these glosses, or maybe the original text of Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, had demonstrated that the suras could be translated in various ways.²²

The same quotation can be found in one of John of Segovia’s earlier text, the collection or the *Errores legis Mahumeti*. The more John of Segovia worked on his long treatise *De gladio divini spiritus*, the more he was concerned that his main source was misleading him. He even sent letters to Spain in order to get inspected manuscripts with the Arabic Qurʾān and the answers confirmed his suspicion.²³ For several years John of Segovia had tried to find somebody who could provide

19 *Replica magne continencie* (V 58r; Scotto 122): “Unde in Yspania commune est proverbium Sarracenos in derisum adversus Christianos dicere quod pingunt sicut volunt.”

20 Robert of Ketton, *Praefatio* (Bibliander 7,40): “[...] nil excerpens, nil sensibiliter, nisi propter intelligentiam tantum alterans.”

21 *Epistula ad Nicolaum de Cusa* (V 9rv; Scotto 15): “[...] habui librum qui Constantinopoli, ut apparet, correcte fuit scriptus, dum illic Iohannes de Ragusio remansit. In glosis [!] vero quibusdam marginibus appositis notatur latina translacio quod in nonnullis veritati pepercerit non exprimens quantam sermo arabicus habet legis illius obscenitatem. Aliquas eciam postillas habet declarantes quorundam passuum obscuritatem.” Cf. Sura 2:221 in *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 9,58-65, pointing to the marginal notes in his manuscript: “[...] prout reperitur in quibusdam additionibus super libro Alchoran.”

22 Cf. Sura 2:223 (according to Riccoldo de Monte Crucis, *Contra legem Sarracenorum* cap. 6, lin. 40-41, ed. by Jean-Marie Mériçoux, *L’ouvrage d’un frère Prêcheur florentin en Orient à la fin du XIIIe siècle. Le “Contra legem Sarracenorum” de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce*, in: *Fede e controversia nel ‘300 e ‘500, Centro Riviste della Provincia Romana, Pistoia 1986*, 1–144, here 84). This text is obviously quoted in *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 9,46-8: “Ut vero aiunt quidam, passus iste in Arabico expressius et clarius describitur. Dicit namque: ‘Mulieres vestrae a natura vestra, arate eas, ubi vultis.’ The same verse is quoted in John of Segovia: *Errores legis Mahumeti* (V 161v).

23 *Praefatio* lin. 218–21: “Quo uero amplius inspiciebam prefate translationis stilum procedendique modum et ordinem ac substantialia libri, eo magis suspicio se ingrebat non esse ueram, quod ipse agnoui accepto ex Hyspania testimonio, uisis ibidem certis, quas mandaueram, Alchurani membranas.”

him with first hand knowledge about Islam and who could help him to get a reliable translation of the Qurʾān. All attempts to find an Arabic speaking person had failed until December 1455. Two years after he had started to write his *De gladio divini spiritus*, John of Segovia met the Muslim Faqih Yça Gidelli at his monastery in Savoy. The history of this Muslim-Christian cooperation is well known.²⁴ After four months of intense work Gidelli departed and left John of Segovia with an Arabic Qurʾān and a translation in Spanish written in a second column. John of Segovia wanted to have this vernacular text translated into Latin in order to make it available for the whole western Christianity. He had to master this translation all by himself with the Spanish and Arabic text and the reading knowledge of Arabic he had gained during his sessions with Gidelli.²⁵ As his knowledge and skills of Arabic were limited, he attempted to find another expert in the Arabic language and the Qurʾān, but all in vain. John of Segovia was well aware of the differences between the spoken Arabic of merchants and the classical Arabic of the Qurʾān.²⁶

Finally, John of Segovia translated the whole Spanish Qurʾān into Latin by himself. In order to surpass the older Latin translation, he tried to translate as literally as possible and to “conserve the Arabic way of expressing,”²⁷ as he says. Looking on both the Arabic original and the Spanish translation, he even accepted grammatical incongruities in the Latin text, if he could thus better imitate the Arabic wording. He tells us, that he even invented new possessive pronouns, for example *sussuus* “their” instead of *suus* for the third person plural possessive pronoun.²⁸ However, the extant fragments only demonstrate to us that the new translation was very literal and mostly correct.

John of Segovia had the scruples to publish this translation before having it discussed with another expert in Arabic. Therefore he had obviously not ordered further copies to be made. So there existed only one manuscript of the trilingual Qurʾān. It was sent to Salamanca after his death. Today it is lost. Only a few fragments in the manuscript descriptions in his donation and in the manuscript of *De gladio divini spiritus* have survived. The main text quotes the same verses of the older Latin translation of Robert of Ketton. John of Segovia added the older translation because some conclusions on the basis of the older translation were erroneous.

Some more fragments are preserved because John of Segovia started to revise his text, and a handful statements and this longer quotation. He could not finish this work because of his illness and lack of time. He likely also realised that the revision of about 500 quotations from all over the Qurʾān in his text would have been a Herculean task. However, the fact, that he tried to revise his text, although his general views about Muhammad and the law of the Saracens had not changed, proves that he was serious about not offending Muslims with false quotations from their holy text.

In these fragments of his Latin translation there are only a few passages where he seems to break the rules of the Latin grammar. In sura 5:112 he writes *quando dixit apostoli* (“when the apostles has said” for *iḍ qāla l-ḥawḥāriyūna*), not *quando dixerunt apostoli* (“when the apostles have said”), as if *apostoli* were a noun in third person singular, not plural. In Arabic we have the

24 Cf. Gerard A. Wiegiers, *Islamic literature in Spanish and Aljamiado. Yça of Segovia (fl. 1450), his antecedents and successors*, Leiden 1994; Davide Scotto, “De Pe a Pa. Il Corano trilingue di Juan de Segovia (1456) e la conversione pacifica dei Musulmani”, in: *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 48 (2012) 515–77.

25 Gidelli also had procured some smaller texts for him, a *Summariūm psalmodium* in Spanish and probably the *Breviario Sunni*, cf. Wiegiers 1994 (see note 24), 98–133.

26 *Praefatio* lin. 325–42.

27 *Praefatio* lin. 443–5: “[...] utque modum ipsum Arabice locutionis ex integro seruarem, minime dubitavi uerberare Priscianum [...]”

28 *Praefatio* lin. 453–60.

verb in singular, if it precedes the masculine subject in plural. Yet, John of Segovia is not consequent. In sura 5:110 some lines before he translates Arabic *fa-qāla llaḏīna* with *et dixerunt illi* (“and those said”) instead of *et dixit illi* (“and those have said”).²⁹

Another example of the way he attempted to adapt his Latin formulations to the Arabic original, can be found in the construction *credere in Deo* and even *credere cum* “to believe in”. This construction with *in* and ablative is completely unusual in Latin religious language. John of Segovia obviously tried to imitate the Arabic construction *‘āmana bi*.³⁰ The last example is that he uses the intransitive Latin verb *descendere* (“to come down”) as a transitive verb with the sense of “to make to come down” as for example in sura 5,114 *descendet super nos mensam* (“he will let come down a table on us” for Arabic *anzil ‘alainā mā’idatan*).³¹ That he used Latin verbs in this way, is one of the points which he mentions in his prologue to the trilingual Qur’ān and which we can verify with the existing fragments. So we can conclude that John of Segovia tried to imitate the Arabic wording as closely as possible. He even created and constructed Latin formulations according to the Arabic original. We know that the Latin translation of the Bible imported many so-called “Semitisms”. Yet, the deliberateness and the radicalism of John of Segovia’s project seem to go much further and make it outstanding. The purpose was not only to keep the same meaning as literally as possible. That could have been done without neologisms like *sussuus* or new grammatical constructions. To some extent John of Segovia seems to have been fond of emulating the Arabic original. However, his primary aim had always been first to make the contents of the law of the Saracens accessible to western readers and secondly to keep the Saracens from accusing the Christians of having changed the meaning or the wording of the Qur’ān.³²

John of Segovia had a very good knowledge of the contents of the Qur’ān and the history of Christian-Muslim encounters, especially the crusades. From his translator Gidelli he also received some sources more or less unknown to western Christianity. However he combined these new insights with his general pattern of interpreting Islam from a Christian point of view. This can be seen in the way John of Segovia understood the division of the Qur’ān into 4 books and into suras, as he had learned from Gidelli. For John of Segovia the author of the Qur’ān tried to imitate the Holy Bible, especially its most eminent books, the book of Psalms and the four books of the gospels.³³ John of Segovia was ignorant of the structure of the successive revelation to Muhammad and the complexity of the order of the suras and the subdivision of the Qur’ān into four books. Some conclusions he made reveal that he was not even familiar with the geography of the Middle East. So he claimed that there had been a prophet in Arabia before Muhammad, because he read in the Epistle to the Galatians that the apostle Paul had been in the region called Arabia after his conversion, but this region is not the Arabian Peninsula.³⁴

29 Cf. Ulli Roth / Reinhold Gleis, “Die Spuren der lateinischen Koranübersetzung des Juan de Segovia – alte Probleme und ein neuer Fund”, in: *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 11 (2009) 109–54, here 141, 143, 147–8.

30 Cf. Roth / Gleis (see note 29), 133–4, and Ulli Roth / Reinhold Gleis, “Eine weitere Spur der lateinischen Koranübersetzung des Juan de Segovia”, in: *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 13 (2011) 221–8, here 225.

31 *Praefatio* lin. 446–8; cf. Roth / Gleis (see note 29), 145.

32 Cf. *Praefatio* lin. 538–52.

33 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Praef. 53–65.

34 Cf. *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 31,486–91: “Sed Mahumet dedit intelligendum, quod huiusmodi lingua deberet esse nativa, qualis erat sua, nati in Arabia. In quo etiam manifeste dedit falsum testimonium dicens nullum lingua Arabica loquentem fuisse in Arabiam missum a deo. Certissimum namque est, quod Paulus statim post conversionem abiit in Arabiam [cf. Gal. 1:17], in qua regione cum primo obtinuerit Mahumetus se reputari prophetam et nuntium dei [...]”

Thomas Burman insinuates that John of Segovia's interest in Arabic philology of the Qur'an shows a kind of freedom from the polemical framework he obviously cannot and will not escape from totally: "[...] philological Qur'an reading has momentarily 'de-demonized' Islam's holy book [...]" as Burman says.³⁵ Although I agree with Burman that philology played an important role to overcome dogmatic limits and to develop a new kind of freedom or neutrality in the 15th and 16th centuries, with respect to John of Segovia I would like to formulate it otherwise: A new kind of polemical and dogmatic Qur'an reading has engendered a new, de-demonising and more adequate form of Qur'an philology. In order to explain this, one has to answer a third question: What status does John of Segovia attribute to religious language and philological efforts at all?

3

In his prologue to the trilingual Qur'an he makes it quite clear:

*[...] I wanted to have a true translation, not to lay it in a piece of cloth or to dig in the earth and to cover it with sand, but that the translation in Latin language should serve the teachers of the holy church to exterminate that sect [...].*³⁶

His new and truthful translation of the Qur'an should be the basis for a new and ultimate initiative of the whole church to overcome the dangerous heresy of the Saracens. The exact translation should help to obtain trustworthy information about the sect of the Saracens and serve for encounters and disputes. This can also be seen from the following examples:

At the end of his voluminous treatise *De gladio divini spiritus* John of Segovia gives some practical advices how to deal with the Saracens.³⁷ His first counsel is not to rely on translators as middlemen, but to negotiate directly in Arabic with the Saracens. Most translators would not be acquainted with religious language and thus would miss the meaning of words in theological contexts. What is more, Christians would have to rely on Muslim translators if they were not able to speak Arabic. Even the model of Castilian or another common language as intermediary does not seem to suffice. To speak about the true meaning of sentences and statements requires knowledge of the true meaning of words. To translate and thus to preach to heretics presupposes theological understanding of the meaning and philological knowledge of the words to express this meaning.

This sincerity or love of truth in the area of philology runs parallel to a similar requirement with regard to the way one should speak with the others. The second counsel is therefore that in the consultations with the Saracens the Christians should always find words of honesty and respect. "Speak always to all men of the law with honest words in the disputations" – several times John of Segovia quotes and commentates this maxim from sura 29:46.³⁸ This is not meant as purely strategic or tactical. John of Segovia sees this way of disputing about the truth as a common basis because he finds this admonition in both the Qur'an and the New Testament. He is convinced of that all men of good will are deeply interested in peace³⁹ and that all men would

35 Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom 1140 – 1560*, Philadelphia 2007, 191.

36 *Praefatio* lin. 343–248.

37 Cf. for the following *De gladio divini spiritus*, *Consid.* 38,443ff.

38 *De gladio divini spiritus*, *Consid.* 3,79–122; 38,465–473.

39 *De gladio divini spiritus*, *Consid.* 3,71–75; 6,151–196. Therefore peace in the sense of fulfilment of the desire of all men is in John Segovia's eyes the common aim of both Christians and Saracens, not only an initial stage, as Victor Sanz Santacruz intimates in his interesting article "Juan de Segovia y Nicolás de Cusa frente al Islam. Su comprensión intelectualista de la fe cristiana", in: *Anuario de historia de la Iglesia* 16 (2007), 181–194, 188.

pursue to come to that kind of human dignity the Bible expresses with the formulation “to be God’s son,” even the Muslims.⁴⁰ Therefore everybody should be interested in leading the other to that deep relationship to God instead of killing him. This was still the ideal of the supporters of the crusades who continued to preach in the days of John of Segovia.⁴¹

The last two counsels seem to be more practical. Consultations and disputations should be held with both the ordinary people and the political and religious leaders of the Saracens in order to have as much influence as possible. Explaining the Christian truths should start with those subjects that are easier to understand. Otherwise, the Saracens could be misled to despising those things they were not able to understand. Generally, one should always try to explain the truths of faith rationally, not just to demand blind faith. John of Segovia ends his treatise with the appeal: “It is specific for science and wisdom to give reasons.”⁴² We should add that divine wisdom gives reasons, too, according to John of Segovia’s thinking.

Thus there is an inner and deep connection of peace and teaching in his “way of peace and teaching.” John of Segovia’s own philological and theological efforts to understand the Muslim belief adequately result from his conviction that faith is rational and that all men pursue the same truth. In his opinion, the mission of the church is “to preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15), and every progress that will be achieved will have to be welcomed. Although John of Segovia thought the Saracens to be the most dangerous heretics the church ever had to face and to withstand, he was full of compassion because they were deluded by their law, the Qur’ān, and because they were ignorant of the truth.

According to John of Segovia, the true author of the Qur’ān and its heresy was the devil. Although this is the judgment of most medieval Christian authors dealing with the Islam, John of Segovia’s conclusion is quite singular. He did not want to burn or hide this dangerous book, but to understand it thoroughly. He still thought consultations and colloquies with the Saracens to be legitimate and useful. Indeed, the Christian commandment to love one’s enemies required such encounters. As could have been seen in the encounters with the Hussites, disputations could lead to agreements and to establish peace, at least for some time.

But in the case of the Saracens with the Qur’ān as their law, the problem was more complicated. The Hussites argued and acted according to the Bible. Their interpretation was in some respects incorrect and false and the Hussites were reluctant to accept that. The Saracens, however, understood and interpreted their law, the Qur’ān, absolutely in a correct way, but their law was false and erroneous. It called to fight against all infidels and especially the Christians, because they were said not to believe in the one God, but in three gods. John of Segovia’s new translation of sura 9:29 still formulated: “Therefore kill those who do not believe in God and the Last Day.”⁴³ As long as the Saracens would believe such commandments to be true and correct, there could be neither peace nor the slightest possibility of converting them. If their law teaches them that the Christians are a kind of polytheists and shall be persecuted and they hold that to be the truth, there will be no peace. Therefore, the first task was to show that this commandment was unfounded and false. According to John of Segovia, the Saracens were driven by their prejudices. To destroy these false suppositions would be one of the main aims of inter-religious encoun-

40 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 38,9–33.

41 Among those clergymen, John of Segovia was acquainted with Nicholas V, Juan Cervantes, Jean Germain and Enea Piccolomini who supported the idea of crusading, cf. Roth 2012, LI–LIV.

42 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 38,563.

43 *Praefatio*, lin. 78f.

ters. One of the characteristics of his disputation with the Muslim ambassador in 1431 is that “he sometimes talked full of anger, so one can conclude that the Saracens were driven by great hatred and contempt against the Christians.”⁴⁴

While John of Segovia was realistic enough to face the possibility that these inter-religious encounters might never result in a conversion of the Saracens he considered them to be necessary, if the Christian church wanted to defend itself against Muslim expansion. He said: To explain, that the Christians were not, as the Saracens thought them to be⁴⁵, would be reason enough to hold interlocutions with them.⁴⁶ If one could not gain them for the Christian truth, one should free them from the untruth, at least the false opinions about the Christians. For this a completely reliable translation of their law should procure the necessary information.

I would not say that John of Segovia thought about tolerance. But he seemed to be willing to accept a kind of status quo provided that untruth and false accusations would come to an end. For this purpose he respected the Saracens as participants or partners in inter-religious encounters. Therefore he was able to see that the Qur’ān contained a lot of Christian truths.⁴⁷ He himself insulted the Saracens only once in his long treatise as “diabolic men”, namely in the text I have quoted in the beginning of this article. That is because he read this formulation in the older Latin translation. Maybe by the collaboration with the Muslim Yça Gidelli he could have learned that also this was unfounded. It was one of the prejudices not the Saracens, but he himself as a Christian should overcome – with regard to both this Muslim, he had been working together for four months, and with regard to his law, the Arabic Qur’ān. “Diabolic men” is Robert of Ketton’s misleading translation for Arabic *ġinn*. I am afraid that we will never know how John of Segovia had translated that word. But this article might have given an idea about how he would have thought about the way one should translate it and how one should think about it with respect to the Muslims.

44 *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 4,197–199; cf. *Epistula ad Nicolaum Cusanum* (V 5r and 17r; Scotto 5 and 35).

45 Cf. *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 38,286–288.

46 Already in 1960, Richard W. Southern. *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge Mass. 1962, 90, had correctly classified this to be “a new approach” and “a quite new conception.”

47 Cf. *De gladio divini spiritus*, Consid. 7.