Philosophical production through translation: The Kindī-circle and development of an Arab philosophy tradition

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ABSTRACT

With this article, I would like to participate in the philological oriented discussion of Graeco-Arabic Studies on the Kindī-circle from a translatological perspective. Despite all their differences, the Kindī-circle translations share a lexical and partially syntactical orientation towards Greek as their source language. In the research that has been done until now, this source-language-orientation is often traced back to a supposed lack in language abilities. Based on the awareness raised in Translation studies that translations – especially but not only in the field of science and philosophy –often do not serve the subsidiary purpose of making a text accessible to persons who do not have sufficient knowledge of the source language, I try to carve out the translational intentions of the circle by situating the Kindī-translations within the nascent Arabic system of philosophy and science. In doing so, it can be seen that the translation strategies of the translators are not attributable to inadequate language abilities, but rather play a vital role in the development of an Arabic philosophical tradition and terminology. This leads me to arguing for describing those translations as "philosophical translations" (Heller 2017).

KEYWORDS: Abbasid translation movement; translators' intentions, Kindī-circle; philosophical translation

Introduction

The role of translation in the scientific and philosophical field has gained increasing interest over the last years both in translation studies (cf. Olohan and Salama-Carr 2011; Rioufreyt 2014; Olohan 2016; Heller 2017/2019; Rawling and Wilson 2018; Schögler 2018/2019; Wei and Yu 2019) and in the history of science (cf. Montgomery 2000/2009/2010; Wright 2000; Saliba 2007; Cook and Dupré 2012; Dietz 2016). While many scholars - historians of science and philosophy as well as some Translation studies scholars - conceptualize translational processes merely as transfer processes and see the positive effect of translation in the circulation and dissemination of knowledge, there is a growing understanding of the translations' role in the construction of knowledge. Maeve Olohan and Myriam Salama-Carr (2011:180), for

instance, bear in mind "the contingency of knowledge, the complexities involved in its communication and circulation, and how it is shaped and reshaped in and through translation". The concept of translation limited to the circulation and transfer of scientific and philosophical knowledge is closely linked to the conception of science as being eminent immutable ideas, a conception that has already been challenged by Sarukhai, who reminds us that "[t]he writing of science is not only a representation of the ideas of science; it is also integral to the creation of new meaning and truth claims" (2002:1). In addition, Rafael Schögler (2018) challenges the traditionally drawn distinction between an idea and the context in which it has been developed. Instead of a transfer of knowledge, he describes translation as an act of creative transformation that reinterprets knowledge in a new context and, hence, as an act of knowledge-making itself (2019:10). In the following section, I would like to deal with a historical case of translation of philosophy in the context of the so-called Abbasid translation movement (8^{th}-10^{th} century) that illustrates in an impressive manner the ways in which translation can be used productively in philosophical discourses.

The Abbasid translation movement and its impact on the development of an Arabic (and subsequently western) tradition of knowledge has rarely been considered in Translation studies until now, with few exceptions such as Salama-Carr (1990/2006) and Said Faiq (2000/2005/2012). All the greater was the attention that the Arabic translations of Greek philosophical works have gained by Arabists and historians of philosophy and science, but still, many questions yet have to be solved, and offer ample reasons for discussion; such as the question of *when* the translation movement began (cf. Saliba 2007), *what* the motivation behind the translation movement was (Saliba 2007/Gutas 1998), *which* role of the rulers had in the commission of translations, and much more.

I do not want to get involved in these discussions but rather turn to a very specific case of translation of Greek philosophical texts[1] into Arabic: the Kindī-group of translators, who attracted attention with a strong source-text – oriented translation method. Many scholars from different disciplines were interested in the Greek-Arabic translation processes that I will refer to as Graeco-Arabic Studies for the sake of simplicity. However, I would like to point out here

[1] The distinction between philosophy and science is a phenomenon of modern times and can be traced back to the 20^{th} century. In light of the historical setting of this article, I will not distinguish between philosophy and science. Whenever I speak of *philosophy*, *philosophical texts* or the like, I refer to philosophy and science likewise. Where I refer to the modern concept of philosophy, I will make this quite clear to the reader.

that this is quite a hybrid group of researchers with different (philological, philosophical or historical) approaches[2]. Some of these scholars – especially those who follow a philological approach but also some of those who follow a philosophical approach (see the accusations of Nasr 2006:16[3]) – addressed the Abbasid translation movement out of a particular research interest that concerns the ancient Greek cultural heritage 'hidden' in the Arabic texts and the hope of either improving readings of respective Greek texts or identifying texts that survived only in Arabic. This research interest is striking, especially during the first hundred years of Graeco-Arabic Studies that began around the middle of the nineteenth century, but is still observed in recent Graeco-Arabic research. The following quote from the *A Digital Corpus of Graeco-Arabic Studies* website reflects this interest in excavating and reconstructing ancient Greek thought:

> Most importantly, Arabic translations were crucial for preserving, transmitting and extending ancient Greek thought: many Greek texts were lost in the intervening centuries and are now only extant in Arabic translation. The Arabic translators also had access to manuscripts that were often several centuries older and potentially closer to the Greek originals than those available to editors of ancient Greek texts today (Digital Corpus).[4]

The question can be asked whether these research interests allow an unobstructed view of what the translations meant to the Kindī-group themselves. In the following, I will focus on the questions of which intentions the Kindī-group of translators followed and which aims they tried to fulfill with their translations. In the first instance, I will give a rough introduction into the Greek-Arabic translation movement as well as into the work and life of al-Kindī, focusing on those aspects that will be important for my following argumentation. I will then work to describe the translation strategies of the Kindī-group, andto reconstruct the reasons why they have often been subject to fierce criticism, both from contemporary and from modern scholars.

[2] As far as I know there are no translatological writings on the translations produced around al-Kindi so far. I hope that I will be able to stimulate this discussion with some insights gained from a translatological perspective.

[3] Nasr criticizes the „excessive historicism of earlier works" (2006:17) in which Islamic philosophical ideas are only of archeological interest. He rather encourages those philosophers who study Islamic philosophy „as a living school of thought […] treating Islamic metaphysical and philosophical ideas as something of innate philosophical value". One of the first (if not the very first) who studied the philosophy of al-Kindi as philosophy in its own right was Adamson (2007). In exactly the same way as Seyyed Hussein Nasr tries to ask „what a particular philosophical idea must have meant as philosophical idea to those who held it and cotemplated it" (ibid.), I aim to ask what the translations of the Kindi-group meant to the Kindi-group themselves, which intentions they followed and what long-time effects can be observed, rather than how ‚authentically' the thoughts of the Greek philosophers were preserved in the translations.

[4] "https://www.graeco-arabic-studies.org/about.html (accessed 24.04.2020)" is the online source for the *Digital Corpus of Graeco-Arabic Studies.*

I will then work to develop an alternative narrative regarding the translation-intentions of the group.

The Kindī-circle and its position within the Abbasid translation movement

Abū Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, born around 800 in Basra in today's Iraq, was a scholar with a broad interest in the so-called *ancient sciences* (علوم الأوائل)[5], especially the Greek heritage. He descended from the old powerful Kinda tribe.[6] Within the tribe, al-Kindī belonged to a privileged family, so we can assume that he was in a strong financial position. At the culmination of his career, al-Kindī worked as a tutor and professor for Prince Ahmad, the son of the caliph al-Muʿtasim (reg. 833-842) to whom he dedicated several of his writings. The scientific oeuvre he left is quite broad: The Arab bibliographer Ibn an-Nadīm lists 264 treatises of al-Kindī in his bibliographic book *al-Fihrist*. In these 264 treatises, al-Kindī discusses different fields of knowledge such as philosophy, logic, geometry, psychology, ethics, music, astronomy, medicine, and politics. In other words, al-Kindī was one of the polymaths of his time.The important point to note with al-Kindī is that he was the first Arab scholar to emphasize ontological questions, catching up on Plato and Aristotle's classical philosophical traditions, which is why he is also called the first Arab philosopher.

In the wake of this reception process, a great translation movement that lasted for more than two centuries (8.-10 C.E/H.E) took place. The majority of the Abbasid society's upper class endeavored to have all available Greek (but also some Sanskrit) ancient texts translated into Arabic. Some of the sponsors of translations were savants themselves, such as al-Kindī, but even the caliphs, princes, politicians and merchants played a major role when it came to supporting and sponsoring translation activities. As recent research shows, the Abbasid research society was characterized by numerous rivalries between scholars competing for the largest influence and the best position at court. Cooper (2016a:43-49) demonstrates that after receiving a new translation of an ancient text, scholars did not share it with their colleagues, but rather hid it in their private libraries because any additional translation meant securing a comparative

[5] The term *ancient sciences* denotes the knowledge that the Arabs absorbed from their Greek, Persian and Indian predecessors. These *ancient sciences* were distinguished from the so-called *Islamic Sciences* (علوم إسلامية), which included the Islamic law, Arabic linguistics and Islamic dialectic theology (Kalām).

[6] The tribe of *Kinda* is an old, powerful tribe that originated in South Arabia, the territory of today's Jemen. In the fifth and sixth centuries, they spread over the entire Arab Peninsula and kept their powerful position after the spread of Islam. For further information see Leube (2017).

advantage over rivalling colleagues. This assumption is confirmed by Arab historians' reports that al-Kindī's private library was very large.

Often, Greek texts were not translated directly from Greek, but via Syriac; several reasons can be found for this. The Abbasid translation movement was preceded by a Syriac translation practice,[7] especially in the Christian cities of Antiochia and Edessa. Most translators of the Abbasid translation movement were Christians themselves and descendants of the Greek-Syriac translation tradition. Therefore, it might have been the case that they might have had faster access to the Syriac translations. An additional explanation could be the fact that Syriac was the mother tongue of most Christian translators. Arabic, the official language of the Abbasid Empire, was their second language. Only a few translators had knowledge of the Greek language, thanks to their clerical education. All others had to make do with Syriac source texts. One can even observe the phenomena that translators with linguistic skills in Greek translated original Greek texts into Syriac and left the translation into Arabic for colleagues who worked exclusively from Syriac.[8]

Al-Kindī was not a translator himself. He was not versed in Greek (or not sufficiently) but he commissioned three translators –Eustahios, Ibn Nāʿima and Ibn al-Biṭrīq –to translate Greek texts into Arabic.

Ibn al-Biṭrīq was the most productive translator of the circle. For al-Kindī, he translated:

- Aristotle: *Prior Analytics* (the translation is lost today)
- Aristotle: *On the Heavens*
- A late antique compendium of the *Meteorology* of Aristotle
- Aristotle: *Physics* (lost today)
- Plato: *Timaeus* (lost today)
- A probably late antique compendium of Aristotle's writing *On the Soul*
- Parts of Proclus: *Institutio theologica*

[7] Strictly speaking, the Syriac translation practice did not only precede the Abbasid translation movement but continued to take place parallelly to the translation practice into Arabic.
[8] We notice this phenomenon especially within the Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq translator group. For further readings see Salama-Carr (1990).

Eustahios translated:

- Aristotle: *Metaphysics*
- Aristotle: *Nikomachean Ethics* (Parts V-X of the translation are available today)

Ibn Nāʿima is presumed to have translated only *Enneads IV-VI* by Plotinus. The translation of Plotinus was falsely passed on in Arabic as *Theology of Aristotle*.[9]

We can see that most of the texts were originally written by Aristotle, which once again demonstrates the circle's interest in the Greek philosophical tradition, something that was unique at that time. However, this interest is not the only striking feature of al-Kindī and his translators. The Kindī-group's translation strategies that have provoked criticism in contemporary and modern philologist research (to which I will refer to in more detail later) are also intriguing.

Translation strategies of the Kindī-group

Examinating the translations made by the Kindī-group reveals some common characteristics, not uniformly shared by all its translators, but linking several texts with al-Kindī (Endress 1997). All translations include the use of loan-words and transliterated Greek terms, as well as the use of loan translations, the formation of abstract nouns, other neologisms, and the transition from the pre-scientific, ad hoc use of Arabic equivalents to a systematic and consistent terminology (Endress 1997:59). In other words, we can say that all the Kindī-circle translations share a striking lexical orientation towards the source language. Regarding further characteristics, the al-Kindī translations can be divided into two groups: the translations that go directly back to an Aristotelian text (the *Metaphysics*, the *Nikomachean Ethics* and *On the Heavens*) share a strong dependence on the source language, both linguistically *and* syntactically. For example, when Ibn al-Biṭrīq translated *On the Heavens*, another Syriac-Arabic translation of the text already existed (Endress 1966:38). Ibn al-Biṭrīq built his translation on the existing translation, revising it not only in terms of misunderstandings but also modifying the terminology (Endress 1966:38-39). It is recognizable that, in doing so, Ibn

[9] The question whether al-Kindī and/or his translator Ibn Nāʿima were the initiator of this false attribution or whether it can be traced back to later copyists gave raise to intensive discussions. My reflections on the Kindī-circle are based on the second assumption; but the hypothesis that I will try to set up in the following is compatible with both options. For further readings about this discussion on the *Theology of Aristotle* see Adamson (2002) and D'Ancona (2004).

al-Biṭrīq made a great effort to utilize a consistent terminology (Endress 1966:41). Moreover, he tried to approximate the Greek sentence structure:

> The reviser [Ibn al-Biṭrīq] often succeeds either with more […], or with less words […], not just to reproduce the meaning more accurately, but also to reach a more literal agreement and […] to recreate the sentence structure of the Greek more faithfully (Endress 1966:39-40).[1]

Ibn al-Biṭrīq did not always succeed in reproducing the Greek syntax, so we also find paraphrastic explanations, but one can definitely see his struggle to represent the Greek sentence structure successfully in the Arabic translation.

Similar observations can be made when looking at the translation of the *Metaphysics* by Eustahios, which Dimitri Gutas describes as "slavishly literal" (Gutas 1998:143). He also made great efforts in order to realize a lexical and syntactical orientation towards the Greek original (Mattock 1989:79-97). Although he follows the basic rules of Arabic syntax, he tries to approach the Greek as closely as possible within these boundaries.

Besides their orientation towards the Greek lexis, all other translations (namely, the compendia of *On the Soul* and of the *Meteorology* as well as the translations of *Institutio theologica* and of the *Enneads*) share the function of a commentary. This means that the translators involved themselves as commentators and introduced their own thoughts into the philosophical discourse of the text without explicitly indicating it.[1] For example, Ibn al-Biṭrīq changed the structure of the compendium of the text *On the Soul* and added comments of a noticeable monotheistic character (Endress 1973:72). He acted similarly when translating the compendium of the *Meteorology*, arranging the chapters differently, leaving out some paragraphs while summarizing others. In some paragraphs, Ibn al-Biṭrīq disagrees with Aristotle, so the translation leaves even more of an impression of a commentary. Ibn Nāʿima's Plotinus shows the same commentary function. It seems that Ibn Nāʿima was keen to clarify Plotinus' argumentation, interpret his position, correct his theory and add his own comments. This fusion of translation and commentary is not a unique phenomenon of Kindī-translations; just think of the tradition of vernacular translations throughout the later European Middle Ages that has

[1] All translations from German are produced by me unless referenced in the bibliography.

[1] To some readers of this article, the combination of these two strategies, the strong orientation towards the Greek lexis on the one hand and the eye-catching commentary inventions of the translator on the other, might seem paradoxical at first sight. As I will try to show in the third part of this article, this supposed paradox is a deliberate part of the group's translation purpose.

strong affinities with exegetical practice - and where the issue of authorship was rather fluid (Copeland 1995:87-97).[1] [2]

Alongside common translation strategy features, the Kindī-circle shares the use of a common terminology. For example, the use of the neologism أيس (it is) and ليس (it is not) to distinguish between εἶναι (it is) and μὴ εἶναι (it is not) is characteristic. A second example of the Kindī-circle's special language use is the use of وجد (to be/to exist) and its pair كوّن (to become)[1] to distinguish between ὑπάρχειν (to be) and γίγνεσθαι (to become).[1] It is interesting that al-Kindī uses precisely this terminology in his own philosophical writings.[1] [4] [5]

The classical view on the Kindī-group translations

The Kindī-group translations have been subject to fierce criticism both of contemporary and modern scholars.

It is not surprising that the terminological work of al-Kindī and his group of translators was deprecated by contemporaries when we keep the new developing Arab linguistics in mind who did not aim to show how the Arab language *is* but rather how it *should be.* With its strongly prescriptive character, they aimed at standardizing the Arab language grammatically and lexically, and to counteract new linguistic influences. (Endress 1986:175)

From the second half of the 8th century onwards, Classical Arabic became widely accepted and acted as a unifying force in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual society of the Abbasid Empire. During the lifetime of al-Kindī and his group of translators, Classical Arabic was in its heyday and adherence to its rules was of immense importance.

> It reached to the point where, in their point of view, grammatical mistakes were some of the worst mistakes of courtly life. In their circles, you would move to a high rank based on a single story you told, or even a single adequate term you used (Rosenthal 1942:262).

[1] In this regard it is also interesting that the Latin term *interpretation* in antiquity includes the meaning of 'exegesis' as well as the meaning of 'translation' (Copeland 1995:88).

[1] Today *kawwana* means *to cause/to form/to create*. At the time of al-Kindī, the meaning of "kawwana" was not as clear; rather, numerous meanings coexisted. It is striking that al-Kindī tried to define the word with the meaning *to become*, even if it failed to establish itself later on.

[1] For a more detailed terminological analysis, see Endress (1973:76-80).

[1] This common use of terminology and translation strategies allows us to speak of a 'group' of translators, as I would like to argue.

Every savant, regardless of his field, had to respect these linguistic norms and language style - especially if they tried to achieve a position at the court. Such an adoption of pecularities of the courtly language (especially parallelisms and series of synonyms) can also be found in the writings of al-Kindī, for example in the introduction to his philosophical epistle *On the unity of God and the finiteness of world bodies* (al-Kindī UG:201). However, such an attempt at adaptation was not sufficient to meet the high expectations of the linguists. Al-Kindī faced as much criticism as his translators because of his philosophical terminology, which resembled that of the translations of his circle. One example of such criticism is the report on the debate between the scholars as-Sīrāfī and Abū Bišr Mattā, which contains a parody of al-Kindī's writing-style, imitating his philosophical terminology. (Adamson 2007:17-18)

One very prominent critic of al-Kindī and the translations of his group, who is also associated with the Arabic linguistics just described, is the Adab literat al-Ǧāḥiẓ, who – talking about the translation of the Meteorology of Ibn al-Biṭrīq – warns of the lies of translation (كذب الترجمة) and additions/accretions of the translator (زيادة) whom he accuses of being ignorant of how to transport (نقل) from one language to another (al-Ǧāḥiẓ Book of Animals part 6:280). Al-Ǧāḥiẓ does not only criticize the translation of the Meteorology but he also shows a scepticism towards translation in general:

> A translator must have an understanding of translation itself, and knowledge of the subject matter. And he or she must have sufficient and equal knowledge of the people from the language from which the translation is made and the language into which it is made. If we also find someone who speaks two languages, we also know that he does wrong to both, because each of the two languages acts upon the other, borrows from it and contradicts it. And how can someone speak two languages as well as if he spoke only one? (al-Ǧāḥiẓ Book of Animals Part 1:76)

Another interesting commentary on the translations of the Kindī group can be found in the literary work of aṣ-Ṣafadī (died 1363) – al-Ġaiṯ al-musaǧǧam – in which he assigns the translators of the Greek-Arabic translations to two different translation methods and in doing so, raises the topical question of translation units.

The first group of translators – he mentions al-Biṭrīq and Ibn Nāʿima as examples – study the meaning of every single word and try to translate it into an Arabic word with similar meaning. He claims that this strategy is bad (ردينة), firstly, because not every Greek word has its Arabic equivalent, which is why the translator keeps many words untranslated, and secondly, because of the syntactical differences between the two languages.

The second group of translators – for which he uses Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq as example, possibly the most famous translator of his time who mainly translated writings of Galen into Arabic – read the whole sentence before they turn its meaning into a correct Arabic sentence. This method is the better one in his opinion (aṣ-Ṣafadī in: Salama-Carr 1990:64-65).

This rather negative assessment of the Kindī-translations is also reflected in modern philological research. Here, the Kindī-translators are criticized especially due to a supposed lack of language ability in Arabic and Greek, their unusual language use, for changing the source text, and for exhibiting a lack of stylistic elegance (cf. Rosenthal 1992:22; Endress 1973:153-154; Endress 1997:59; Blau 1988:311).
Combing through the literature while dealing with the Abbasid translation movement, one realizes that the early translations, including those of the Kindī-circle, are judged worse than the translations of Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq and the translators of his group.[1] **6**

> Most early translations were rather clumsy, and it could happen at any time that a translator with a mind of his own followed his personal taste. However, Ḥunain and his school, in which his son, Isḥāq b. Ḥunain (died 910) and his nephew Ḥubaish were prominent, succeeded in coining an authoritative terminology and attaining a high and genuinely Arabic quality of linguistic expression (Rosenthal 1992:8).

Franz Rosenthal has little confidence in the early translations and warns of a lack of objectivity by the translators when he talks about them having "a mind of [their] own" and accuses them of following their own "personal taste". His formulation that Ḥunain and his group of translators reached "a high and genuinely Arabic quality of expression" indicates not only that the early translators, by which he refers to the Kindī-group, were lacking language abilities, but also that they were speaking a less authentic form of Arabic. He is not the only one who confronts the al-Kindī translators with not following grammatical rules and language styles. Endress (1973:153) writes about the Kindī-circle translations: "The older translators were still incapable of putting the Greek or Syriac originals into an appropriate Arabic linguistic form, which combines content-related fidelity with the ideals of the 'ʿArabiya'". By doing so, he points out not only the uncommon use of language that does not respect the rules of Classical Arabic, but he also accuses the translators of a lack of textual fidelity. Due to the lexical orientation in the source text, the translation misses some content and "stylistic elegance" (Endress 1973:154).

[1] For more information about[6]Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq and his group of translators, see Salama-Carr (1990/1997) and Cooper (2016b).

It can be assumed that Joshua Blau likewise referred to the Kindī-Circle translations when he wrote that many early Christian-Arabic translations of Greek texts were "so literal and clumsy, that the style can hardly be called Arabic any longer" (Blau 1988:311). The stylistic peculiarities of the Kindī-translations and their complexity made the text so incomprehensible in parts that even the reader needs help from the Greek source text to understand it (cf. Kunitzsch 1976:127).

As for the question of *why* the al-Kindī translators oriented themselves towards the Greek syntax when translating, Endress has a simple explanation: "[S]ome of the translators were not very good Arabists themselves, tending to fall back on Greek and Syriac whenever accepted Arabic equivalents were lacking" (Endress 1997:59).

This explanation received a favorable reception from other Graeco-Arabic researchers. Taking into account the concept of translation that dominates the discourse, it stands to reason why: from an analytical look at the aforementioned critics, we observe a basic assumption according to which the primary purpose of translations consists in the transfer of meaning. This assumption of the primary function of translation in turn precedes the belief that meaning can be transferred from one language into another withouth altering it, and without detaching it from its linguistic shell and surrounding it with another language. In general, the purpose of translation is seen in the transfer and transformation of cultural assets, as we can discern from the quotation of the *Digital Corpus* that I cited at the beginning of the article, in which they say: "Most importantly, Arabic translations were crucial for preserving, transmitting and extending ancient Greek thought". Accordingly, a translation serves as *preserver* of the thought contained in the source text.

Considering the transfer of cultural assets as the main purpose of translation and, subsequently, the transfer of meaning as a translator's main task, it becomes clear why textual fidelity (cf. Endress 1973:13) is considered one of the main goals and, at the same time, one of the main quality characteristics of a translation alongside with stylistic elegance (ibid.) and readability (cf. Biesterfeldt 1995).

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the Kindī-group translations are considered 'bad translations'. Due to the extreme lexical and syntactical orientation towards the Greek language,

the translations of Aristotelian texts offer neither a clear presentation of the philosophical ideas of the source text nor a language style that respects the standardized rules of Classical Arabic, making it harder for modern researchers to reconstruct the Greek original texts. Neither does the commentary function of the circle's 'commentary translations' allow for an unobstructed view of the Greek original. Rather, the translators take the liberty of modifying the philosophical ideas inscribed in the source text. Considering the acceptance of relay-translations in those days and bearing in mind *why* relay-translations were made (due to lack of Greek among some translators), it seems plausible that the source- text oriented translation method of the Kindī-translators is based on a lack of language abilities as well.

Especially, but not only in the philosophical field, it is insufficient to limit the reason for a translation to its secondary function, which is to make the philosophical text accessible to a readership that has no or insufficient knowledge of the source language. Large (2018:312-314) adds four additional main reasons for a translation of a philosophical text: Firstly, the use of translation as a medium of exegesis of the philosophy itself. Translation, of course, is always an interpretation, whether conscious or not, but it can be used intentionally in order to clarify and resolve ambiguities. Secondly, Large attributes a "reinvigorating impact on indigenious philosophical traditions" (Large 2018:313) to translation, regardless of nature and quality of the translation. The third intention lies in the desire to enrich one's own mother tongue in its emergence as a literary and philosophical language. And fourthly, the intention of translating a philosophical text may be the wish of an individual translator to develop and extend their own philosophical horizon.

Against this backdrop, it seems justified to raise the question of what the intentions of the Kindī-translators themselves were. I would like to work these out in the following. I will therefore try to demonstrate the key issues in al-Kindī's philosophical writings, primarily from his most important philosophical treatise *On the First Philosophy* (FP). This analysis is vital in order to understand al-Kindī's philosophical objectives. Considering his philosophical goals is important because it assumes the group's translational intentions and makes comprehensibe which makes the strategic role comprehensible that translation played within the philosophical discourse of that time. At the same time, I will situate the philosophical and translational objectives of the Kindī-circle in their socio-historical contexts.

In search of translational intentions

The reader of al-Kindī's philosophical treatises will notice that al-Kindī covers many theological topics. This fact is related to several developments that accompanied the so-called *Abbasid revolution*, the dynastic change from Umayyads to Abbasids in 750 AC. Ruling over a population that was overwhelmingly non-Arab as well as non-Muslim, the Umayyads promoted an Arabo-centric political line. Non-Arabs were treated as second-class citizens, regardless of whether they converted to Islam. The discontent among Shia-Muslims, Sunni-Muslims that were non-Arabs and non-Muslims, allowed the emergence of a political movement called *Hāšimiya*. The Hāšimiya-movement rebelled against the Umayyad Caliphate and accused it of breaking Islamic law. At the same time, they promised their supporters that their own rule, implemented with the takeover of the Abbasids, was based on the same principles. The problem was that at the time, no one had a firm grasp on the contents of Islamic law. As Nagel (2004:107) points out, it was easy to discuss, but much harder to create. This was the great challenge of the early Abbasid Caliphate. The life of al-Kindī was still characterized by efforts to define the contents of Islamic law. The confrontation led to disputes within Abbasid society concerning the Empire's theological grounds. Questions about man's free will and whether or not the Quran was created occupied society's educated class. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that these theological questions are also reflected in the writings of al-Kindī. It is interesting that in questioning theological topics, al-Kindī avoids the use of religiously shaped words such as *god*, *creator* or *created things*. Rather, he tries to implement a more general philosophical terminology by speaking of *the first cause* (العلة الأولى), *the first true complete Agent* (الأول التام الفاعل الحق) and by differentiating between *the true One* (الواحد الحق) and those who are *one metaphorically* (واحد بالمجاز). With his use of philosophical terminology, al-Kindī distances himself from other social groups that handle theological questions such as the Islamic Traditional Scholars or the Muʿtazila.[1] 7

A second decisive observation that can be made when reading the philosophical writings of al-Kindī carefully concerns his relation to Aristotle. On the one hand, from the way al-Kindī writes about Aristotle, the reader has the impression that al-Kindī is a great admirer of his 'philosophical forefather'. In *On the First Philosophy,* for instance, he initiates a quotation by

[1] The Muʿtazila was a group of representatives of a rational, speculative, dialectic theology that advocated the doctrine that the Quran was created; in doing so, the group confronted the Islamic Traditional Scholars who supported the belief that the Quran is uncreated and therefore timeless and not restricted to a geographical area.

Aristotle with the following words: "Aristotle, the most distinguished of the Greeks in Philosophy, said" (Al-Kindī 1970:59). Moreover, he writes separate articles on Aristotle; for example, his treatise *On the Number of Aristotle's Books*, wherein he gives advice on the proper order in which Aristotle's writings should be read by students of philosophy. The assumption that al-Kindī admires Aristotle is confirmed by the fact that the great majority of texts for which al-Kindī ordered translations are Aristotle's texts.

However, on the other hand, it appears that on many philosophical questions, al-Kindī diverges from Aristotle. For instance, he rejects the Aristotelian thesis of the eternity of the world and instead, defends the idea of a created world. Moreover, he rejects the Aristotelian theory of sense perception and instead distinguishes between the human intellect and the *First Intellect* (العقل الأول). According to al-Kindī, the single human intellects are capable of universal concepts, but to activate this capability requires the aid of the *First Intellect*. The First Intellect can cause the human intellect to think about a certain universal concept. Once a human has thought about a certain universal concept, he or she can from then on reflect on this concept at any time without the help of the First Intellect. So, strictly speaking, al-Kindī rejects the Aristotelian theory of sense perception only in parts. He agrees with Aristotle insofar as he is convinced that a human being can explore the world around them and grasp perceptible forms. But when it comes to grasping universal forms, al-Kindī claims that the human intellect relies on the First Intellect.[1]

It is not my intention to maintain that there is a contradiction between admiration and philosophical disagreement. On the contrary, critics and disagreement can be called the vital essence of philosophical discourse. Still, it seems that al-Kindī considered Aristotle to be a great philosopher, but not because of his philosophical ideas. The question that arises is what it is for which al-Kindī admires Aristotle. To get to the bottom of this question, I would like to quote a part of *On the First Philosophy*, in which al-Kindī criticizes a group of contemporaries[1] for having less knowledge of the "methods of truth".

> […] while being wary of the bad interpretation of many strangers to the truth who are in our day acclaimed for speculation [Naẓar]. If they are crowned undeservedly

[1] For a deeper insight into the philosophical viewpoints of al-Kindī, I recommend Adamson (2007).

[1] Many discussions were raised on the topic of which group of contemporaries al-Kindī addresses with this critical quotation. Ivry (1976) believes that al-Kindī responds to the Muʿtazila, which seems plausible because the term Naẓar, here translated with 'speculation' usually referred to the Muʿtazila at the time. We can even find quotations in primary literature, in which the Muʿtazila are called *Ahl an-Naẓar* (family of those who speculate).

> with the miters of truth, it is due to their narrow understanding of /the methods of truth and their scant knowledge of what Majesty requires as regards opinion and judgement in those /common universal usages which prevail among them (Al-Kindī 1970:97).

One thing is very clear from this quotation. To al-Kindī, knowledge and correct usage of philosophical methods of inquiry are of great significance. Coming back to the question of why al-Kindī admired Aristotle and taking into account that Aristotle was not only well known because of his additional thoughts about issues initiated by Plato, but also because of the methodological basis he offered, it seems plausible to assume that al-Kindī had the Aristotelian logic, the syllogism, and philosophical concepts in mind when he criticized a group of contemporaries (probably the Muʿtazila) for their lacking knowledge of the "methods of truth". These philosophical methodologies and concepts are, as I would like to argue, exactly what al-Kindī aims to adopt from Aristotle.

With this specific interest of al-Kindī in mind, we can see that the lexical and syntactical orientation towards the Greek source text, which was often criticized as clumsy, had a philosophical purpose. This translation method offered al-Kindī the opportunity to look at the latent meaning-making structures of the texts, to follow Aristotle's train of thought and to grasp how Aristotle used the Greek language when philosophizing and – vice versa – which opportunities the Greek language provided for the activity of philosophizing. The syntactical and lexical orientation towards the source text in the translations of *On the Heavens,* the *Nicomachean Ethics,* and the *Metaphysics* is attributable to a conscious, strategic translational decision and does *not* imply a lack of Arabic language skills, as Endress (1997:59) assumes. Against this backdrop, it becomes even clearer why the translators Ibn al-Biṭrīq and Eustahios spared no effort to obtain the Greek originals and did not use Syriac translations as source texts for the Arabic translations, as they had in some cases with the Neoplatonic philosophers' translations, and as was common in other translator groups at the time.

Al-Kindī's special interest in *how* Aristotle philosophized explains his strong orientation towards the Greek syntax when translating texts that date directly back to Aristotle. Still, there is one issue that remains to be resolved: how can we interpret the strong lexical orientation towards the Greek original and the many newly created words? It seems as if al-Kindī and his translators had a second purpose in mind apart from observing the Aristotelian way of philosophizing. As already mentioned, al-Kindī was the first *Arab* philosopher in the Greek

tradition. In other words, he was the first who used the Arab language to form and develop theories. In doing so, he had to recognize that the Arab language lacked evolved philosophical terminology. Classical Arabic, the language of the northern Arabic tribes, was first and foremost a language of poetry. It also served a religious purpose for the dissemination of Islam. During al-Kindī's lifetime, the Arabic scientific and philosophical language was only beginning to develop in discussions and translations of Greek scientific and philosophical texts. During the first reception period of ancient texts, scientists were mainly interested in astronomical, astrological and medical writings as well as the *practically applicable knowledge* they contained. I call this knowledge 'practically applicable' insofar as it permits readers to work with special materials, to brew certain medicines or to build instruments for the purpose of astronomical observations. To some extent, this is why Arabic medical and astronomical terminology developed at that time. Al-Kindī, who focused on metaphysical issues, became keen on forming theories. Of course, theory formation is also a form of practice, a practice of thinking, but al-Kindī did not use material tools or substances. When theorizing, his tools were rather his power of imagination, logical conclusions and *language*. Due to the lack of Arabic terminology with which to conduct abstractions and linguistic differentiations, al-Kindī had to construct a suitable terminology. Therefore, Endress is partially right when explaining:

> It is natural, that the earlier translations should be less adequate and, what is most evident, less consistent than the later ones. The translator could not yet rely on a terminology developed and proven in the dialogue with scientists and philosophers, a terminology which had to be coined for concepts totally absent from early Arabic (Endress 1997:59).

The language used by the translators which Endress is criticizing as less adequate and less consistent is very similar to the way al-Kindī uses language in his own treatises. But instead of *excusing* this method of language use with the explanation that the translators were not yet able to rely on a developed terminology, I trace the lexical orientation on the Greek language back to a *conscious decision* of the Kindī-circle, which is to say that it took strategic aim at developing and establishing an Arabic philosophical language. Once again, this demonstrates al-Kindī's practice-oriented goal. Similarly to other scholars, he was keen on *building* something, not an astrological instrument or an effective medicine, but an Arabic language of philosophizing. This assumption is confirmed when looking at al-Kindī's treatise *On the Definition and Description of Things*,[2] in which he lists several terms with definitions. The

[2] Edited and translated into English by Klein-Francke (1982)

idea of imitating the Greek language in order to develop their own mother tongue is not exclusive to the Kindī-group. On the contrary, the Kindī-group stands in line with Cicero, whose translations are in great part responsible for the development of the Latin philosophical language (Eucken 1964 [1879]:50) and Schleiermacher, who attributes the potential to develop the German language "through the cultivation of foreign plant life" (2012 [1813]:69) to source-text oriented translations.

Hence, we can sum up two translation purposes of the Kindī-group: firstly, to enrich the Arabic language and to establish a philosophical terminology. And secondly, to demonstrate the Aristotelian way of philosophizing. Both purposes served the general goal of developing an Arabic tradition of philosophy. In order to achieve these purposes, the Kindī-circle accepted the use of their own mother tongue in an uncommon way rather than "to exercise his mother tongue in the sorts of gymnastics native to it" (Schleiermacher [3]2012 [1813]:55). Therefore, they resisted pressure from Arabic philology scholars who, for their part, aimed to standardize the Classical Arabic language and to counteract new linguistic influences.[2] Against the backdrop of these specific translation intentions, both the lexical and, in case of Aristotelian texts, the syntactical orientation towards the Greek original, do complete justice to the *skopos* (Vermeer) of the translations. [1]

Conclusion: an alternative narrative

In conclusion, the Kindī-group did not primarily target the transfer of philosophical ideas with its translations. Even though it is assumed that al-Kindī did not speak Greek at all or at least not sufficiently, the Kindī-circle did not consider translations as an aid to bridge language barriers.[2] The translators were interested in the linguistic constitution of philosophical ideas rather than the propositional content of the text. They understood translation not as an aid that *enables* and therefore *precedes* the philosophical discourse but as *part of the philosophical activity* itself. Herein lies the difference between a 'simple' translation of a philosophical writing whose aim is limited to overcoming linguistic barriers and a *philosophical translation* (Heller 2017) that adds its own contribution to the history of philosophy.

[2] For further information about the Arab philology and the efforts of standardizing the Arabic language, see Fischer (1982) and Schall (1982).

[2] Despite that al-Kindī was not versed in Greek, Greek texts were not translated to offer a clear presentation of the philosophical ideas of the source text. In this context, we shouldl not forget that the translations of the Kindī-circle in particular, and the Greek-Arabic translation movement in general, were preceded by oral discussions.

> Against this background, a translation does not acquire a philosophical character just because philosophers are being translated, but because philosophers translate as philosophers and thus, philosophically (Heller 2017:273).

In this regard, we can consider the Kindī-circle not only as a circle of translators but also as a circle of philosophers[2] who used the practice of translation productively in a philosophical way. In exactly the same way as there are different methods of philosophizing, there are also different kinds of philosophical translations, so we can observe the application of two different kinds of philosophical translation within the Kindī-circle. On one hand, there are the syntactical source-text oriented translations of Aristotelian texts in which the translators aimed to expose the latent meaning structures of the texts. Instead of the propositional content of the texts, the translators targeted the linguistic constitution of philosophical ideas. On the other hand, there are commentary translations through which the translators participated directly in the philosophical discourse, which – as one could argue – makes them philosophers themselves.

In this article, I have focused on the translational *intentions* of the Kindī-group. A question that could be asked in the same vein is that of the *effects* their translations had. Did/Do the translations have the effects the Kindī-group intended to realize, namely the development of an Arabic tradition of philosophizing? Are the translation strategies they chose appropriate to serve this philosophical purpose? The question of which form of translation is fruitful for a renewal of the philosophical tradition was once again raised by the Moroccan philosopher Abdurrahman Taha (2002/2013), who criticizes the source-text oriented translations in which the grammatical rules of the Arab language are ignored and refers to them as imitations of ancient thought (تقليد الفكر القديم), by which he does not only criticize that the Arabs blindly imitated the *substance* of Western philosophy but also the *form* of philosophizing. This imitation, as he argues, had led to an islolation of Muslim philosophy and its dependency on foreign philosophical projects (Abdurrahman 2006). He, on the contrary, argues for the Arab right to philosophical difference (2002).

[2] As did Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq, whȍ translated medical texts as medic himself, Ibn al-Biṭrīq, Eustahios and Ibn Nāima translated philosophical texts as philosophers. While Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq translated the medical texts as preceding his (or his readers') medical praxis, the Kindi-translators used translation as an *act of philosophizing*.

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