

QURANIC ALLAH AND BIBLICAL GOD : A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TRANSLATION OF GOD'S NAME IN CONTEMPORARY DUTCH TRANSLATIONS

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Abstract: This article deals with the fundamental Arabic and Quranic concept of "Allah" in the Dutch Quran translations, especially those made by contemporary Dutch Arabists: Kramers (1953), Leemhuis (1989) and Verhoef (2015). The main research question is, to what extent can we speak of the possible impact of the Biblical reference framework on selecting the word "God" as the translation equivalent of the proper name "Allah"? First, Allah is approached etymologically, terminologically, and theologically from the Biblical and Quranic points of view. Then, the liturgical formula *Basmalah*, where the term Allah is mentioned, is investigated based on the translations of the three contemporary Dutch translators. Finally, a thorough analysis is made based on the theological and exegetical meaning of the concept of Allah and the two divine attributes *Ar-Rahmān* and *Ar-Rahīm*. Peter Newmark's translation procedures are used here. As a result, this study demonstrated how much the Biblical reference framework has influenced Dutch Quran translations. Firstly, the term 'God' implicitly carries a particular theological and philosophical connotation (Hellenistic, Biblical, Christian) that partly differs from the concept of Allah in the Quran and Islamic tradition. Secondly, the impact of the Bible is explicitly evident, as seen in Kramers' Quran translation and in the choice of the divine name or the attribute *barmhartig* (mercy), which is a central concept in Christianity.

Keyword: Allah; Bible; Dutch Translation; God; Quran Translation

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas konsep dasar bahasa Arab dan konsep dasar Al-Qur'an tentang "Allah" dalam terjemahan Al-Qur'an berbahasa Belanda, terutama yang dibuat oleh para ahli Arab Belanda kontemporer: Kramers (1953), Leemhuis (1989) dan Verhoef (2015). Pertanyaan utama penelitian ini adalah, sejauh mana kita dapat berbicara tentang dampak yang mungkin terjadi dari kerangka referensi Alkitab dalam memilih kata "Tuhan" sebagai padanan kata "Allah"? Pertama, Allah didekati secara etimologis, terminologis, dan teologis dari sudut pandang Alkitab dan Al-Qur'an. Kemudian, formula liturgis *Basmalah*, di mana istilah Allah disebutkan, diselidiki berdasarkan terjemahan tiga penerjemah Belanda kontemporer. Terakhir, analisis menyeluruh dibuat berdasarkan makna teologis dan eksegetis dari konsep Allah dan dua sifat ilahi *Ar-Rahmān* dan *Ar-Rahīm*. Prosedur penerjemahan Peter Newmark digunakan di sini. Hasilnya, penelitian ini menunjukkan seberapa besar kerangka referensi Alkitab telah mempengaruhi terjemahan Al-Qur'an di Belanda. Pertama, istilah 'Tuhan' secara implisit membawa konotasi teologis dan filosofis tertentu (Helenistik, Biblikal, Kristen) yang sebagian berbeda dengan konsep Allah dalam Al-Qur'an dan tradisi Islam. Kedua, pengaruh Alkitab secara eksplisit terlihat jelas, seperti yang terlihat dalam terjemahan Al-Qur'an Kramers dan dalam pemilihan nama ilahi atau atribut *barmhartig* (Maha Pengasih), yang merupakan konsep sentral dalam agama Kristen.

Kata Kunci: Alkitab; Allah; Terjemahan Al-Qur'an; Terjemahan Belanda; Tuhan

1. Introduction

The concept of Allah is central to the Islamic theology. It is considered the first article of faith in Islam, which every Muslim must believe. That is why it is essential to introduce this fundamental concept. The term Allah is thoroughly analysed about the term God as the translation equivalent in most of the Quran translations made by the Dutch Arabists.

The translation of the Quran or the translation of the meanings of the Quran into other languages, including European languages, has become a crucial role in understanding the Holy Book of Islam, which is considered the cornerstone in understanding the various dogmatic, ritual, juridic, and historical issues of Islam. Concerning the Dutch and Flemish context, in which one and a half million Muslims live, there is an increasing need for translations of the Quran, whether among recent Muslim generations, converts, or non-Muslims. There are 16 Dutch Quran translations, divided into two main categories. On the one hand, seven translations were made by Arabists—non-Muslim theologians and scholars specialising in Arabic and Islamic Studies. This category includes four older translations. The oldest is by Berentsma from 1641, followed by the translations by Glazemaker (1657), Tollens (1859), and Keyzer (1860) (Hamilton, 2005). In addition, there are three contemporary Dutch Quran translations by Kramers (1956), Leemhuis (1989), and Verhoef (2015), which formed the research corpus of my PhD project. The old translations are intended for Dutch readers, while non-Muslim translators make the three contemporary Dutch Quran translations.

On the other hand, there are nine Dutch Quranic translations by Muslim translators. The two earliest Quranic translations were made by the Ahmadiyya community in the Netherlands: the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement in 1934 and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 1953. The following translation appeared in 1996 and was produced by Sofjan Saury Siregar and his students. In 2013, four Dutch Quran translations were published, respectively, by the Halal Life Foundation, Discover Islam, the Islamic University of Rotterdam, and *The Interpretation of the Meanings of the Quran* by Aboe Ismail and his students. In 2014, Ali Soleimani's Quran translation appeared, followed by a translation in 2018 by I. Spalburg, which included extensive commentary. These translations are primarily intended for Muslims as a resource to understand their faith.

Despite the publication of many Dutch translations of the Quran by Muslim translators, many Muslims still use the contemporary translations of the three non-Muslim translators we discuss in this article for various reasons. These translations are freely available on the Internet, and their copies are found in most public and university libraries. In addition, they appeared at an early stage before the publication of the Islamic translations, and the translations of Kramers (1956) and Leemhuis (1989) are still authorities in academic, cultural, and media circles.

Therefore, working on these translations to introduce them and analyse them critically and methodologically to reveal their strengths and weaknesses is essential. Thus, starting by examining how these three translators deal with the term Allah, which is considered a fundamental concept in the Quran, theology and Islamic jurisprudence came about. We prefer to analyse the verse of the *Basmalah* because it is a key concept not only in the Quran but in Islam as a whole as a system of belief, worship, behaviour and ethics. The *Basmalah* verse has also become a well-known phrase for Muslims and non-Muslims in the European context in general and the Dutch in particular. Today, the *Basmalah* is used by Muslims and several Westerners, whether in its Arabic form or its translated meaning.

The concept of Allah is central to Islamic theology and is regarded as the first article of faith in Islam, which every Muslim must believe. Therefore, it is essential to introduce this fundamental concept. Allah is thoroughly analysed concerning the term God, commonly used as the equivalent translation in most Dutch Quran translations by non-Muslim translators. Various definitions and interpretations are examined and cited to provide a comprehensive overview of the concept of Allah.

Firstly, this research explores the term Allah etymological, terminological, and theological levels. Secondly, the liturgical formula *Basmalah*, with which every chapter of the Quran—except *at-Tawbah* (The Repentance)—begins, is discussed. The term Allah appears in this significant Quranic formula,

often recited by Muslims during daily prayer and at the beginning of any religious or everyday act, including eating, slaughtering, and ritual washing (Ibn Kathir, 1999, pp. 120–121).

Finally, the translation procedures used (such as naturalisation, transference, notes, additions, glosses, and synonymy) for rendering the proper name Allah and its two attributes, *Ar-Rahmān* and *Ar-Rahīm*, are analysed, considering the possible impact of the Biblical reference framework on translators.

A literature study and comparative method were used in this research paper, particularly in the first two chapters on the concept of Allah/God in the Bible and the Quran and in describing the research corpus. In addition, the idea of Allah/God was analysed in the translations of the *Basmalah* verse and other Quranic verses. Various primary and secondary sources were utilised to achieve this research objective. A key challenge in finding sources was the limited availability of studies focused on Dutch Quran translations. The Dutch Quran translations that form this study's research corpus are considered this article's primary sources. These include Johannes Kramers' *The Koran translated from Arabic* (1956, 1992), Alfred Leemhuis' *The Koran: A rendering of the meaning of the Arabic text in Dutch* (1989), and Eduard Verhoef's *The Koran: Holy Book of Islam* (2016).

In addition, various articles and studies on Dutch Quran translation were referenced, including *European Qur'an Translations* (2014) by Thomas E. Burman, *The Study of Islam in Early Modern Europe* (2001) and *The Quran in Early Modern Europe* (2005) by Alastair Hamilton, and *Studies in Language, Etymology, and Terminology* (2019) by Abdulrahman Alsulaiman.

2. Allah and God Concepts

Allah Concept, an Etymological Exploration

The word *'ilāh* is a fundamental concept in monotheistic religions. Etymologically, a distinction is made between two-word stems of the term *'ilāh*. The first root word is (ل+ل: *il+l*), which can be found in the languages Akkadian (ل: *el*), Hebrew (אֱל: *'el*); Phoenician and Ugaritic (ل: *'el*), Syriac (ܐܠܐ: *'elā*); Arabic (*'ill-um*). In the Quran, the word (*'ill*) stands for Allah (9:8). This linguistic root is also mentioned in the reply of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, to the sayings of the false prophet Musaylima: He did not receive this thing from *'ill*, and in the name of the city of Babel in Akkadian: (*bab 'illī*: باب الی: *bab el-ālihat*). Several Hebrew names, including Ishmael, Michael and Israel, have this word at the end. The second root word is (*'lh*), which is also present in Hebrew (אֱלֹהִים: *elōah*); in Syriac and Aramaic (ܐܠܗܐ: *'elāh*); in Arabic (إله: *'ilāh*). This linguistic root forms the basis of the word Allah as the only worshipped God distinguished from the names of the idols (Alsulaiman, 2019, pp. 118–119).

In other words, "the substantive *'lh* "god" is related etymologically with the common Semitic *ilu/ll* "god, deity" attested in the East, Northwest, and South Semitic Languages except Ethiopic. It is presumably a primary noun. The form *'lh* as an appellative "god" characterises Aramaic. At the same time, it represents the divine name El (Niehr, 2018, p. 33). According to Gen. 33:20, Jacob erected there an altar and called it Elelohe-Israel: the God of Israel. In Arabic terminology, the word *'ilāh* is modified to Allah and is attributed only to the exalted Creator (Al-'Iṣfahānī, 2009, p. 17), and it is a proper name assigned only to the True God (Al-Ġurġānī, 2004, p. 32; Böwering, 2002, pp. 316–317; Ibn Kathir, 1999, p. 1/123).

On this basis, it appears that the name Allah is given in Islam to the Unique God, the One, the Creator, the Master of the worlds and the Lord of the last judgment. The word Allah is derived from the Semitic *'ILL* (Ballanfāt, 2007, p. 40; Niehr, 2018, p. 33), and it consists of *'ilāh* (God) and the Arabic article *al* (Boom, Geeraets, & Sijs, 2005, p. 1/171). It has no plural or feminine form. Also, the term Allah was used in the pre-Islamic period, and the Father of the Prophet Mohammad was called Abdullah (Mir, 1987, p. 9). Furthermore, the composition *Allahumma*, with which certain supplications are opened, resembles the Hebrew *'Ēlōhīm* (Ballanfāt, 2007, p. 40). Elohīm stands in Hebrew for the only One (Bolle & Pimentel, 1984, p. 342; Niehr, 2018, p. 37).

The term Allah is often translated in ancient and modern European languages to *Deus*, *Theos*, *God* (Dale et al., 1997, p. 341), *Gott*, *Dieu*, *Dios*, *Dio*, etc. Jaouhari assumes that the French concept of God/Allah, namely *Dieu*, was influenced by the Hellenistic interpretation, where *Dieu* stands for Zeus, the Greek supreme God of Olympus. The Hellenistic and Christian embodiment of God is often found in the Western translations of the Quran, which are characterised by the dramatic style. God is personified in the Bible, especially in conversations of the creatures. That is contrary to the concept of God in Islam, which is abstract and non-adaptable (Jaouhari, 2014, p. 58).

However, Alsulaiman states that *God/Dieu/Theos* in the Greek, Latin and Germanic languages are not proper names but ordinary terms to indicate the meaning of God. In the West, the adherents of the revealed religions capitalise on these terms to distinguish the True God from idols, as do the Arabs who add the article *'al/Jī* to *'ilāh/الله*. The difference between these two methods is that the distinction in Arabic is phonetic and in written form, while in European languages there is only a distinction in the written form without any distinction in the pronunciation between the words with lowercase and those with a capital letter (Alsulaiman, 2019, pp. 119–120).

3. From Biblical and Quranic Viewpoints

In this paragraph, the concept of God will be discussed from both the Biblical (Old and New Testament) and Quranic points of view. The fundamental question of the Hebrew religion is: "Who is God?" Krašovec assumes that "Many aspects of characterisation of the only God of Israel can be derived from the emphasis on God's working in history" (Krašovec, 2015, p. 542). Several names are given to the Hebrew God, including *'ēlōhîm*, *'ādōnāy* and YHWH. *'ēlōhîm* is characterised as absolute God. According to Niehr, "for the use of *'elāh* in Biblical Aramaic, one must emphasise fundamentally that the plural *'elāhîn* or *'elāhayya* always means "(the) gods" and is not comparable to Hebrew *'elōhîm*, God" (Niehr, 2018, p. 37). The name YHWH was gradually replaced in the postexilic time by the term *'ādōnāy*, the Lord as a pluralis maiestatis, which can also be taken in an absolute sense (Krašovec, 2015, p. 548). YHWH is considered the personal name of the God of Moses because it was revealed to him as Israel's saviour from Egyptian slavery. "It was this God, YHWH, who, in the belief of Israel, was the God of the beginnings; so that it was him, YHWH, whom people invoked in the primaeval period" (Scullion, 1992, p. II/1044; Gen. 4:26). The four Hebrew consonants YHWH stand for "LORD" in Dutch, which occurs more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament, but God states His name the first time in Ex. 3:14: "I AM WHAT I AM" (KBS, 2012, p. 79).

In addition, other names are given to God in the Old Testament, including God of the Bible, God of Abraham, God of Hebrews, God of gods, and God of Israel. Often, only the existence of YHWH as the God of Israel is emphasised, and who alone existed, other "gods" or "divinities" simply did not exist (Scullion, 1992, p. II/1048). Sometimes those gods are seen as strange gods: "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments." (Gen. 35:2) or they are attributed to other peoples, such as "gods of Egypt": "and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD" (Ex. 12:12). The uniqueness of the "God of Israel" is emphasised in dozens of Old Testament verses by the formula: apart from/besides of Me there is no god. This concept would later evolve especially in Jonah and Nahum, where God not only guides the history of his people, "but God is at the centre of world history. All injustice, wherever it happens, is a sin against the Lord. God is exposing tyrants worldwide and freeing people from their yoke" (KBS, 2012, p. 1475).

As for the God concept in the New Testament, there is no doubt that "He is good, wise, powerful, just, blessed, holy, and merciful" (Bassler, 1992, p. II/1050). The concepts of the Old Testament acquired a Christian focus in their new context. God is one; likewise, there is Jesus Christ, one church, the body of Christ, and one Spirit. God is the Creator and giver of life. He raised Jesus from the dead (Bassler, 1992). In the evangelical tradition, the oneness of God is also emphasised, especially in the Gospel of Mark, where "And Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29). According to Bassler, "this fundamental monotheistic faith is challenged, but not seriously compromised, by Christological

developments within the early Church." God's functions and several divine epithets, including "Lord", are transformed into Jesus. In this way, Jesus is the image of God and bears the stamp of God's nature (Bassler, 1992, p. II/1049-1051).

Furthermore, the trinity concept occupies a crucial place in Christianity, of which God, the Father, the Son, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are a part. At his appearance in Galilee, Jesus said to his disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). With "the Father" here is meant God, "Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:48; 6:1) as opposed to the human Father. When Jesus was twelve, he went to Jerusalem with his parents (Mary and Joseph) for Easter. His parents returned home, but the child Jesus was left there without knowing it. They came back to Jerusalem to find him there. When they saw him there, his mother said: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy Father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Then he asked them, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2: 41-49).

Based on chapter 112 al-Ihlās, the Dedication (Pickthall, 2011, pp. 112: 1-4), Koerts outlines the crucial place that the concept of God occupies in the Quran and Islamic theology. "The uniqueness of God is central to faith. The creed of Islam begins with it. That creed expresses that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" (Koerts, 2012, p. 243). In this way, the shirk, "the belief in other gods besides God or the attribution of partners or children to Him", is considered the worst sin in Islam. "Thus, the God of the Quran acquired a character completely different from the God of the Bible" (Koerts, 2012, p. 243). This means that "the God of the Quran to whom Muslims submit to themselves cannot possibly be the same as the God of the Bible whom Christians call their Father." (Durie, 2018, p. 115). Here, we speak of the typical Islamic monotheism, whose historical and theological roots return to the Abrahamic religion. Abraham broke with polytheism (16:120), was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian, but a Muslim (Koerts, 2012, p. 243: 67). Muslim and ḥanīf, Monotheists in the sense of avoiding polytheism and seeking faith (Ibn Kathir, 1999, p. 2/58) in the True God of all prophets from Adam to Muhammad. That is to say, neither a polytheist nor a Jew or a Christian (Rubin, 2002, p. 402). This is, therefore, the God of the Quran, who introduces Fazlur Rahman as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and man and, in particular, the giver of guidance to man and He Who judges man, individually and collectively and brings gracious justice to him (Rahman, 2009, p. 1).

Contrary to Koerts, who assumes that it is impossible to equate the God of the Bible and Allah, there are several common attributes between YHWH, the Father and Allah, in particular about oneness, existence, power, rule, justice and mercy (Bassler, 1992, p. II/1050). Simultaneously, these concepts differ from each other on other points. YHWH is the God of Israel, while Allah is the Lord of humankind (1:2). Many functions of Christian God are transferred to Jesus Christ, while "naught is as His likeness" (42:11). Hans Küng concludes that "all three prophetic religions refer to the one God, the Creator of the world and the God of Abraham. However, it is significant that Judaism takes its name from a people, 'Israel' (or from the tribe of 'Judah'). Christianity is named after its central figure, 'Christ' (Jesus of Nazareth); Islam—from the Arabic verb *aslama*, 'to submit, hand oneself over, surrender'—by its very name confesses none other than God: 'submission, handing over, surrendering' to God" (Küng, 2007, pp. 77–78). In other words, God as a monotheistic concept refers to the God of Abraham (monotheistic) as well as that of Moses (Jews), that of Jesus (Christians) and that of Muhammad (Muslims).

Durie speaks of the Biblical reflections in the Quran that are noticeable in various concepts, including monotheism. He considers whether these reflections are inherited or borrowed. Generally, the oneness of Allah refers to the Biblical God because the Bible itself emphasises the unity of God (Durie, 2018, p. 105). To what extent does the theological development of this concept in the Quran have more profound and systematic relations with Biblical theology? According to Durie, "The Quran shares with the Bible a basic conception of God as the unique creator, and certain attributes of God are common to both scriptures, such as God's knowledge and power, but the Quran constructs and applies this uniqueness very much in its way." Here the Arab socio-cultural context must be taken

into account, where Allah is positioned "as the supreme patron and owner-master of humankind" (Durie, 2018, pp. 118–119). On this basis, "Some features of the theology of Biblical monotheism, such as particular attributes of God, are shared by the Quran. However, in other respects, the theological emphases of the Bible and the Quran in guarding faith in the one God pull in quite different directions." That is to say that the Quran's concept of "the One and True God" was borrowed from Judaeo-Christian sources not inherited. It was significantly repurposed, being reclothed in native Arabic linguistic categories in the service of the Quran's distinctive spiritual vision of the unity of God (Durie, 2018, pp. 119–120).

4. Allah in the *Basmalah* Verse

The word Allah has been mentioned 2699 times in the Quran in various forms, independently (Allah: 2153 times) or with a specific preposition (*wal-lāh*, 'and Allah': 240 times; *bil-lāh*, 'thanks to Allah': 139 times; *lil-lāh*, 'for Allah': 116 times; *wa-lil-lāh*, 'and for Allah': 27 times; *tal-lāh*, 'I swear by Allah': 8 times; *fal-lāh*, 'and Allah': 6 times; *allāh-humma*, 'a vocative with which the supplication is started': 5 times; *'ā-Allāh*, 'I swear by Allah': twice; *'ā-bil-lāh*, 'I swear by Allah': once; *wa-tal-lāh*, 'and I swear by Allah': once). The analysis of the concept of God is more focused on translating the *Basmalah*, the well-known liturgical formula with which the Quran chapters begin. The *Basmalah*, as the name of the phrase *bismi 'Allāh*, in the name of Allah, is formulated based on two words: *bismi* and Allah. It is known in Arabic grammar as a kind of neologism (Ibn Ashour, 1984, p. 1/137). Moreover, according to Ibn Kathir, the companions of the Prophet Muhammad started the God book, the Quran, with the *Basmalah*. Allah has 99 different beautiful names, but the intended and the appointed is one; Allah is the proper name of the Lord. The Greatest name because all properties further characterise it. This name has only been assigned to Allah by the Arabs. As for the two divine names *Ar-Rahmān* and *Ar-Rahīm*, they are derived from *rahmah*. It is narrated that 'Īsā (Jesus) said: *Rahmān*, merciful has to do with worldly life and hereafter, while *Rahīm*, merciful has only to do with worldly life (Ibn Kathir, 1999, pp. 1/116-126). This is a call for Muslims to start by naming and remembering Allah, begging for help on all occasions only from Him. He is the revered Lord with superiority and generosity; His mercy is all-encompassing; his hospitality and charity are abundant; His grace extends to everything, and His benevolence reaches all creatures (Al-Sābūnī, 1981, p. 1/23).

The *Basmalah* is mentioned 114 times in the Quran; 113 Quran chapters start with *Basmalah* except for sura nine at-Tawbah, the Repentance. In addition, the *Basmalah* is part of the Quranic verse 30 of the chapter an-Naml, the Ants: "Lo! It is from Solomon, and lo! It is: In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" (27:30).

Commenting on this Quranic verse, the editors of the Kramers' Quran translation write in the footnote: "This letter thus begins just like the suras of the Quran. Every ordinary letter from a Muslim start with this formula" in: (Kramers, 1992, p. 311). The companions of the Prophet Muhammad opened the book of Allah by pronouncing the *Basmalah*. Several Muslim theologians argued that *Basmalah* is part of a Quranic verse from sura an-Naml. However, they differ as to whether the *Basmalah* at the beginning of each chapter is an autonomous verse, part of a verse, or of sura *al-Fātiḥah*, the Opening or that the *Basmalah* was simply used as a distinction between the suras. The last standpoint has been confirmed by Ibn 'Abbās, who referred to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad knew the separation of the Quran chapters only when he received the *Basmalah* (Böwering, 2002, p. 318; Ibn Ashour, 1984, pp. 1/138-145; Ibn Kathir, 1999, pp. 1/116-117).

In summary, both "Allah" and "God" are used in the Dutch Quran translation as translation equivalent of the Arabic word: الله/ Allāh. When the reader lacks the basic knowledge of the Quran and Arabic language, he probably cannot distinguish between the Quranic Allah and the Biblical God. The capable reader, on the other hand, is. Moreover, the foregoing shows that "Allah" is a proper name that can only be assigned to the True Abrahamic and monotheistic God, while "God" is a common term to denote the meaning of a particular god. In addition, the concept of Allah differs from the Biblical concept of God in some specific aspects and attributes related to the people of Israel or Jesus Christ. However, some translators prefer the translation equivalent of "God", which

transcends theological differences and is general enough, such as Verhoef who assumes that this is the same God (Verhoef, Personal Interview, April 10, 2019).

5. Description of the Research Corpus

In this chapter, we will discuss the three Dutch translators whose works form the research corpus of our article: Johannes Kramers, Frederik Leemhuis, and Eduard Verhoef. Several aspects will be examined, including their biographies, Quran translations, the reasons behind their translations, and methodologies.

Kramers' Translation of the Quran (1956)

Historically, the Quran translation by Leiden Arabist Johannes Hendrik Kramers (1891-1951) is considered the first Dutch translation "made directly from the original Arabic" (De Pijper, 1951-1952, p. 230). This first Dutch translation, made entirely from Arabic, appeared in 1956 (Kramers, 1992, p. XV). "It is a great pity that he was not fortunate enough to fully realise his highly commendable initiative to produce the first Dutch translation made directly from the Arabic text, as he had envisioned it, and with the critical apparatus he had in mind" (Drewes, 1960, p. 215). That is to say, this edition, found in the estate of the late Prof. Kramers, was not ready for printing (Drewes, 1960, p. 214). "Unfortunately, the notes Kramers wanted to add to his translation remained unfinished" (Bonebakker, 1957, p. 332).

Nevertheless, this important translation work was still completed. "Mrs Kramers-the Flemish Pleysier, rightly felt that she had to make her husband's work accessible to the Dutch public, for which she received the help of Dr R.W. van Duffelen" (Bonebakker, 1957, p. 332). The Arabist and diplomat, Dr. R.W. van Duffelen, completed the work and provided it with notes (Kramers, 1992). According to Drewes, Van Duffelen "limited his task to adding short introductory notes to each chapter and a summary annotation based on Kramers' notes in the margin. A short introduction precedes the translation, partly also drawn from found notes. An extensive index of names and subjects, written by Kramers himself, concludes the work" (Drewes, 1960, p. 214).

Kramers' translation of the Quran is characterised by complexity, especially in synthesis and sentence construction. Therefore, it cannot be used to learn Arabic, nor is it suitable for the average reader. "But this translation is not intended to aid the study of Arabic. For the average reader, however, such strangely constructed sentences hinder understanding, and thus do not belong in an edition intended for the general public" (Drewes, 1960, p. 215). This observation is echoed by Jansen, who believes that the translation is not only tricky "because it concerns a translation of one of the most difficult books in existence, but also because of the peculiar Dutch that has been used" (Kramers, 1992).

However, how can we explain this difficulty, given that the essential function of any translator is to bring the reader closer to the meaning of the source language? Kramers likely assumed, as Jansen notes, that the Quran is not written in the bland, flat, everyday language of humans but in the divine language of God and the angels (Kramers, 1992).

After more than four decades, Kramers' Quran translation was edited in 1992 by Jan Jansen and Asad Jaber. Several changes and adjustments were made to the original edition, including: a) The verses were printed with free line spacing, similar to modern translations of the Old Testament prophets; b) Minor omissions and errors were corrected; c) Notes were added, primarily aimed at non-Muslims; d) Several commentaries were used, including those by Paret, Bell, Ġalālayn, and Al-Bayḍāwī; e) Numerous parallels between the Quran and the Bible were indicated in the footnotes to help non-Muslim readers understand the Quran (Kramers, 1992).

Kramers' Quran translation remains an important resource for students, researchers, and interested readers studying Islam and the Quran. It is still widely referenced in the Dutch-speaking world despite its (unusual) prosaic style. "This is the strength of this monumental Quran translation, of which more than 50,000 copies have been sold, and not without reason" (Kramers, 1992).

Furthermore, many Dutch speakers consider this translation (along with Leemhuis's) highly authoritative (Hoekman, 2014).

Leemhuis' Quran translation (1989)

Leemhuis' Quran translation, like Kramers', is highly regarded by many Dutch readers. This translation was done directly in Arabic by Groningen Arabist Frederik Leemhuis and was first published in 1989 (Gent, 2019). The use of the term "rendering" may sound unusual to some, particularly to Wim Raven, who believes that "the word 'rendering' suggests a religious translation, but the unique aspect here is that a Muslim did not do it" (Raven, 1991, p. 276). However, Leemhuis clarified his intentions, stating that his translation aimed to "offer the Dutch reader the opportunity to understand the text as the majority of Muslims understands it" (Leemhuis, 1989).

Leemhuis' Quran translation consists of 440 pages, with the Arabic Quran text and the Dutch translation placed side by side. At the book's end is an afterword, an explanation, an index of names and subjects, and three Arabic pages regarding the Ḥafṣ reading version, along with several reading instructions (Leemhuis, 1989). This translation has been reprinted several times, with 16 editions published in 2014 (Gent, 2019).

Leemhuis was acutely aware of the challenges in rendering the Quran from Arabic into Dutch, acknowledging that certain aspects of the original text would be lost in translation. For this reason, he opted for "a rendering of the meaning of the Arabic text in contemporary Dutch that is as accessible as possible" (Leemhuis, 1990, p. 426). He avoided using exceptional word choices or sentence structures to approximate the original meaning. "The starting point for the translation was alignment with Islamic interpretations of the text. To this end, many classical and modern Arabic commentaries and studies have been useful to me, including the tafsir works of al-Djalalain, al-Baydawi, and At-Tabari" (Leemhuis, 1989).

Leemhuis was also mindful of the Quran's recitation. He based his translation on "the version of Ḥafṣ of the reading of 'Asim, as it became known through the Egyptian standard edition that was first published in 1923 and has been reprinted numerous times since then" (Leemhuis, 1989).

In addition, the original Arabic Quran text is included in Leemhuis' translation, which allows those proficient in Arabic to compare the translation with the original text. "Of course, many choices had to be made between various possible translations" (Leemhuis, 1989). Raven commented on this: "From the publicity given to this book, and also from the fact that the Arabic text is printed next to the translation, I infer that Leemhuis had a second goal: to provide Muslims in the Netherlands with a useful aid in their study of the Quran, untainted by the pedantry of the orientalisists" (Raven, 1991, p. 276).

Verhoefs' Quran translation (2015)

In 2015, the Quran translation by theologian and Bible translator Eduard Verhoef was published under *The Koran: Holy Book of Islam*. This title was criticised by Jan Jaap de Ruiter, who questioned the use of the word "holy" in the Quran. According to de Ruiter, holiness should be associated with noble values, beauty, and sublimity, which, in his view, contradict specific passages in the Quran. For example, Surah 9 (At-Tawbah, The Repentance), verse 29, urges Muslims to "fight those who do not believe in God and the Last Day... and who do not adhere to the true religion." Verhoef chose to translate the verb *qatala* in this verse as "to kill," which, according to de Ruiter, fits Verhoef's understanding of the holiness of the Quran (de Ruiter, 2015). Verhoef did not label the Quran as holy without reason. He explains:

"The belief that God revealed the Quran to Muhammad is a religious stance, and that is, of course, not up for debate. Everyone is free to believe whatever they wish. I try to understand the text as a document that shaped the Arabic world in the seventh century. In line with conventions in the Dutch language, I simply write that the individuals in question say or tell something. In doing so, I am not making any claims about whether the Quran is God's revealed word. That question lies outside the scope of this book" (Verhoef, 2016, p. 14).

It is also worth noting that Verhoef had a long-standing interest in the Quran well before his translation was published. In 2001, he began reading the Quran with about 25 villagers during the fasting month of Ramadan. While most of the group came from a Christian background, a few participants were from the Islamic tradition (Verhoef, 2016, p. 10). Additionally, Verhoef's fascination with Arabic, stemming from his earlier study of Semitic languages, further fuelled his interest in the Quran (Verhoef, 2016, p. 11). He began studying Arabic in 1993 and soon started reading parts of the Quran. Initially, the group used existing Dutch translations, but over time, they felt the need for a more contemporary text (Verhoef, 2016, p. 11).

Verhoef's Quran translation consists of over 380 pages, excluding the original Arabic text, and includes an introduction, a foreword, a justification, and a short index at the end. However, it should be noted that Verhoef's more detailed commentary on the Quran, explaining all the chapters, was published separately (Verhoef, 2017).

Regarding the translation process and methodology, Verhoef acknowledges several challenges that complicate translating the Quran into Dutch. He reflects on the influence of culture, grammar, and style. First, he emphasises that "the culture and time in which a text was written play a significant role. Every text bears the marks of the region where it originated." For instance, Verhoef points to words and imagery in the Quran, such as desert, paradise, and rivers, which are closely tied to the early seventh-century Arabian context (Verhoef, 2016, p. 13). Second, he highlights the grammatical differences between Arabic and Dutch, which pose additional difficulties. He notes that the Quran often contains sentences that, from a Dutch perspective, seem incomplete or awkwardly structured. Verhoef chose not to adjust his translation to align with conventional Dutch grammar (Verhoef, 2016, p. 13). Finally, the compact style of the Quran presents challenges, as "in Dutch, we would often prefer to add a phrase" to clarify meaning. Verhoef avoided adding such phrases, although the brevity of the original Arabic text sometimes made it challenging to adhere closely to the original (Verhoef, 2016, p. 13).

Despite these translation challenges, Verhoef produced an accessible translation for Muslims and non-Muslims. According to Mol, this translation "has the advantage of giving each verse its weight and expressiveness, though the downside is that the verses are harder to read as a continuous narrative. This can lead to a fragmented and ahistorical reading of the Quran, which can cause misunderstandings. However, Verhoef has clustered the verses, making them easier to read more coherently" (Mol, 2016).

6. Translation Analysis of the *Basmalah* Verse

Arabic text:

"بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ"

"*Bismi 'Allāhi 'ar-rahmāni 'ar-rahīm.*"

Dutch Translations of the Basmalah Verse:

Kramers (1956): "*In de naam van Allah, de Barmhartige Erbarmer.*"

Kramers (1992): "*In de naam van God,¹ de Barmhartige Erbarmer.*"

¹Compare. For example, Jeremiah 26:9: 'Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD?' and Colossians 3:17: 'Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus'.

Leemhuis (1989): "*In de naam van God, de erbarmer, de barmhartige.*"

Verhoef (2016): "*In de naam van God, de barmhartige, de genadevolle.*"

Translation Procedures (naturalisation, transference, notes, additions, glosses, synonymy)

Two translation procedures are used in the above translations to translate the keyword *الله* / *Allāh*. On the one hand, naturalisation is replacing a culture-specific word from the source language (SL) with a culture-related word from the target language (TL). "This procedure succeeds transference and adapts the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology (word forms) of

the TL" (Newmark, 1988, p. 82). On the other hand, transference is when a specific word is derived from the source language by the target language. That means that "transference (*emprunt*, loan word, transcription) is the process of transferring a SL word to a TL text as a translation procedure" (Newmark, 1988, p. 81). Most translators (editors of Kramers' Quran translation 1992; Leemhuis, 1989; Verhoef, 2016) have preferred naturalisation, replacing the original term *Allāh* with the translation equivalent 'God'. Only Kramers (1956) translated the word *Allāh* from Arabic into Dutch.

It should also be noted that the editors of Kramers's translation have commented in the footnote to indicate the word God. Here are the translation procedure notes, additions, and glosses used. The additional information a translator may have to add to his version is normally cultural, technical or linguistic (Newmark, 1988, p. 91).

In addition, the translation procedure synonymy is used to translate the two beautiful names of Allah: *Ar-Rahmān Ar-Rahīm*. The word synonymy is used (Newmark) "in the sense of a near TL equivalent to an SL word in a context where a precise equivalent may or may not exist. This procedure is used for an SL word with no clear one-to-one equivalent." Moreover, the synonymy is considered one of the important translation procedures because the translator cannot do without synonymy. "He has to make do with it as a compromise to translate more important segments of the text, segments of the meaning, more accurately" (Newmark, 1988, p. 84). Each translator tried to select the appropriate meaning from different synonyms of these terms. In the above translations, there are three variations of equivalents, namely: *de Barmhartige Erbarmer* (Kramers, 1956, 1992); *de erbarmer, de barmhartige* (Leemhuis, 1989) en *de barmhartige, de genadevolle* (Verhoef, 2016).

7. Finding the Translation Equivalent: God or Allah?

To what extent can we consider God as an appropriate translation equivalent for Allah? Exegetes, including Ibn Kathir and Al-Šābūnī, agree that Allah is the only God to be worshipped. Any superstition and shirk, polytheism is unacceptable. The absolute qualities (generosity, mercy, superiority, etc.) are only assigned to Allah. Do these qualities also apply to the concept of God as it was experienced, introduced and interpreted in Jewish and Christian theology?

The above-mentioned standpoints (Jaouhari, Alsulaiman, Koerts, Bassler, Durie) clearly distinguish between the concepts of Allah and God. Jaouhari refers to the presence of the Hellenistic and Christian elements in the concept of God in the Western translations of the Quran. At the same time, Alsulaiman states that Allah is a unique proper name to distinguish God from idols. Koerts even concludes that the God of the Quran (Allah) has a character that is entirely different from the God of the Bible. Moreover, Bassler has made several specific features of the Old Testament YHWH and the New Testament God explicit, which differ from Islamic Allah. This also applies to Durie, who deduces that some features of Biblical monotheism can be equated with those of the Quran. However, the theological focus of both books draws faith in the one God in very different directions. Does that mean that the proper name? (Newmark, 1988, pp. 214–215). Allah cannot be translated, and the word God is an inappropriate translation equivalent for it, as long as it does not live up to the original Quranic connotation of Allah.

Nevertheless, both Verhoef and Jansen (or the editors of Kramers's Quran translation) tried to justify the word God as the equivalent of Allah. Jansen assumes that Kramers left the Arabic word Allah untranslated, but nowadays, most translators would probably just like to translate Allah as "God". In his view, he bases himself on two reasons. On the one hand, Arab Christians also speak "Allah" when they mean "God". On the other hand, in the Quran, Allah refers to the God of the patriarch Abraham, the Only Creator of Heaven and Earth (in: Kramers, 1992, p. XVII). Verhoef also thinks the Dutch equivalent of "God" is most suitable for the Arabic "Allah". He has deliberately chosen, as the French "Dieu" is also translated as "God" where appropriate. Moreover, Christians (and Jews) in Arab countries use "Allah" for God without hesitation. "This corresponds to the word "Allah" in their Arabic editions of the Bible where the Dutch translations of God speak" (Verhoef, 2016, p. 14).

This justification can be discussed using the Islamic tawḥīd-expression. When we replace the word "Allah" in the first part of the Islamic testimony of faith: *lā 'ilāha 'illā 'Allāh* / there is no god but God, with the equivalent "God", there is a kind of confusion and vagueness in the meaning. The second "God" is capitalised (but can also be enclosed in quotation marks). The reader may notice the difference in writing, but it is phonetically impossible. Here is a concrete example from both editions of Kramers' Quran translation, the original and the edited.

Kramers (1956): "Weet dan, dat er geen ander **god** dan **Allah**." (47:19)

Kramers (1992): "Weet dan dat er geen ander **god** is dan **God**." (47:19)

In the second example, we cannot make a phonetic distinction between the Islamic and Abrahamic God, Allah, and any other god to be denied (*lā 'ilāha* / there is no god). The term *'ilāh* stands for every God, while Allah only means the True God in the Islamic and Quranic sense. Kramers was aware of this important difference, as seen in the first example. That is why he did not replace the proper name Allah but kept it or translated it (transference). The editors of Kramers' Quran translation (as well as Leemhuis and Verhoef) have capitalised God as the translation equivalent of Allah. However, they have not considered the equal pronunciation of the word God, whether it starts with uppercase or lowercase letters. For example, the audience cannot understand the real meaning of the Dutch translation of the Islamic creed. How is it that some Quran translators replace the untranslated proper name Allah with the word God while they transcribe other fundamental concepts, including ṣalāt and zakāt?

Another translation problem in Basmalah has to do with translating the two beautiful names/ attributes of Allah: *Ar-Raḥmān Ar-Raḥīm*. In the above translations, there are three variations of equivalents: de Barmhartige Erbarmer (Kramers, 1956, 1992); de erbarmer, de barmhartige (Leemhuis, 1989) and de barmhartige, de genadevolle (Verhoef, 2016).

Kramers has capitalised both properties (de Barmhartige Erbarmer) and wrote them together (without a comma). The second name (Erbarmer) has no article. However, Leemhuis and Verhoef have these two names (de erbarmer, de barmhartige; de barmhartige, de genadevolle) written with lowercase letters, with articles and separated with a comma.

Ar-Raḥmān is translated respectively to de Barmhartige, de erbarmer, de barmhartige, while *Ar-Raḥīm* is translated to Erbarmer, de barmhartige, de genadevolle. Where do these terms come from? Moreover, what criteria are translators based on when selecting these translation equivalents more than others?

The word barmhartig can be found in both Dutch Bible translations (Berentsma, 1941, p. 56) and old Dutch translations of the Quran. In Deut. 4:31, The property Barnhart (merciful) is attributed to God. Berentsma (1941, p. 56) translated *Ar-Raḥmān* to "des barmhartighen", while Glazemaker (1657, p. 55), Tollens (1859, p. 1), and Keyzer (1860) replaced *Ar-Raḥīm* by "barmhartige, barmhartigen en albarmhartigen" respectively" (Glazemaker, 1657, p. 55) (Tollens, 1859, p. 1) (Keyzer, 1860, p. 87). As the first modern Arabist, Kramers, who transferred the Quran directly from Arabic into Dutch, probably adopted the adjective Barnhart (merciful) from Berentsma, which in turn was influenced by contemporary Dutch Bible translations. On the other hand, the terms genadevol and erbarmer are not found in the Dutch Bible versions. Two items are meaningful and structurally related to genadevol: the adjective genadig (gracious) in Ex. 34:6 and the adverb genadiglijk (gracious) in Gal. 3:18.

The word barber as a divine quality or name is not at all found in the Dutch Bible. Etymologically, it is derived from "high German barmen, Gothic Arman, formed from the arm as a translation of Latin from misereri [feeling sorry], from miser [miserable, poor]" (Dale, Veen, & Sijs, 1997, p. 266). We can consider it synonymous with barmhartig (merciful) and genadevol (gracious).

These terms, which are related by meaning, are confused both in the above-mentioned translations of the *Basmalah* and in the Dutch language in general. However, both *Ar-Raḥmān Ar-Raḥīm* stands for grace and mercy in Arabic, but they differ theologically. On the one hand, they are only assigned to Allah. On the other hand, *Raḥmān* is related to worldly life and the hereafter, while

Raḥīm is only related to worldly life (Ibn Kathir, 1999, pp. 1/116-126). It is also more important to refer here to a tradition in which the Prophet Muhammad said, "Allah said: I am Allah and *Ar-Raḥmān*, I created the womb (*raḥim*), and my name is derived from it. Whoever keeps the family ties, Allah will have mercy on him, but whoever breaks these ties, Allah will not have mercy on him" (As-Siğistānī, 2009, p. 3/119).

Finally, it is worth noting that we have made every effort in this analysis to identify appropriate methodological mechanisms for analysing the concept of God in these Dutch translations of the Quran. This subject is new and relevant and has not been thoroughly explored by previous researchers. While there are earlier works on translating the Quran into Dutch, as mentioned in the introduction, we lack studies focusing on analysing and comparing these translations and investigating the biblical influence on the three discussed translators. This can be a significant challenge for any researcher because we must also find the appropriate methodology for analysing the translated texts and conducting a literature review. Moreover, this work involves interdisciplinary research, where literary analysis intersects with theology and exegesis

8. Conclusion

To what extent can we now speak of the possible impact of the Biblical reference framework in selecting the word God as the translation equivalent of the proper name Allah? We can assume that the Biblical reference framework is present on two levels in the above translations. First, the term God implicitly carries a particular theological and philosophical charge (Hellenistic, Biblical, Christian) that is partly distinct from the concept of Allah in the Quran and Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Even if the translator does not mean that the term God still refers to a particular dogma that falls outside the Islamic reference framework, this probably confuses the understanding of the ordinary reader who lacks basic knowledge of the Quran because he cannot distinguish between Biblical and Quranic God on the one hand and between Biblical and Quranic monotheism on the other. In this way, he may fail to understand the original meaning of the Quran. Second, the influence of the Bible is explicitly expressed, especially by the editors of Kramers's Quran translation. In a footnote about the word God, Jer. 26: 9 and Col. 3:17 are quoted. Regardless of the content of these two quotations, the Biblical reference framework appears visible in this edition of Kramers's translation of the Quran, both in the footnotes and in the text. In addition, we cannot ignore the Biblical impact of selecting the divine name or attribute *barmhartig*, especially because *barmhartigheid* (mercy) is a core concept in Christianity considered of great value.

That does not mean that giving preference to "God" as the translation equivalent of "Allah" reduces the literary quality of the translation. The aim is not to make a judgment about a particular translation or a translator of the research corpus but to examine to what extent the Biblical reference framework influences the translation of this fundamental concept about which some theological differences arise between the Quran and the Bible, as discussed earlier in this article.

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