CONSCIENCE IN ARABIC AND THE SEMANTIC HISTORY OF *ḌAMĪR*

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With regard to research on the notion of *ḍamīr* in the religious and philosophical works of some modern Muslim writers in Egypt, this article investigates the semantic history of the word. Classical Islamic usages are examined as well as medieval and modern Bible Arabic. The author finds that in the coining of *ḍamīr* as the preferred word for conscience in modern Arabic, Islamic and Christian impulses have interacted – with developments in Christian Arabic in the nineteenth century as a major influence.

The context of the current investigation into the semantics of *ḍamīr* is a broader analysis of the notion of conscience in the works of three modern Egyptian writers. Writing in the 1950s and 60s, the Muslim intellectuals ᶜAbbās Maḥmūd al-ᶜAqqād (d. 1964), Kāmil Ḥusayn (d. 1977) and Khālid Muḥammad Khālid (d. 1996) put the notion of *ḍamīr* at the centre of their works about Islamic ethics, moral philosophy, and the relation between Muḥammad and Christ (Leirvik 2006).

The extensive use of *ḍamīr* by these authors to express a uniting bond between people of different religious belongings, inspired an investigation of the semantic history of the word *ḍamīr*: what were the meanings of *ḍamīr* in classical Arabic? How and when did the word acquire the modern meaning of moral conscience?

In what follows, I will present the main findings of my historical-semantic investigations.[1] One guiding question will be the possible interaction between Islamic and Christian impulses in the coining of *ḍamīr* as the preferred word for 'conscience' in modern Arabic. My semantic investigation will rely partly on lexicographical evidence. Dictionaries summarise the evidence of a specific textual corpus at a given time, not as neutral observations, but as definitional efforts in their own right. In the case of dictionaries from European languages into Arabic, entries may even function as innovative suggestions.

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[1] In my work on the semantic history and current meanings of *ḍamīr*, Michael Carter, who was co-supervisor for my doctoral project, provided valuable and much appreciated advice regarding the classical Arabic sources. I would therefore like to dedicate this article to Michael Carter, wishing him well on his 70th birthday in 2009.

A second focus will be on Arabic bibles, from early medieval manu-scripts to modern printed versions, with the purpose of elucidating how *al-ḍamīr* became the preferred term for rendering the Greek *syneídēsis* and its cognate words in Syriac, Coptic and Latin.

'Conscience' in the modern Arabic lexicon
In Modern Standard Arabic, *šuʿūr* and *waʿy* are the words mainly used for self-reflexive consciousness (Wehr 1979, 554 and 1268). Given the oscillation between self-reflexive consciousness and moral conscience in some European languages (such as French), one cannot preclude that *ḍamīr,* in its modern usage as the preferred word for conscience, may also connote self-consciousness in a wider sense.

For moral consciousness or conscience**,** as distinct from consciousness in a general sense, a modern English–Arabic dictionary gives two alter-natives: *ḍamīr* and *wijdān* (Doniach 1982, 75). Correspondingly in mod-ern Arabic translations of the World Declaration of Human Rights, *ḍamīr* alternates with *wijdān*.[2] More than *ḍamīr* with its reference to in-ner thoughts, *wijdān* seems also to connote experience and emotion, also when used in the possible sense of moral consciousness/conscience.[3]

Other words for conscience in the modern Arabic lexicon include *ḏimma* and *sarīra*. Both Belot's French–Arabic dictionary from 1890 and Spiro's English–Arabic dictionary of colloquial Egyptian Arabic from 1897 has *ḏimma* as the first entry and *ḍamīr* the second.[4] Saadeh's

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[2] The Arabic version that is available on the UN website www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/arz.htm (accessed 5 Jan 08) has *ḍamīr* in all cases. A different version, supplied by the Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies in December 1997 has *ḍamīr* in the preamble, but *wijdān* in art. 1 and 18.

[3] In some modern English–Arabic dictionaries, such as Saadeh (1911) and Doniach (1982), *wijdān* is listed as the second option after *ḍamīr* for 'con-science'. However, neither Wehr's *Standard Arabic–English Dictionary* nor Badawi and Hind's *Dictionary of Modern Egyptian Arabic* (1986) include 'con-science' among the suggested translations of *wijdān.* As for earlier evidences, neither Freytag (1835) nor Lane (1874) have any entry for *wijdān.* But al-Bustānī's *Kitāb muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ* (1867–70) does have an entry. He explains that among the Ṣūfis, *wijdān* designates encounter with God (*muṣādafat al-ḥaqq taʿālā*), whereas in other well-known usages, it stands for 'the soul and its inner forces'.

[4] The use of *ḏimma* ('protection') might be emphasising the binding aspect of conscience, which some users of Modern Arabic may have regarded as not sufficiently covered by *ḍamīr*. As noted already by Humbert (1838, 249), *ḏimma* (*dimma*) was early used in Egyptian colloquial Arabic for conscience –

dictionary (1911) has *sarīra* as its third entry for 'conscience'. As a cognate of *sirr*, *sarra* would be expected to underline the inner, non-divulged character of conscience.

The dominant rendering of conscience in Modern Standard Arabic, however, is *ḍamīr* for which Wehr lists the following meanings: 'heart; mind; innermost; conscience; (independent or suffixed) personal pronoun' (Wehr 1979, 637). Etymologically, *ḍamīr* refers to the hidden. In the coining of *ḍamīr* as a word for conscience in modern Arabic, etymology therefore indicates a strong inward orientation, towards a moral voice within. The use of *ḍamīr* (or even *ism muḍmar*) for the personal pronoun in Arabic grammar may point in the same direction: the personal pronoun conceals the agent, who devoid of his name has 'shrunk' into anonymity.[5]

Proceeding to modern Egyptian colloquial Arabic, we find that Badawi and Hinds render *ḍamīr* as '1. conscience. 2. [*gram*] pronoun' For *wijdān* or *wigdān,* they list '(inner) consciousness, imagination, mind'. (Badawi and Hinds 1986, 524).

The philosophical dictionary compiled by the Christian Arab, Jamāl Ṣalībā, which concentrates on French and Arabic philosophical terminology, translates *šuᶜūr* as 'conscience psychologique', and *ḍamīr* as 'conscience morale'. First, Ṣalībā defines *ḍamīr* as a disposition of the soul to distinguish between good and bad deeds, accompanied by the faculty to issue immediate moral judgements on the value of individual actions. Secondly, he cites Rousseau in order to show that conscience—as a 'divine instinct'—can also be conceived of as capable of issuing moral judgements in advance; functioning both as a guide and a restraint (Ṣalībā 1971, 763).

Ḍamīr *in classical and medieval Arabic*

The word *ḍamīr* is not found either in the Qurʾān or in the *ḥadīth* collections. Among Muslim writers of classical and medieval Arabic, the word does occur. But in pre-modern contexts, there is no evidence that *ḍamīr* was ever used in the specific sense of moral consciousness or conscience. What we do find is the following: *ḍamīr* in the grammatical meaning of pronoun; *ḍamīr* in the general sense of hidden, innermost thought (often interchangeable with *sirr* or *sarīra*); and what seems to be a typical Ṣūfī distinction between *ḍamīr* as 'the inner conscious' and *sirr*

as an alternative to *ḍamīr*.

[5] According to Wehr, the first form of the verb *ḍamara* means 'to be or become lean, emaciated ...' or 'to contract, shrink'.

as 'the inner unconscious'.

Grammar and logical theory

A firmly established use of *ḍamīr* is found in Classical Arabic grammar, where *ḍamīr* has carried the meaning of 'personal pronoun' from the second Islamic century onwards. By use of *ḍamīr,* the hidden, non-expressed aspect of the pronoun is emphasised, more than its function as a 'pro-noun' (i.e. replacing the noun) in grammars within the Latin tradition (Carter 1981, 250f).

It is interesting to note that in a discussion of al-Mubarrad's refutation of the great grammarian, Sībawayhi, al-Mubarrad is accused by Ibn Wal-lād of having made up something in his own mind (*iddiᶜāʾun ᶜalā ḍamīrihi*) without any support in Sībawayhi's text (*fī naṣṣi qawlihi*). What is merely in the *ḍamīr,* may also be contested (Carter 2001, 59f).

Shīᶜite usage

In the mystical commentary on the Qurʾān attributed to the Shīᶜite Imām Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), one finds a reference to *ḍamīr* in his explanation of Qurʾān 28:10. This verse employs two different words for 'heart': *fuʾād* and *qalb*. Al-Ṣādiq's commentary adds other words for the interior of the human being, and runs as follows (in my translation):

The *ṣadr* is the source (*maᶜdin*) of submission, the *qalb* is the source of certitude, the *fuʾād* is the source of contemplation, *al-ḍamīr* is the source of the secret (*al-sirr*, i.e. things known only to God), and the soul (*nafs*) is the refuge of all good and all evil.[6]

Among the words listed by al-Ṣādiq for the inner sources of the human being, *ḍamīr* is the only one which does not occur in the Qurʾān. As one can see, it is identified with, or at least intimately related to *sirr*.

Also in the collection of Imām ᶜAlī's sermons, which were edited in their present form in *Nahj al-balāġa* in the eleventh century, one finds references to *ḍamīr* in the sense of the inner self. In an intriguing passage from one of his sermons, ᶜAlī speaks of the *ḍamāʾir* of human beings as 'God's eyes'. After having assured his audience that nothing is hidden from God of whatever people do by day or night, he says:

Your limbs are a witness, the organs of your body constitute an army (against yourself), your inner self serves Him as eyes (to watch your sins; *wa-ḍamāʾirukum ᶜuyūnuhu*) and your loneliness is open to Him'.[7]

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[6] Nwyia 1968, 215.

[7] Imam Ali 1986, 411 (sermon 198), translating ᶜAlī 1963, 394.

In one of his sayings, he states that if a person is too eager to acquire the riches of the world, then it fills his *ḍamīr* with distress which keeps altering in 'the black part of his heart', some grief worrying him and other giving him pain.[8]

The use of *ḍamīr* in *Nahj al-balāġa* is not necessarily very precise. As a reference to the inner, invisible self, *ḍamīr* often seems to be interchangeable with *sarīra*. A parallel in the opening of one of ᶜAlī's sermons, however, might indicate than there could be more to it than mere synonymy: 'Allāh knows hidden matters (*al-sarāʾir*) and is aware of inner feelings (*al-ḍamāʾir*)'.[9]

Ṣūfī usage

It might be that these passages attributed to ᶜAlī should be read in the light of later Ṣūfī usage, in which some interpreters do find a rather elaborate distinction between *ḍamīr* and *sirr*. In certain Ṣūfī contexts, we find a very pointed usage in which *ḍamīr* denotes the inner conscious, whereas *sirr* stands for the inner unconscious. According to Louis Massignon, this distinction can already be traced in the works al-Ḥallāj (d. 922). Massignon gives thirteen references (Massignon 1954, 29), and translates *ḍamīr* as used by al-Ḥallāj as 'le moi conscient de l'homme (opp. sirr*,* son inconscient profond)'.[10]

In later philosophical Ṣūfism, such as in Ibn ᶜArabī (d. 1240), *ḍamīr* seems to have been used in the same way – signifying the conscious self and contrasting *sirr,* the deep unconscious. In Ibn ᶜArabī's meditation on the metaphor of travel and the ecstatic night journey of the Prophet, he writes (in my translation):

He experienced a divine gift and a special care, something that had not arisen in his heart (*bi-sirrihi;* in his inner unconscious) or been unfolded in his conscious reflection, (*Fī ḍamīrihi*, Ibn ᶜArabi 1994, 24).

In earlier stages of Sufism, al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) employed the notion of *ḍamīr* in the context of his spiritual technique of *muḥāsaba* or self-examination. However, his use of *ḍamīr* and *sirr* appears not to be influenced by the more elaborate Ṣūfī usage referred to above. *Ḍamīr* and *sirr* are instead used to distinguish the inner from the outer in a more general

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[8] ᶜAlī 1963, 639 (saying 377), cf. Imam Ali 1986, 656.

[9] Imam Ali 1986: 215, translating ᶜAlī 1963, 151 (sermon 85).

[10] This is also the meaning of *ḍamīr* given by the Arabic–French Ṣūfī dictionary *Al-Muᶜjam al-ṣūfī,* which—in tune with Massignon—defines *ḍamīr* as 'Le moi conscient de l'homme' in contrast to *sirr* which means 'Inconscient profond de l'homme' (Ibn ᶜAbd Allāh n.d., 23).

sense. For example, he distinguishes between pious fear (*taqwā*) at the level of the limbs and at the level of *ḍamīr* (al-Muḥāsibī 1940, 9, cf. 11, 13). He employs the notion of *sirr* with a similar distinction, namely that between self-examination and *taqwā* on the secret (*sirr*) and overt (*ᶜalāniyya*) levels respectively (ibid., 6f, cf. 133).

In al-Ghazālī's *Revival of the Religious Sciences*, the term *ḍamīr* refers to secret, inner thoughts (al-Ghazālī 1927, 3: 22). In his work 'The Beginning of Guidance', it has possibly mystical overtones too, when he states that 'God most high is aware of your secret being' (*ḍamīr*, al-Ghazālī 1950, 4). He seems to equate *ḍamīr* with *sarīra* and states elsewhere in the same work: 'God most high is aware of your inmost thoughts (*sarīra*) and sees your heart' (*qalb*; ibid., 19).

Philosophical usage

In medieval Arabic, fine distinctions between *ḍamīr* and *sirr* may have been restricted to Ṣūfī usage. As for philosophical use of *ḍamīr*, the word seems mostly to be used in the general sense of inner thoughts. For example, al-Fārābī speaks of the externalism of the voice which gives expression to what is otherwise concealed in the mind (*al-ḍamīr*, quoted by Amīn 1964, 149).

Other Muslim philosophers from the classical period used *ḍamīr* with reference to heartfelt relations or inner thoughts, but with no apparent mystic or moral connotations. In a text originating from the philosophical circle of Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. 985), we find the following statement attributed to Abū Sulaymān:

If the heart (*ḍamīr*) of one friend is open to another, the truth glows between them, the good enfolds them, and each becomes a mainstay to his companion, a helpmate in his endeavor, and a potent factor in his attaining his wish. There is nothing surprising in this: souls ignite one another, tongues exchange confidences; and the mysteries of this human being, a microcosm in this macrocosm, abound and spread (Kraemer 1986, 163).

From a later period, in a work of the theologian and philosopher Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 1233) entitled *Al-ʾIḥkām fī ʾuṣūl al-ʾaḥkām*, one can find the following statement (in Michael Carter's translation):

Nor do we accept that the understanding [of the meaning of words] can only be achieved by historical transmission [of words with that meaning]: what about pedagogical transmission, such as is done with children, or the deaf and dumb use of sign language to make known to others what is in one's mind (*ḍamīrihi*)?' (al-Āmidī 1985, 1: 34).

A more specialised usage, related to logical theory, can be found in Ibn

Sīnā (d. 1037). In his logical theory, inspired by Aristotle, he uses *ḍamīr* to explain a special kind of deduction or syllogism (*qiyās*) which conceals its major premise: '*Ḍamīr* is a syllogism, the major premise of which is hidden' (Ṣalībā 1971, 764).

Ḍamīr in early dictionaries, Arabic and Western
In Arabic dictionaries from before the modern period, one finds that *ḍamīr* invariably stands for what is concealed in one's heart. Unlike Ṣūfī usages, *ḍamīr* tends to be identified with *sirr*. The famous *Lisān al-ᶜarab* which was compiled by Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311) defines *ḍamīr* as *al-sirr,* as inner thought, or as the thing that you conceal in your heart.[11]

Several centuries later, the Arab lexicographical tradition reached its peak with the gigantic *Tāj al-ᶜarūs* which was compiled by al-Zabīdī (d. 1791). Its definition of *ḍamīr* is substantially identical with that given by *Lisān al-ᶜarab* (al-Zabīdī 1888, 3: 352).

Turning to the first dictionary of the Arabic language to be edited and printed in the West, the *Lexicon Arabicum* by F. Raphelengius (1613), we find that this particular dictionary defines *ḍamīr* as 'sensus, conscientia'. The added Latin index gives three different entries for *conscientia*, viz. *ḍamīr, ḏihn* and *niyya*. Given the fact that in European languages, there was hardly any distinction between 'conscience' and 'consciousness' until the seventeenth century, it is hard to decide whether *conscientia* in this context is meant to connote moral consciousness, or merely refers to consciousness in general.

Raphelengius' dictionary was published posthumously by the Dutch scholar, Thomas Erpenius, who was also responsible for the first printed edition of the New Testament in Arabic, published in Leiden in 1616. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Netherlands were still under Spanish domination, and there is evidence that Thomas Erpenius was acquainted with Moriscos of Spanish origin (van Koningsveld 1997, 32–6, 195f). This suggests that Erpenius and Raphelengius had Hispano–Arabic as a major linguistic source on which to draw. One of the sources probably utilised by Raphelengius was a manuscript of Spanish Mozarabic origin known as 'The Latin-Arabic Glossary of the Leiden University Library', which may be as old as the twelfth century. For *conscientia,* it lists the following Arabic equivalents: *ḍamīr wa-niyya wa-ḏihn* (Seybold 1900, 99). As can be seen, the entries are identical with those of Raphelengius. The glossary in question may stand as intriguing evidence of a medieval Arabic rendering of *conscientia* as *ḍamīr*. How-

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[11] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ᶜarab*. 1955, 4: 492.

ever, this Hispano–Arabic usage seems to have had no major impact either on Oriental Christian Arabic or on Islamic Arabic in the medieval period.

Ḍamīr as moral consciousness: since when?

So since when can one find *ḍamīr* used in the sense of 'moral consciousness/conscience' in modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic?

Most Western dictionaries from the nineteenth century are orientated towards Classical Arabic. None of them indicates that *ḍamīr* should be taken in the sense of moral consciousness/conscience. Neither Freytag's *Lexicon Arabico–Latinum* (1835) nor Lane's *Arabic–English Lexicon* from 1874 include 'conscience' among the meanings of *ḍamīr* – only variations on the theme of 'secret thought'. For the indefinite sense, Lane listed the following meanings: 'a thing that thou concealest, or conceivest, or determinest upon...in thy heart, or mind:...a secret; syn. *sirr*'. Hence, he notes, it is also used as meaning a pronoun. As for the definite sense, he informs that *al-ḍamīr* may also signify 'The heart [itself]; the mind; the recesses of the mind; the secret thoughts; or the soul' (Lane 1874, 1/5: 1803).

The contemporary 1875 edition of the *Dictionnaire arabe–français* by A. de Biberstein Kazimirski gives similar evidence. His dictionary does not include 'conscience' among the mind-related meanings of *ḍamīr* – only spirit, heart, intimate and covert thought at the bottom of the heart (Kazimirski 1875, 3: 46). One may thus conclude that the dictionaries of Freytag, Lane and Kazimirski all reflect traditional Arabic and classical Ṣūfī usage, in which *ḍamīr* designates innermost, secret thoughts or the hidden conscious.

There are, however, other nineteenth-century dictionaries, even from the first half of the nineteenth century, which indicate that *ḍamīr* could also be taken in the sense of 'moral consciousness'. These dictionaries also reflect contemporary and colloquial usage. In a chapter concerning 'défauts' in *Guide de la conversation arabe* from 1838, Jean Humbert suggests that 'conscience' might be rendered either as *ḍamīr* or *dimma/ḏimma* (Humbert 1838, 249). Humbert clearly has 'conscience' in the sense of moral conscience in mind, since he also lists some Arabic expressions for remorse: *nakhz = nakhz al-ḍamīr =ᶜaḏāb al-ḍamīr*.

Significantly, dictionaries linked to a Christian Arab context and originating from the same period, give similar evidence. An early testimony which corroborates Humbert's suggestion can be found in a French–Arabic dictionary which was compiled by the Egyptian Copt

Ellious Bocthor, and published in 1828–29 after having been revised and expanded by A. Caussin de Perceval. For 'conscience' in the sense of 'sentiment intérieur du bien et du mal', Bocthor/Perceval first lists *ḏimma*, then *ḍamīr* and as a third option *sarīra* (Bocthor 1828–29, 1: 189).

Another nineteenth-century Christian Arab suggestion that *ḍamīr* can also be used in the sense of moral consciousness is found in *Kitāb muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ*, the famous dictionary of Buṭrus al-Bustānī which was published in Beirut in two volumes in 1867–70. Al-Bustānī, who was a Maronite but later became a Protestant, was strongly involved in the translation work which resulted in the so-called Bustānī-van Dyck Bible. The dictionary's relevant entry under *al-ḍamīr* is as follows (in my translation):

… and the secret (*al-sirr*), and the innermost thought (*dākhil al-khāṭir*); and hence *al-ḍamīr* in the sense of the created ability in the human being to distinguish between what he is permitted to do and not do; or an inner feeling which informs about the lawful and the illicit, forbidding the latter (al-Bustānī n.d./1870, 1255).

As we shall see, Arabic bibles from 1860 onwards corroborate Bocthor's and al-Bustānī's lexicographical novelties. The combined evidence indicates that in the nineteenth century, *ḍamīr* was given the meaning of 'moral consciousness' and 'conscience' in both Christian Arabic usage and French–Arabic lexicographical efforts. This seems to have happened in both the Egyptian (Bocthor) and Syrian–Lebanese (al-Bustānī) contexts, with translation work between French and Arabic as a possible trigger (Humbert, Bocthor).

Towards the turn of the century, we find similar evidence in dictionaries of Egyptian colloquial Arabic. Socrates Spiro's Arabic–English dictionary from 1895 renders *ḍamīr* as 'conscience, mind', and his English–Arabic dictionary from 1897 translates 'conscience' as (1) *ḏimma* and (2) *ḍamīr* (Spiro 1974/1897, 139; 1980/1895, 353).

From the beginning of the twentieth century, one regularly finds *ḍamīr* in the sense of 'conscience' in dictionaries of modern Standard Arabic. In Saadeh's *English–Arabic Dictionary* from 1911, published in Cairo, 'conscience' is rendered as (alternatively) *ḍamīr, wijdān, ᵓidrāk, nuṭq ᶜaqlī* – whereas 'consciousness' is rendered as *wijdān, šuᶜūr, ᵓidrāk* and *ḏākira* (Saadeh 1911, 369). The combined lists may testify to a certain oscillation in some Arabic words between 'conscience' and 'consciousness', perhaps reflecting the corresponding ambiguity in European languages.

At the time of Saadeh's dictionary, the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* stated that 'the modern Islāmic languages employ conventional translations of the European words [for conscience]; in Turkish *vijdan* (properly 'sensation') is employed, in Arabic *ḍamīr* ('the hidden being')' (Margoliouth 1964/1911, 4: 46).[12]

Ḍamīr *in biblical Arabic*

Editing work on Arabic bible translations from the early Middle Ages has been limited and they are difficult to overview.

When searching for Arabic renderings of New Testament verses in which *syneídēsis*—the Greek word for conscience—occurs, it must be kept in mind that most Arabic translations from the ninth until the nineteenth century were made from versions in other languages than Greek, namely from the Syriac Peshitta,[13] the Latin Vulgate or from Coptic. Thus, one cannot necessarily say that this, or that Arabic word, is a translation of the Greek *syneídēsis*. In Coptic, however, *suneídēsis* is used as a loan-word from Greek. As for the versions based upon the Latin Vulgate, the Arabic words that are used translate and interpret *conscientia*.

In the following section, I will examine the vocabulary used in the relevant verses in the Epistles of the New Testament (27 occurrences), the Acts of the Apostles (2 occurrences), and a variant reading of John 8: 9 which includes the word *syneídēsis.*

When investigating Arabic bible manuscripts from the pre-modern period, it turns out that *ḍamīr* has in fact not been the preferred word for *syneídēsis* and related words in other languages. Instead, either *niyya* ('intention') or the word *baṣīra* ('clear evidence', 'insight') prevails. *Ḍamīr* is preferred in one single tradition, namely Hispano–Arabic bible translations that may date from as far back as the tenth century.

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[12] William Tisdall, writing in 1906, contended that the Arabic language does not have any word which '*properly* expresses what we mean by *conscience*'. It is obvious, however, that *ḍamīr* was already in the picture, since he qualifies his assertion by recording that 'in Arabic and Persian we have to use *ḍamīr* (the heart, the mind), but even this does not occur in the Qur'ân'. (Tisdall 1906, 62f)

[13] The Syriac Peshitta (Bible 1979), on which many of the oldest Arabic translations depend, renders *syneídēsis* as *tirtå* in all cases except two. In Romans 9: 1 and 2. Cor. 1: 12, *reyᶜånå* (mind) is used instead. In Titus 1: 5, *reyᶜånå* is used together with *tirtå.* In 2. Cor. 5: 11, *madaᶜ* is used. I am thankful to Elie Dib Wardini, my former colleague at the University of Oslo, for assistance with the Peshitta references.

Medieval and early modern Arabic bibles[14]

In early medieval manuscripts originating from monasteries in Palestine and Sinai, *niyya* was the most common choice. Three Sinai Arabic manuscripts from the ninth century containing translations from Syriac or Greek all testify to the prevalence of *niyya* in the south Palestinian tradition. Sinai arab. 151, 154 and 155[15] all have niyya in the vast majority of cases. But Sinai arab. 151 has *ᶜaql* ('mind') in two places where the Syriac Peshitta also has different options. Similar evidence is found in a Tischendorf-related Arabic manuscript from 892.[16] The co-dex, referred to by Tischendorf as ar^pet, has *niyya* in six legible cases, and *raᵓy* ('opinion') in three.

From the period between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, only a few Arabic bible manuscripts are available. As regards bible translations from the Hispano–Arabic context, a 1542–43 New Testament manuscript kept in Madrid, parts of which might go back to the tenth century, dis-tinguishes itself by its unique preference for *ḍamīr* (BNM cod. 4971). Together with the lexicographical testimonies cited above from the twelfth-century Latin–Arabic glossary of Mozarabic origin and the *Lexi-con Arabicum* from 1613, which was probably also influenced by His-pano–Arabic, the Madrid manuscript testifies to a medieval Christian Arabic use of *ḍamīr* in the sense of moral consciousness.

As for other medieval and early modern manuscripts, MS Vat. copt. 9 (dated 1204/5) contains an Arabic version accompanying the Coptic-Bohairic text, but with additions from both Greek and Syriac sources. According to Thompson, this eclectic recension, which is sometimes called the 'Egyptian Vulgate', dates back as far as the tenth century. It became generally used by the thirteenth century, not only in Egypt, but also in Syria (Thompson 1955, 10). Its version of the Gospels was re-worked by the Alexandrian scholar, Hibat Allāh ibn al-ᶜAssāl, resulting in the so-called 'Alexandrian Vulgate', which according to Metzger, became a source of linguistic corruption and formed the basis of all printed editions of the Arabic Gospels from the *editio princeps* of 1591 until the twentieth century (Metzger 1977, 264f).

In connection with the European Renaissance and Catholic missionary efforts, printed Arabic bibles began to appear in various contexts. In 1591, the Medicean printing house in Rome published the first printed

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[14] For more details regarding the translation of individual verses in the New Testament, see Leirvik 2006, 73–77, 254–257.

[15] Edited by Staal 1983–4, Gibson 1899 and Gibson 1894 respectively.

[16] Edited by Stenij 1901.

version of the Gospels in Arabic, basing itself mainly on the MS Vat. copt. 9. As for the rendering of *syneídēsis* in Acts and the Epistles, we shall see that two major tendencies can be identified in subsequent editions of the New Testament and the Bible. One is represented by the *editio princeps* of the New Testament (Leiden 1616) and of the Bible (Rome 1671) in Arabic, the other by the Polyglot Bibles of the seventeenth century. The first tendency prefers *niyya*, but includes *ḍamīr* in some cases. The second tendency opts for *baṣīra*.

In 1616, Thomas Erpenius in Leiden published the first printed edition of the entire New Testament in Arabic (Bible 1616). As we have seen, Erpenius was also involved in a lexicographical work which was partly influenced by Hispano–Arabic/Mozarabic, the linguistic tradition in which the medieval use of *ḍamīr* for *conscientia* is attested by both dictionaries and a New Testament manuscript. As for the rendering of *syneídēsis* in Erpenius' Arabic New Testament, however, the preferred option was not *ḍamīr*. Instead, *niyya* is used in the majority of cases, although he does prefer (or add) *ḍamīr* in six of the relevant verses.[17]

In 1671, following the final union between Rome and the Arabic-speaking Maronites in the sixteenth century, Congregatio de Propaganda Fide printed the first edition of the entire bible in Arabic – based on the work of Maronite Christians. This so-called 'Propaganda Version' conformed to the Latin Vulgate, but was partly based on previous Arabic manuscripts of Syrian and Coptic origin. Like Erpenius' New Testament, the Propaganda Version has *niyya* in nearly all places, with the same exceptions for *ḍamīr* as in Erpenius (Bible 1822/1671).

In the same period, Arabic versions of the Bible were included in both the Paris and London Polyglot Bibles, completed in 1645 and 1657 respectively. The editor of the Paris Polyglot put a Maronite scholar, Gabriel Sionita, in charge of editing the Arabic text. The scholars based

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[17] The verses that have *ḍamīr* instead of *niyya* (2. Cor. 1: 12, 4: 2 and 5: 11, in Romans 9: 1, and—together with *niyya*—in Romans 2: 15 and Titus 1: 15) correspond more or less to the verses that reveal other options than the standard choice of *tirtå* in the Syriac Peshitta (cf. note 10 above).

A manuscript of Egyptian/Coptic origin, possibly from the sixteenth century, has *niyya* in all places except bar two. Corinthians – where it has *ḍamīr*. As one can see, the evidence conforms partly to that of Thomas Erpenius' printed New Testament in Arabic from 1616. The manuscript is found in the un-catalogued collection of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo. It has not been edited, and the dating is a guess. I am grateful to Mark Swanson for drawing my attention to the manuscript.

their work on a variety of manuscripts, which as far as the Gospels were concerned, were mostly in accordance with the aforementioned 'Egyptian Vulgate'. As for the rest of the New Testament—that is to say, the most relevant parts for the present investigation—the source appears to have been a different one, namely an Arabic manuscript translated from Greek and brought from Aleppo by the Carmelite Father Joseph (Graf 1975–77/1944–53, 1: 93f).

In all Arabic bible editions within this tradition, there is a preference for the word *baṣīra* ('insight'). The London Polyglot was edited by Brian Walton, and depends on the Paris Polyglot for the Arabic version. It has *baṣīra* ('insight') corresponding to *syneídēsis* in most of the verses in question, but a wide variety of alternative renderings in other verses (Bible 1657).

In 1727, a translation of the New Testament by the Syrian Salomon Negri was published in London (Bible 1727). According to Graf, the translator keeps close to a Melchite recension of 'the Egyptian Vulgate', but reworks it from Greek. As for the rendering of *syneídēsis*, this version comes close to the Polyglots and opts for *baṣīra* ('insight') in all places except one.

Ḍamīr *in modern Arabic bible editions*

From the latter part of the nineteenth century, a variety of modern Arabic bible translations have been produced and used by the churches in the Middle East.

In the 1840s, American missionaries in Syria initiated a new Arabic translation, which came to be known as the Bustānī–van Dyck or the Smith–van Dyck Bible (Bible 1991/1865).[18] The New Testament was published in 1860, followed by the edition of the entire bible in 1865. In 1878, a Catholic initiative resulted in a different version of the New Testament, which is now conventionally referred to as the old Jesuit Bible (Bible 1992/1878).

In 1857, shortly before the Bustānī–van Dyck version, a new Arabic translation was published by the 'Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge' in London. The translation work was headed by the Lebanese Christian. Fāris al-Shidyāq (Bible 1983/1857).[19] In rendering *syneídēsis*, the Shidyāq version keeps close to the tradition from Erpenius. It has *niyya* in most cases, but (similar to Erpenius) has *ḍamīr*

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[18] The work which resulted in the Bustānī–van Dyck version was initially headed by Eli Smith.

[19] The New Testament was published in 1851, and the entire Bible in 1857.

in six.[20]

Then, with the bible edition which carries the name of Buṭrus al-Bustānī (the author of *Kitāb muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ*, cf. above), comes the change. Contrary to prevailing practices in Arabic bible translations till then, the translation team took the decision to let *ḍamīr* render *syneídēsis*. In all relevant verses, the Bustānī–van Dyck Bible makes use of *ḍamīr* (Bible 1991/1865). In the wake of the Bustānī–van Dyck Bible, the Jesuits made the same decision (Bible 1992/1878).

The Bustānī–van Dyck translation was based entirely on Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. The linguistic ambition was to conform to living Arabic and it is generally regarded as a landmark in modern Arabic bible translation. According to the Bible Society in Egypt, this version has remained by far the most widespread bible translation in Egypt – among Catholics and Protestants as well as Copts . It has often been described as 'the book of the people'. It is also the version commonly used for liturgical readings in Egyptian churches. Moreover, this would be the bible edition most often referred to by Egyptian Muslims.[21]

There are strong indications, therefore, that Bible Arabic was one of the main factors in the process towards a general use of *ḍamīr* for moral consciousness/conscience in Modern Standard Arabic and in Egyptian Arabic usage more specifically. It at least seems highly probable that Bible Arabic has contributed towards the semantic and conceptual development which was taken a step further when reform-minded Egyptian intellectuals (Muslims as well as Christians) such as Faraḥ Anṭūn, M. H. Haykal and Aḥmad Amīn employed *ḍamīr* (or *wijdān*) when rendering 'conscience' in their reception of European philosophy and in their modern elaborations on Christian or Islamic ethics (Leirvik 2006, 83–89).

Conclusion

The variety of words used for rendering 'conscience' in Arabic, triggers the question of what is really at stake in this semantic process: is it the European notion of 'conscience' that is translated into Arabic by use of several words covering different aspects of the received notion? Or are we instead faced with a number of Arabic words that gradually acquire new meanings when—in a modern context—the need is felt more strongly than before to express a concern for personal integrity and faith-

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[20] Differently from Erpenius, it has *ḍamīr* in John 8: 9 and *baṣīra* (insight) in 1. Cor. 8: 7 and 8: 10.

[21] According to officials in The Bible Society in Egypt (personal communication, December 1997).

transcending moral obligation? Probably, the process went both ways. As for the different words that may have been considered as candidates, it is clear that during the twentieth century, *al-ḍamīr* has become the standard word for translating 'conscience' as well as for expressing the modern Arabic (Islamic–Arabic as well as Christian–Arabic) notion of 'conscience'.[22]

Classical Arabic and the Islamic tradition gives the modern Arabic notion of *al-ḍamīr* other emphases over and above those found in European terms for 'conscience'. It is resonant with an etymology and a spiritual tradition, notably Ṣūfīsm, which consistently turns the attention inwards.

As a general conclusion to my lexicographical and semantic considerations, I would suggest that Christian Arabic has been a major influence behind the modern Arabic (even Islamic) coining of *al-ḍamīr* as moral consciousness or conscience.

As regards the relation between etymology and the pragmatics of language, we have seen that the word *ḍamīr* points unequivocally in the direction of something known intimately by oneself, as innermost knowledge. Pragmatically, in the way twentieth-century Egyptian writers employ the word *ḍamīr*, there may still be a most important communal dimension to it in the sense of a faith-transcending, moral obligation.

We have seen that in Christian Arabic in Spain, there is both lexicographical and bible manuscript evidence that *ḍamīr* could be used for *conscientia/syneídēsis* in the medieval period – in a context marked by relatively intense close and sustained Muslim–Christian interaction. It seems, however, that medieval Mozarabic usage remained a marginal voice, with no strong impact on the Arabic-speaking community or written Arabic in general.

As for Christian and biblical Arabic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the evidence is more conclusive: here lies a major source of the semantic development that traced above. Indeed, translations of European philosophy into Arabic in the beginning of the twentieth century may have contributed in the same direction (Leirvik 2006, 82–87).

It was this semantic and intellectual development that culminated in the 1950s and 60s when al-ʿAqqād, Ḥusayn and Khālid put *al-ḍamīr* at the centre of their innovative approaches to Christ, Muḥammad and the

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[22] *Ḍamīr* has also left its marks in languages influenced by Arabic. In contemporary Urdu, conscience is *zamīr* (written like the Arabic *ḍamīr*)*;* in Swahili, it is *dhamiri*. In Turkish, however, the common word for conscience is *vicdan* (cf. the Arabic *wijdān*).

shared Muslim–Christian heritage. When, for instance, al-ᶜAqqād, in his groundbreaking work, *ᶜAbqariyyat al-Masīḥ* (The Genius of Christ, 1953), speaks of 'the law of love and conscience' (*šarīᶜat al-ḥubb wa-l-ḍamīr*), his summary of the perceived essentials of Christ's teachings is simultaneously taken as an inspiration for modern reform of Islamic ethics. In a similar vein, Khālid in his book *Maᶜan ᶜalā al-ṭarīq. Muḥammad wa-l-Masīḥ* (Together on the Road: Muḥammad and Christ, 1958), speaks of the integrity of human conscience as the uniting bond between the two prophets and their adherents (Leirvik 2006, 2008).

In this way, the word *ḍamīr* became—for a period that is already history—a point of crystallization for linguistic and intellectual interaction between Muslims and Christians.

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