Christmas and the Eucharist in the Qurʾān

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In the following article, several shorter texts by Christoph Luxenberg have been merged and revised by the author himself. The last part had previously been published in three different versions, the first two of which are in German: (1) the German periodical published in Trier, Imprimatur *1 (2003): 13–17; (2) Christoph Burgmer, ed.,* Streit um den Qurʾān: Die Luxenberg Debatte— Standpunkte und Hintergründe *[Controversy about the Qurʾān: The Luxenberg Debate—Viewpoints and Background], 2nd ed. (Berlin, 2007), pp. 62–68. The third version was an enlarged French translation: "Noël dans le Coran," in A. M. Delcambre and J. Bosshard, eds.,* Enquêtes sur l'islam *(Paris, 2004), pp. 117–38.*

1. Language of the Koran

In an earlier study entitled, *A Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran. A Contribution to the Deciphering of the Language of the Koran*, the author put before the public some results of his research on the language of the Qurʾān. Taking for his point of departure the linguistic situation that prevailed historically at the time the time the Qurʾān was edited (according to Islamic tradition 7th Century CE), the *lingua franca* and the literary language of the whole of the Near East was not Arabic, but Syriac, a variant of Aramaic. On this basis he succeeded in elucidating great many passages considered obscure and recognized as such not only by Western orientalists but also by Arab commentators themselves. This fact led him to show that the language of the Qurʾān, which constitues the essential foundations of written Arabic, is so intimately linked to Syriac that one can speak of a *mixed Arabo-Syriac* language.

From this finding it logically follows that without taking into consideration Syriac the intended meaning of the Qurʾān and Qurʾānic Arabic cannot be understood. Thus, ignoring Syriac, the Arab exegetes have interpreted Qurʾānic expressions as being, for example, Houris or Virgins of Paradise *(ḥūr ʿīn)* whereas in their Syriac sense they designate white raisin or vine, eschatological components of the Christian Paradise, an allusion to the wine of the Last Supper. The same goes for the young boys or ephebes of Paradise *(wildān)* which the Arab commentators have imagined, when in reality the term is just another Syriac loan words designating the same raisins. By using

411

these expressions, the Qur'ān compares the whiteness of these heavenly raisins to the limpidness of crystal and immaculate pearls.

2. St. Peter: Persevere in Your Prayers: Surah 108 (*al-Kawṯar* – (the) Abundance)

The author moreover has shown that it is not just on the level of simple isolated words but also at the level of syntax that the Arab commentators have misunderstood the Qur'ānic text, to the extent of misinterpreting entire surahs. Thus the Arab exegetes saw in the title of Surah 108 (*al-Kawṯar* – *Abundance*), among others, the name of a river in Paradise reserved exclusively for the Prophet or—according to another interpretation—for faithful Muslims, and in the following verse the reprobation of an opponent of the Prophet who must have despised the latter for having been deprived of children. However, the Syriac reading of this Surah recalls to mind the First Epistle of St Peter, Chapter 5 verses 8–95, according to which—and in accordance with the introduction to the compline of the Roman service—the faithful are exhorted to persevere in their prayers by which their adversary, Satan, is routed. Let us now examine this sura in philological detail.

The following summary of the views of traditional Qur'ān exegesis concerning this short Surah stems from Josef Horovitz's article from the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1st ed. (vol. 2, Leiden, Leipzig, 1927) and may serve as an introduction:

> KAWṮAR, a word used in Sūra 108:1 after which this Sura is called *Surat al-Kawṯar*. Kawṯar is a *faw'al* form from *kaṯara*, of which other examples occur in Arabic (e.g. *nawfal*; further examples in Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik*, I 344 [An Outline of a Comparative Grammar]). The word, which also occurs in the old poetry (e.g. the examples in Ibn Hišām, ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 261, and Nöldeke-Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, I 92), means "abundance" and a whole series of Muslim authorities therefore explain al-Kawṯar in Sūra 108:1 as *al-Ḵair al-kaṯīr* (see Ibn Hišām, *op. cit.*; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, XXX 180 f.). But this quite correct explanation has not been able to prevail in the *Tafsīr*. It has been thrust into the background by traditions according to which the Prophet himself explained Kawṯar to be a river in Paradise (see already Ibn Hišām, p. 261 below, and notably al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, XXX 179), or Muḥammad says that it was a pool intended for him personally and shown to him on his ascension to Paradise (see al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, XXX 180), which latter view al-Ṭabarī considers the most authentic. Even the earliest Sūras (77:41; 88:12 etc.) know of rivers that flow through Paradise, but it is not till the Medīna period that they are more minutely described, notably in, Sūra 47:15: "there are rivers of water which does not smell foul: rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change; and rivers of wine, a pleasure

for those that drink, and rivers of clarified honey." These rivers correspond to the rivers of oil, milk, wine and honey, which had already been placed in Paradise by Jewish and Christian eschatology; the only difference is that Muḥammad replaced oil by water; in Arabia pure water was not to be taken for granted and besides it was necessary to mix with the wine of Paradise (see Horovitz, *Das Qurʾānische Paradies*, p. 9). When, after the Prophet's death, eschatological explanations of the "abundance" of Sūra 108:1 began to be made, al-Kawṯar was identified as one of the rivers of Paradise and when we find in one of the versions quoted in al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* that "its water is whiter than snow and sweeter than honey" or "and its water is wine," etc. we have obviously an echo of Sūra 47:15. But they did not stop at simply transferring these Qurʾānic descriptions to the Kawṯar but the imagination of later writers gave the river of Paradise a bed of pearls and rubies and golden banks and all sorts of similar embellishments. According to a later view (see *Aḥwāl al-Qiyāma*, ed. Wolff, p. 107) all the rivers of Paradise flow into the *Ḥawḍ al-Kawṯar* which is also called *Nahr Muḥammed*, because, as we have seen above, it is the Prophet's own.

Before going into the philological analysis of this Surah, which has been made into a legend in the Islamic tradition, it would be good first of all to give the Qurʾānic text and its understanding on the basis of the Arabic exegesis with the traditional reading.

انا اعطينك الكوثر / فصل لربك وانحر / ان شانئك هو الابتر

innā aʿṭaynāka l-kawṯar / fa-ṣalli li-rabbika wa-nḥar /
inna šāniʾaka huwa l-abtar

These three verses are rendered according to the Arabic understanding as follows:

Bell II 681[1] 1. Verily, We have given thee the <u>abundance</u>;[2] 2. So pray to thy Lord, and <u>sacrifice</u>. 3. Verily, it is he who <u>hateth</u> thee who is the <u>docked</u> one.[3]

Paret 519: 1: Wir haben dir die <u>Fülle</u> gegeben. 2: Bete darum (*fa-ṣalli*) zu deinem Herrn und <u>opfere</u>! 3: (Ja) dein <u>Hasser</u> ist es, der <u>gestutzt</u> [Note: D.h. ohne Anhang (? *abtar*). Oder: schwanzlos, d.h. ohne Nachkommen (?)] ist. [Note: Oder (als Verwünschung): Wer dich haßt, soll gestutzt (oder: schwanzlos) sein!]. *[1 : We have given you the abundance. 2 : Therefore pray to your Lord and sacrifice ! 3: (Yes) it is your hater who will be pruned   (i.e., without attachment [?abtar]), or : will be without a tail, [i.e., without offspring (?) ; or : (as a curse) Whoever hates you, shall be pruned (or : be without a tail) !].*

Blachère 668: 1 En vérité, Nous t'avons donné l'<u>Abondance</u>.⁴ 2 Prie donc en l'honneur de ton Seigneur et <u>sacrifie</u> ! 3 En vérité, celui qui te <u>hait</u> se trouve être le <u>Déshérité</u>! [Verily, We have given you the abundance. So pray to honour your Lord, and sacrifice. Verily, he hates who hates you finds himself disinherited]

The explanation of this short Surah has caused Qur'ān scholars in the East and the West a great deal of trouble. Even a summary of the nearly eleven pages of attempted interpretations in *Ṭabarī* (XXX 320–330) would be taking things too far. In any case, this would only serve as an example of how falsely the Qur'ān text has been in part interpreted by the Arab exegetes. Nevertheless Paret devotes just under two pages to it in his *Kommentar* [*Commentary*] pp. 525–527). As an introduction (525) he remarks on the subject:

> Harris Birkeland has published an extensive interpretation of this short, but difficult Surah (Harris Birkeland. *The Lord Guideth: Studies on Primitive Islam*, Oslo 1956, pp. 56–99).

The following explanation of the individual words will show that all of the previous efforts were love's labor's lost.

1. The expression selected as the title of the Surah الكوثر (*al-kawṯar*) is the transliteration of the Syro-Aramaic ܟܘܬܪܐ / *kuttāra*, which is the nominal form of the second stem ܟܬܪ / *kattar* (*to persevere*). This verbal root (*kṯar) is found in both languages, the Arabic root كثر / *kaṯura* (*to be much, many*) referring to quantity, while the Syro-Aramaic counterpart ܟܬܪ / *kṯar* (*to remain, to last*) merely refers to quantity of time, i.e., duration. In the Qur'ān this Syro-Aramaic meaning occurs only occasionally, e.g., in Surah 20:33, 34: كي نسبحك كثيرا / ونذكرك كثيرا / *kay nusabbiḥaka kaṯīrā / wa-naḏkuraka kaṯīrā* "that we may *constantly* glorify Thee and make *constantly* remembrance of Thee."⁵ The medial و / *waw* in كوثر (*kawṯar*) is *mater lectionis* for short *u*, as is normal according to Syro-Aramaic spelling. The word should therefore be interpreted as *kuttār* as in Classical Syriac ܟܘܬܪܐ / *kuttārā* or Western Syriac *kūṯārā* ⁶ (*constancy, persistence, steadfastness*). The fricative *ṯ* (pronounced as *th* in English "*thing*") of the canonical Qur'ānic reading (*kawṯar*) reflects the Western Syriac pronunciation after the gemination of consonants was generally dropped. Since such a *mater lectionis* is uncommon in the Qur'ān, the Arabic philologists interpreted this *mater lectionis* as the non-syllabic part of the diphthong *aw*, thus reading the form as *kawṯar* (= *fawʿal*). The corresponding Arabic form of the Syro-Aramaic *kuttārā* would be تكثير (*takṯīr*).⁷

   This uncommon form *kawṯar* ought to have aroused the scepticism of the commentators. It is also no accident that the word has never made its

way into Arabic in the meaning of *abundance*. This is also, as it is often the case, why it is regarded as the name of a river in Paradise and, among other things, is still used today as a woman's name (with the actually Syro-Aramaic meaning of *Constantia*).

2. The same meaning is expressed by the borrowing from Syro-Aramaic صل / *ṣalli* (*pray*). On the other hand, the word that has been understood in Arabic as "slaughter," وانحر / *wa-nḥar*, has been misread. What is meant here in connection with "to pray" is the Syro-Aramaic root ܢܓܪ / *nḡar* (*to wait, to hold out, to persist*).[8] The only meaning from this root that has entered into the Arabic borrowed form نجر / *najara* is the meaning "to plane." In the Qur'ān, however, it is the first meaning that is meant. Therefore, Arabic وانجر / *wa-nḡar* (*and persist – in prayer*) should be read here. The Qur'ān employs in this connection among other things the synonymous root صبر / *ṣabara* (< ܣܝܒܪ / *saybar*). Parallels are offered here by Surah 19:65: فاعبده واصطبر لعبادته (*so worship him and wait in his worship*) and Surah 20:132: وامر اهلك بالصلوة واصطبر عليها (*command your family to pray and persist therein*). Furthermore, with the lexically equivalent Arabic verb داوم على / *dāma ʿalā* (in modern Arabic دام على / *dāwama ʿalā*) (*to persist in something, to do something constantly*), it is said in Surah 70:23 of those who pray: الذين هم على صلاتهم دائمون (*who say their prayers constantly*).

3. As a further adapted transcription of Syro-Aramaic ܣܢܐܟ / (*sānāḵ*)[9] (*your hater = enemy, adversary*) in Arabic, the Qur'ānic شانئك (*šāni'aka*) has been understood correctly as "your hater." In the Christian Syriac terminology, Satan is referred to, among other things, as a *"misanthrope"* —hence an "adversary"—in contrast to God, who is referred to as (*raḥmā-nā* > Arabic رحمن / *raḥmān*) "one who loves mankind" (philanthropist).

4. Finally, the root بتر (*batara*) (*to break off, to amputate*), based on the Arabic elative الابتر (*al-abtar*), is a metathesis of the Syro-Aramaic ܬܒܪ (*tḇar*), for which *Mannā* (829a) gives us the following Arabic meanings: (2) انكسر. انسحق (*to be broken, defeated, destroyed*), (3) فرّ. انهزم (*to make a dash for freedom, to be put to flight*).

3. Excursus: On the Etymology of the Arabic Root أعطى / aʿṭā

The result of the philological analysis of the individual expressions is that, except for the form, *scarcely one word in this Surah is of Arabic origin*. In the end, the only verb considered to be genuinely Arabic, أعطى / *aʿṭā* (*to give*), will prove to be, etymologically (by the shifting of the *hamza* to *ʿayn* and the resultant emphasizing of the ܬ/*t*), a secondary dialectal formation of Syro-Aramaic ܐܝܬܝ / *aytī* (*to summon, to bring*). This is already clear from the Qur-

'ānic use of these two roots. In other words, while the Arabic root عطى / 'aṭā occurs a total of 13 times in the Qur'ān, the instances of the root borrowed from the Syro-Aramaic ܐܬܐ /etā > Arabic اتى /atā (to come), with all its derivatives, are countless. The Arabic form أعطى /a'ṭā(to give) corresponds to the Syro-Aramaic Af'el ܐܝܬܝ / aytī (to summon, to bring). The equivalent Arabic form of أتى / 'atā would be > *أأتى >'a'tā, a form which would violate the phonotactical rule in Arabic, which does not allow two consecutive hamza, especially when the second one is vowelless.[10] To circumvent this rule, the second hamza was replaced by the acoustically most similar phoneme 'ayn. As the place of articulation of the 'ayn is pharyngeal, the following consonant was consequently pharyngealized, i.e., it became emphatic "ṭ." These phonetic replacements thus resulted in the secondary Arabic verb أعطى /a'ṭā(to give), the radicals of which, however, have no counterparts in any other Semitic language. C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, gives the etymological correlatives of the Syro-Aramaic verbal ܛܥܐ / 'ṭā (520a) (1. *delevit, evertit / to efface, to cancel, to exterminate*) as follows: Hebrew עטה ('aṭā) *velavit (to veil)*, Arabic غطا (ġaṭā) *texit (to cover)*, Accadean *e,ū obscurum esse (to be obscure)*. These etymological correlations make clear that the Arabic verb أعطى /a'ṭā, in the sense of "to give," is not genuine Arabic, but a secondary derivation from the Syro-Aramaic verbal root ܐܬܐ (etā) > Arabic أتى (atā) > IVth stem *أأتى ('a'tā) > أعطى ('a'ṭā).

The last sceptics may be convinced by the following evidence quoted in A. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*, 146 (codex of Ubai b. Ka'b), Surah 20:36, where the canonical reading أوتيت ('ūtīta) (in the context—literally: "you are given" your request = your request is granted) is transmitted in this old codex as أعطيت ('u'ṭīta). Hence: أوتيت ('ūtīta < *'u'tīta) = أعطيت ('u'ṭīta).[11]

From the preceding discussion the following reading and understanding has now resulted for Surah 108 according to the Syro-Aramaic reading:

انا اعطينك الكوثر / فصل لربك وانجر / ان سانيك هو الابتر

(*inna a'ṭaynāka l-kawṯar* or *al-kuttār /fa-ṣalli li-rabbik wa-nǧar /*
in sānīka huwa l-abtar)

1. We have given you the (virtue of) _constancy_ ;
2. so pray to your Lord and _persevere_ (in prayer);
3. your _adversary_ (the devil) is (then) the _loser_.

4. Christian Epistolary Literature in the Qur'ān (Surah 108)

This brief Surah is based on the Christian Syriac liturgy. From it arises a clear reminiscence of the well-known passage, also used in the *compline* of the Roman Catholic canonical hours of prayer, from the First Epistle General of Peter, Chapter 5, Verses 8–9 (according to the *Pšiṭṭā*):

8 Wake up (Brothers) and be vigilant, because your *adversary* the *devil*, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom *resist steadfast* in the faith."

From this first evidence of Christian epistolary literature in the Qur'ān it now becomes clear that it has previously been a mistake to connect the text of Surah 108 with any of the enemies of the Prophet Muḥammad, not to mention with the expressions the Qur'ān has been accused of using in this regard, expressions which are unworthy of it. This text is without a doubt pre-Qur'ānic. As such it is a part of that *matrix out of which the Qur'ān was originally constituted as a Christian liturgical book* (*Qəryānā*), and which as a whole has been designated in Western Qur'ān studies as the *first Meccan period*.[12] The address in the second person in this as in other Surahs is moreover not necessarily directed at the Prophet himself. Rather, as is customary in liturgical books, each believer is addressed in the second person.

As in the Roman Catholic *compline*, one can easily imagine these three verses as an introduction to an earlier Syro-Aramaic hour of prayer. Bell's suspicion that it is a fragment from Surah 74 cannot be ruled out, since this Surah as well as Surah 73 with their call to bedtime prayer, i.e., to the *vigils*, read in part like a *monastic rule*.[13] Whence there too the hitherto unrecognized Syro-Aramaisms, the explanation of which is being reserved for a future work.

5. The Eucharist: Surah 96: al-ʻAlaq – "the Clot"

In the same way the Arab exegetes had seen in Surah 96 (al-ʻAlaq – "the Clot") the start of the revelation announced to the prophet by the angel Gabriel. However the lexicological and syntactical analysis of this Surah, examined under its Syriac connection, has revealed—contrary to the confusion which has reigned in its Arabic reading up to now—a clear and coherent composition in which the faithful is entreated to pray and participate in the liturgical service that the Qur'ān designates as The Eucharist (corresponding to *iqtarib* taken from the Syriac liturgical term ܐܬܩܪܒ *eṯqarraḇ,* Arabic term *ta-qarrab* which signifies "take part in a liturgical service" as well as "to receive the Eucharist."

Islamic tradition sees in this Surah [Surah 96] the beginning of the Revelation, because the initial word *iqra' (iqrā)* ("read") has been interpreted as being the first word the angel Gabriel addressed to the Prophet inviting him to read the Qur'ān. However, the Arabic verb *qara'a*, derived from the Syriac *qrā*, has only retained the meaning "to read," whereas in Syriac it has at least twelve meanings and further nuances, the most appropriate in this context is "to invoke, to call." Verse 1 : "*Iqra' bi-smi rabbi-ka. . .*" corresponds to the

Syriac locution *qra b-šem maryā* meaning "Invoke the name of the Lord," a formula which introduces a prayer or a liturgical office. It concerns just such an office in this case, it is the last term used in verse 19 which we will now define. The verb *iqtarib* (Arabic meaning "draw closer") is in fact Arabic only in form and corresponds in reality to the liturgical Syriac term "ܐܬܩܪܒ *eṯqarraḇ*" meaning "to take part in the Offering (Eucharistic)" as well as "to receive the Eucharist."

With this term the Qur'ān reveals a detail hitherto unsuspected making an allusion to a Pre-Islamic Christian liturgy and we discover at the same time another term also not well-known until now.

Let us now look more closely at Surah 96, "al-'Alaq." In the Islamic tradition this is held to be the beginning of the prophetic revelation. Serving as the title is a keyword selected from the text, العلق (*al-'alaq*), which until now has been falsely translated by "clotted blood" (Bell), "der Embryo" (Paret), and "l'Adhérence" (Blachère). For purposes of comparison the following very literal rendering of Paret's translation[14] (513 f.) ought to be sufficient.

Surah 96:1-19: العلق / "al-'Alaq"

1: <u>Recite</u> in the name of your Lord who has created,

2: has created man out of an embryo!

3: <u>Recite</u>! Your Lord is <u>noble</u> like nobody in the world [Note: literally, the noblest (one) (al-akramu)],

4: (He) who [Note: (Or) Your Lord, noble like nobody in the world, is the one who] taught the use of the calamus-pen [Or who taught by means of the calamus-pen],

5: taught man what (beforehand) he did not know.

6: <u>No</u>! Man is truly <u>rebellious</u> (*yaṭġā*),

7: (for) that he <u>considers</u> himself <u>his own master</u> (*an ra'āhu staġnā*).

8: (Yet) to your Lord <u>all things</u> <u>return</u> (some day) [literally: To your Lord is the <u>return</u>].

9: <u>What</u> do you think, indeed, of him who

10: forbids a slave [Or: a servant (of God)] when he is saying his prayers (*ṣallā*)?

11: <u>What</u> do you think <u>if</u> he (i.e., <u>the one</u>?) is rightly guided 12: or commands one to be God-fearing? 13: <u>What</u> do you think <u>if</u> he (i.e., <u>the other</u>?) declares (the truth of the divine message) to be a lie and turns away (from it)? (That the latter is in the wrong should be clear.) 14: (For) Does he not know that God sees (what he does?) 15: <u>No</u>! If he does not stop (doing what he is doing) we will surely <u>seize</u> (him on Judgment Day) <u>by the forelock</u>, 16:a <u>lying</u>, sinful <u>forelock</u>. 17: May he then call his <u>clique</u> (*nādī*)! 18: We shall (for our part) call the <u>henchmen</u> (of <u>Hell</u>) (? *az-zabāniya*). 19: <u>No</u>! Prostrate yourself (rather in worship) and <u>approach</u> (your Lord in humility)!

The discussion of the underlined expressions will first of all be carried out verse by verse:

5.1 Verse 1:

Borrowed from the Syro-Aramaic ܩܪܐ (*qrā*), the Arabic verb قرأ (*qara'a*, although originally probably *qarā* like *banā* and *ramā*), has for the most part taken over the meaning "to read" from Syro-Aramaic. Elsewhere, the Qur'ān furnishes evidence of the meaning "to teach" once in Surah 87:6, سنقرئك فلا تنسى (*sa-nuqri'uka fa-lā tansā*, which should actually be read *sa-nuqrīka*), which is rendered as follows by Paret (507): "We will <u>cause</u> you <u>to recite</u> (revelatory texts). You will now forget nothing (thereof)." Under ܐܩܪܝ, (*aqrī*) *Mannā* (698b) gives the meaning "to teach" in Arabic with علّم (*'allama*). Accordingly, what is meant by this verse is: "We will teach you (in a way) that you will not forget."[15]

The correct interpretation of the expression اقرا باسم ربك (*iqra'* [actually *iqrā*] *bi-smi rabbika*) is of crucial importance for the historical appraisal of this Surah, which Islamic tradition has declared to be the beginning of the prophetic revelation. In this regard, Nöldeke refers (*op. cit.* 81) to Hartwig Hirschfeld, who, in pointing to the frequent occurrence in the Bible of the Hebrew expression *qrā ḇ-šem YHWH*, had translated the Qur'ānic expression correctly with "proclaim the name of thy Lord!" The explanation given by the Arab grammarian Abū 'Ubaida—that قرأ (*qara'a*) means as much as ذكر (*ḏakara*) "to call (upon)" here—proves to be equally correct, despite the fact that it is rejected by Nöldeke with the comment: "But قرأ never has this meaning." For that, he refers to M. J. de Goeje in the glossary to *Ṭabarī* where قرأ بشئ is said to mean "he read in something."

Thus, Nöldeke took as his model for the explanation of this early Qur'ānic expression its later misunderstood use in Arabic, instead of tracing it back to its Syro-Aramaic (or Hebrew) origin. The fact is that the equivalent Syro-Aramaic expression taken from Biblical usage ܩܪܐ ܒܫܡ ܡܪܝܐ (*qrā ḇ-šem māryā*; with and without ܒ / *b*) has in general become a *technical term* for "to pray, to hold divine service."[16] But as for how the preposition ܒ / *b-* is to be explained, it is simply to be understood here as follows: "Call: <u>In the</u> name of the Lord!" One does this particularly at the beginning of a prayer or a divine service, and indeed it was this that was also replaced later on in the recitation of the Qur'ān by the parallel formula بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم (*bi-smi l-lāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*) (<u>In the</u> name of God, the compassionate, the merciful).

Nöldeke has also not noticed that this expression, though not with the borrowed verb قرا (< ܩܪܐ / *qrā*), but with the lexically equivalent Arabic verb دعا (*da'ā*) (*to call, to invoke*), is documented in connection with the preposition ܒ / *bi-* in this meaning in a verse[17] attributed to *Waraqa ibn Nawfal*

(ورقة بن نوفل ; cousin of *Ḥadīǧa*, the first wife of the Prophet),[18] which runs as follows:

أقول إذا صليت في كل بيعة تباركت قد أكثرت باسمك داعيا

I say whenever I pray in a church.[19] "Be you praised, full oft *I call* [<u>with</u>] *your name!*"

There can accordingly be no doubt that the introductory formula اقرا باسم ربك (*iqra' bi-smi rabbika*) has the equivalent Syro-Aramaic sense and is to be understood as a call to prayer. Indeed, the subsequent context of the entire Surah argues for this as well. To understand from this a call to *read in a book* is simply without any objective foundation. The previous interpretation rests solely on the later Arabic exegesis's misunderstanding of the use of this *Syriacism*.

The logical conclusion is that the view held by the Arabic tradition, according to which the angel Gabriel had with this *formula* called upon the Prophet to read, even though the Prophet could not read, is a later pious legend growing out of this very same misunderstanding. The Surah is, as a whole, a thematically presented call to worship, as the other misunderstood expressions will show.

5.2 Verse 2

About the expression علق (*'alaq*) Blachère (657) remarks correctly that it seems originally to have been a noun derived from the verb *'alaqa*, "to stick, to cling." To that extent, he is doubting the interpretation "clots of blood" of the Arab exegetes, which Paret, in turn, interprets as "embryo." With the corresponding translation, "adhérence" (adhesion), however, he is nonetheless not able to explain the actual meaning of this metaphorical expression. This is because here, too, the *tertium comparationis* can only be determined by way of the Syro-Aramaic. Add to this that the *Thes.* (II 2902) cites for us under ܥܠܘܩܐ (*'ālōqā*) (for which it gives the loan word in Arabic علقة / *'alaqa* "leech") the following commentary from the Syrian lexicographers, who, besides the *leech* named after this property, also explain the following with this *nomen agentis* "clinger:"

ܐܘ ܛܝܢܐ ܘܠܝܫܐ ܕܕܒܩܝܢ ܒܐܝܕܐ ܘܥܣܩܝܢ ܠܡܬܫܝܓܘ

aw ṭīnā w-layšā d-dābqīn b-īḏā w-'asqīn l-mettšīḡū

The expression "clinger" designates either a "leech" "or the <u>clay</u> or <u>dough</u> that sticks to one's hand and is difficult to wash off."[20]

With that, the expression علق (*'alaq*) would be explained, since the property "sticky" is indeed used by the Qur'ān in connection with "clay," in one instance, in Surah 37:11: انا خلقنهم من طين لازب "we have created you out of *sticky*[21] *clay.*" Adapted to the rhyme, the Qur'ān is here using the synonymous

Syro-Aramaic expression familiar to it. With من علق (*min ʿalaq*) what is meant in Arabic is من طين عالق = لازب (out of something *sticky = sticky clay*).

5.3 Verse 3

For the Arabic elative (absolute superlative) referring to God, الاكرم (*al-akram*), the meaning also common in modern Arabic, "honorable, admirable," is actually adequate, especially since it is here precisely a question of the worship of God in the church service.

5.4 Verse 4

Because God has taught man بالقلم (*bi-l-qalam*) "with the calamus reed-pen," surely the most plausible explanation is the *knowledge revealed through the scripture.*

5.5 Verse 6

There begins at this point in the Surah, with كلا (*kallā*),[22] which has been misread in Arabic and misunderstood abruptly in the context as "*No!*", a series of three adverbs, all of which mean the Syro-Aramaic ܟܠܐ (*kullā*) and which are, depending on the context, to be understood positively in the sense of "everything," but negatively in the meaning of "not at all." In this verse the كلا (Syro-Aramaic *kullā* in the sense of Arabic كليّا *kullīyaⁿ*) belongs with the preceding ما لم يعلم (*mā lam yaʿlam*), because in the Qurʾān the sentence does not necessarily end with the rhyme. Hence this كلا is to be drawn into Verse 5, so that this verse will then be: "he taught man what he did <u>not</u> know <u>at all</u>."[23]

Secondly, Paret translates the verb طغى (*ṭaġā*) with "aufsässig sein [to be rebellious];" (Blachère: "L'homme … est <u>rebelle</u>;" Bell: "man <u>acts presumptuously.</u>") Except for the secondary غ / *ġ* there is, in itself, nothing Arabic about this verbal root.

6. Excursus: On the Etymology of the Verbal Root طغى (*ṭaġā*)

This verb is unusual in any Arabic dialect. Its use in modern Arabic is due exclusively to this misread Qurʾānic word. The etymological Arabic equivalent is in fact the verbal root ضاع / *ḍāʿa* (generated by sonorization of the Syro-Aramaic emphatic ܛ / *ṭ* > ض /*ḍ* with simultaneous sound-shifting). The Arabic ع / *ʿayn* in ضاع / *ḍāʿa* makes clear that the diacritical point in طغى / *ṭaġā* has not any justification and that the original spelling طعى / *ṭaʿā* renders truly the Syro-Aramaic verbal root ܛܥܐ /*ṭʿā*.

The etymology is covered by the original meaning of both verbal roots (cf. C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* 282a, ܛܥܐ / *ṭʿā* 1. *erravit* [*to go astray*]) =

Arabic ضاع /ḍāʿa (to get lost). According to the classical correspondence table of the Semitic sounds in C. Brockelmann's *Syrische Grammatik*[24] (p.15), the Arabic ض /ḍ can only correspond with a Syriac ܥ /ʿayn. A classical example is Syriac ܐܪܥܐ /arʿā = Arabic ارض /arḍ (earth). This is the classical rule. But that in the multiplicity of the Arabic (or common Aramaic) dialects a Syro-Aramaic emphatic ṭ can become occasionally an Arabic ḍ by sonorization, this phenomenon has hitherto not been considered in the Semitic philology. A first example we had with Syro-Aramaic ܛܪܦ (Eastern Aramaic ṭrap̄) > Arabic ضرب (ḍaraba [to strike, to hit]), from which there are three variants that illustrate the transition from Syro-Aramaic ܛ /ṭ into the Arabic ض / ḍ: a) طرف (ṭarafa < Western Syro-Aramaic ܛܪܦ / ṭrap̄ = ṭraf) (to hit, to touch the eye with something) (*Lisān* IX 213b, 11f.); b) طرب (ṭariba < Eastern Syro-Aramaic ܛܪܦ / ṭrap̄ – with sonorization of the p > b) (to be *touched* emotionally = to be moved, to be delighted); c) finally with sonorization of the emphatic ط /ṭ > ض /ḍ = ضرب (ḍaraba – "to strike").

The Qurʾān offers a further example of a sonorized Syro-Aramaic emphatic ܛ /ṭ with the secondary Arabic verbal root ضرّ (ḍarra) (to harm, damage) < Syro-Aramaic ܛܪܐ (ṭrā) (to strike, to push—7 further variants in C. Brockelmann), that C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* 287a, compares with the actually from Syro-Aramaic truly borrowed Arabic Verb طرأ (ṭaraʾa), the *tertiae hamza* of which is nothing but a fictitious pronunciation imagined by the Arab philologists. Not only the apparent restriction of this verb to the first stem and its semantics field to one general meaning (to break in, over-take, befall) shows that it is borrowed, but also the fact that the Arab lexico-graphers did not observe that its VIIIth stem إضطرّ (iṭṭarra /uṭṭurra) (to be forced, compelled), according to its original meaning, does not fall under the root ضرّ (ḍarra) (to damage), but under طرأ (ṭaraʾa = ṭarā), according to the meaning of Syro-Aramaic ܛܪܐ (ṭrā) (to push away, to repel) and its reflexive stem ܐܬܛܪܝ (eṭṭrī). That the secondary Arabic form ضرّ (ḍarra) is derived from the Syro-Aramaic ܛܪܐ (ṭrā), shows C. Brockelmann (*op. cit.*) by the same specific meaning quoted under 6.: *offendit* (to harm).

The second element that shows the perplexity of the Arab Qurʾān readers is the variable reading of the alternative writing of the nominal form of the verbal root ضرّ (ḍarra), depending on its spelling with or without the Syro-Aramaic emphatic ending ā of the *status emphaticus*. Apart from the reading ḍarr (harm, damage) as antonym of نفع (nafaʿa) (use, benefit), the Qurʾānic spelling ضرّ (without the emphatic end-ā) is read ḍurr(u/i/l/a) (derived from the IInd Syro-Aramaic intensive stem ܛܪܝ / ṭarrī, verbal noun ܛܘܪܝܐ / ṭurrāyā; 19 times in the Qurʾān in the sense of *distress, adversity*). When, on the other hand, the same word is written with the Syro-Aramaic emphatic end-ā ضرا (properly: ḍurrā—with dropping of the unaccented y of the Syro-Aramaic word before the end-ā—as in قران < Syro-Aramaic ܩܪܝܢܐ / qəryān(ā) > Arabic qurān / qurʾān) or with the Arabic article الضرا (etymo-

logically: *aḍ-ḍurrā* < ܛܘܪܳܝܐ / *ṭurrāyā*; both spellings 9 times), this spelling is read with an added *hamza* after the end-*ā* as الضراء (*aḍ-ḍarrā'u*), as though this spelling were etymologically different.

7. On the Origin of the Arabic Final Hamza

In his *Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* [*Compendium of the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*] (I 593, C.a.), Carl Brockelmann supposes a verbal class *tertiae hamza*, according to the classical Arabic grammar, when he says: (add Kienast)

> Als 3. Radikal war ˀ schon im altarab. Dialekt des Ḥijāz nach *i* und *u* zu *ĭ* und *ŭ* geworden…[As 3ʳᵈ radical, the ˀ (= hamza) had become already in the old Arabic dialect of Ḥijāz *ĭ* and *ŭ* after *i* and *u*. . .].

But in fact, what C. Brockelmann says about the Hebrew (*op. cit.* 594 b.), Syriac and Assyrian (594 c.) as to the "dropping" of the III ' (*tertiae hamza*), is likewise to apply on the so-called (post-Qur'ānic) *Old Arabic*. For the Qur'ānic orthography has no graphical sign for a final *hamza*. Spellings as اتوكوا (*atawakkaw* [*I lean*]—same spelling in both codices of Samarqand and British Library Or. 2165—traditional reading: *atawakka'u*; Surah 20:18) [makes one] suspect a hypercorrect late emendation according to the classical Arabic grammar. As to the supposed III ' (*tertiae hamza*), the end-*alif* in the Qur'ānic spelling has been erroneously regarded as a *hamza*-bearer. From Syro-Aramaic borrowed verbs, as e.g., قرا (*to read*) and برا (*to create*), are not to be read *qara'a* and *bara'a*, but—according to the Syro-Aramaic pronunciation: *qarā* and *barā*. Except some onomatopoetic verbs in Arabic, as تأتأ / *ta'ta'a* (*to stammer*), طأطأ /*ṭa'ṭa'a* (*to bow one's head*) and the glottal stop in spoken Arabic in لا / *la'*, *la'a = lā* (*no*), perhaps also in the case of a softened ع / *'ayn* as in بدأ / *bada'a* < بدع / *bada'a* < methatesis of Syro-Aramaic ܒ݂ܕ /*b̲ad̲* (*to create*),[25] it can be said that with regard to the Qur'ānic orthography the Qur'ān does not know a III ' (*tertiae hamza*).

Much graver is however the addition of the by no means justified *hamza* after an end-*alif*, as far as such an *alif* in Syro-Aramaic can designate at least three different categories:

a) The ending of a *status emphaticus* masculine (be it a noun or an adjective), as e.g., شفاء (traditional reading: *šifā'un*—Surahs 10:57; 16:69; 17:82; 41:44) < Syro-Aramaic ܫܦ݂ܝܐ / *šep̄yā* or *šp̄āyā* (*clearness, purity*); the same Syro-Aramaic form ܗܕ݂ܝܐ / *hed̲yā* or *hd̲āyā* = Arabic هدى / *hudan* or هداية / *hidāya* (*leading, guidance*) shows how arbitrary the traditional different reading of the alternative spelling of these both words in Surah 41:44 (هدى وشفاء) as *hudan wa-šifā'an* is, since both words, according to the same

Syro-Aramaic origin, are to read likewise as *hudā wa-šifā* (after dropping of the unaccented Syro-Aramaic *y* before the emphatic end-*ā*).

The superfluous end-*hamza* can also distort a genuine Arabic adverb, as in Surah 12:16, where it is said of Joseph's brothers: وجاو اباهم عشاء يبكون (Bell I 219: *They came to their father* [wa-ǧā'ū abā-hum] *in the evening* ['īšā'an], *weeping* [yabkūn]), whereas the adverb "in the evening" occurring four times in the Qur'ān (Surahs 19:11,62; 30:18; 40:46) as عشيا ('*ašīyan*) and not عشاء ('*išā'an*), should have called] the attention of the Arab readers to the fact, that the latter original spelling, without the end-*hamza*, [was to be read as] عشا يبكون (*ġiššan yabkūn*) "<u>false</u> tears."

b) All cases of the Arabic feminine elative with an end-*alif* reflect truly the ending of the Syro-Aramaic *status absolutus* feminine with an end-*ā* and are consequently to read without the superfluous end-*hamza*, as, e.g., صفرا (*yellow*) in Surah 2:69, that is to read adequately *ṣafrā* (as in spoken Arabic) and not صفراء (traditional reading: *ṣafrā'u*). The early Arab grammarians were obviously aware of this morphology, in so far as they declared such an ending as ممنوع من الصرف / *mamnū' min aṣ-ṣarf* (*banned as to the inflection = indeclinable*). Later grammarians may have interpreted this rule as *partially declinable* (rendered in the Western Arabic grammars by the term *diptotic*) and added to this purpose the fictitious end-*hamza*. This concerns as well the following plural endings.

c) The end-hamza in the the Arabic plurals of the types: فعلاء / *fu'alā'* and افعلاء / *af'ilā'*, are likewise superfluous. All these unjustified additions are an invention of the Arab philologists subsequent to the creation of the classical Arabic grammar in the second half of the eighth century and later. As far as such forms occur in Arabic poetry, this linguistic-historical criterion would provide a *terminus post quem* (= *a quo*) as to the origin of the corresponding poetical works. Further morphological formations of the classical Arabic grammar, borrowed from Syro-Aramaic, will be demonstrated with some examples from the early Arabic poetry in a forthcoming study.

8. Continuation of Surah 96:6

Since it became now clear that طغى (*ṭaġā = ṭa'ā*; with all other Qur'ānic derivations) is a borrowing from the Syro-Aramaic ܛܥܐ (*ṭ'ā*), its meaning can consequently be found among the equivalent semantic field appropriate to this context. It follows from the context that the meaning to be retained is the one cited in *Mannā* (289b f.) under (6) نسى (*nasiya* – "to forget"). Accordingly, this verse does not say "man is *rebellious*," but "man *forgets*."

8.1 Verse 6

First of all, the result of the above misunderstood ليطغى (*la-yaṭġā*) was that the particle following it, ان, was misread as *'an* (*that*) instead of *'in* (*when*). The personal suffix for the verb رءاه (*ra'-hu*—properly: *rā-hu*) has been correctly understood reflexively from the context. This usage happens by chance, of course, not to be Arabic, but Syro-Aramaic.[26]

Secondly, however, in the case of the next verb استغنى (*istaġnā*), it is not "considers himself his own master" that is correct, but rather the alternative that Bell proposes (II 667) in note 4: "*he* has become rich."
The verses 6–7 are accordingly:

> In truth, man *forgets* *when* he sees that he *has become rich*.

8.2 Verse 7

In the first place, it should now be clear that this understanding yields a conjunction أنّ (*anna* – "*that*") introducing a dependent clause. The hitherto misunderstood context, however, has caused the syntactical unity of this sentence construction to be so torn apart that one made this dependent clause into an independent main clause introduced by the intensifying particle إنّ (*inna*).

Secondly, from this misunderstanding the need arose to interpret the Arabic verbal noun الرجعى (*ar-ruǧʿā*—rather *ar-raǧʿā*) in no other way than the general sense of "return to your Lord." If one considers the new understanding, however, then this "return," referring to the "man who has become rich," is to be understood as the "return" or "repatriation" of this circumstance unto God, which man "forgets" to the extent that he, in accordance with a familiar human experience, no longer thinks about praying. Verses 6–8 are thus directly concerned with the subject of this Surah and should be understood as follows:

> 6. In truth, man *forgets,* 7. *when* he sees that he *has become rich,* 8. *that* (this) is *to be returned unto* your Lord.

Whereas until now it was a question of a man become wanton who fails to pray out of personal conviction, in the sequence which now follows the Qur'ān addresses the external influence of an unbeliever who wants to stop a devout man (a *servant of God*) from praying. In the process, the verses 9–14 consist syntactically of two previously completely overlooked conditional clauses, the first formulated as a question and the second as a counter-question. From Paret's translation, the previous confused understanding is evident. Nevertheless, first of all, as an introduction to the syntactic structure, the individual elements will be analyzed.

8.3 Verse 9

From the perspective of the Arabic understanding, the particle أ *ʾa* prefixed to the verb ارءيت (*a-ra'ayta*—properly: *a-rayta*) in Verses 9 and 11 cannot be understood otherwise than as an interrogative particle. This understanding excludes a subsequent conditional clause, but exposes at the same time the disharmony of the syntactic period.

8.4 Excursus: (a) On the Meaning of the Particle أ /ʾa

This problem cannot be overcome without the help of Syro-Aramaic. For only the Syro-Aramaic can give us information about the genesis of the Arabic interrogative particle أ / *ʾa*, which until now has been considered *classical*. In his study on the subject Bergsträsser[27] naturally starts from the classical assumption and contents himself with a descriptive reproduction of the opinions of the Arabic grammarians. Nobody seems to have realized till now, however, that, on the basis of the Qurʾānic usage, the Arabic interrogative particle أ / *ʾa* has only grown secondarily out of the Syro-Aramaic particle ܐܘ (*aw*) through the omission of the ܘ *w*. Evidence for this is provided by the Qurʾānic usage itself. For example, it can be determined that the original particle او / *aw* occurs as an interrogative particle in conjunction with the negative particle لا (اولا *awa-lā*) three times and with لم (اولم *awa-lam*) 33 times, whereas, with 78 occurrences, the usage with the monophthongized particle أ / *ʾa*, for instance, ألم (*a-lam*), clearly predominates.

The *Lisān* (XIV 55b) cites *al-Farrāʾ*, who explains the و / *w* of the Qurʾānic interrogative particle أولم (*awa-lam*) as an "*isolated* wāw" to which the interrogative particle أ / *ʾa* was added (إنها واو مفردة دخلت عليها ألف الاستفهام). Hence the awareness that this interrogative particle is not of Arabic origin is lacking among all of the Arabic philologists. The other uses of the particle او / *aw* in the Qurʾān also coincide to a large extent with that of the homonymous Syro-Aramaic ܐܘ / *aw*.[28]

Thus, for example, the Qurʾānic use of the monophthongized particle أ / *ʾa* has found its place in Arabic as a conjunction introducing an apodosis expressing uncertainty or doubt, especially after corresponding negative verbs, as in لا أدرى أ (*lā adrī ʾa*) or لا أعلم أ (*lā aʿlamu ʾa* – "I do not know whether. . .") (cf., e.g., Surah 72:10,25). As a rule this is felt to be an indirect interrogative particle. Anyone with a feeling for the language, however, would not be able to recognize this function as soon as he encountered the Syro-Aramaic particle ܐܘ / *aw* instead of the Arabically naturalized particle أ / *ʾa*. An example of this is provided by Surah 3:128:

ليس لك من الامر شئ او يتوب عليهم او يعذبهم فانهم ظلمون

Paret (55) renders this verse as follows:

3:128 —it is not for you (to decide) the matter—<u>or</u> to turn again to them (mercifully) <u>or</u> (else) to punish them. They are (indeed) wrongdoers.

The *Lisān* (XIV 55a) explains the particle أو / *aw* here in the sense of "<u>until</u> he takes pity on them" or "<u>unless</u> God takes pity on them" (<u>حتى</u> يتوب عليهم و <u>إلى</u> أن يتوب عليهم). However, according to the Syro-Aramaic understanding of the conjunction ܐܘ / *aw* the verse says:

3:128 It should be *a matter of indifference* to you <u>whether</u> (God) takes pity on them <u>or</u> dooms them to death (by fire): they are (in any case) wrongdoers.

8.5 (b) On the Usage of the Particle أ /ca in the Sense of إن /in (if)

The list that the *Thes.* (I 48) supplies, by way of the East Syrian lexicographers, on the usage of the Syro-Aramaic conjunction ܐܘ (*aw*) is interesting in this regard. Under the eight occasionally occurring functions *Bar Bahlūl* gives the meaning ܐܝܢ (*ʾēn*) (*if*). This in turn coincides with the explanation provided by *Kisāʾī* (953–1002), cited in the *Lisān* (XIV 55a), that أو (*aw*) also occurs *conditionally* (وتكون <u>شرطا</u> : قال الكسائي وحده – "only Kisāʾī said: it also occurs conditionally").

8.6 The Solution of Verses 9 to 14

On the basis of this excursus, the following new interpretation emerges for these verses:

9–10. The first ارءيت is to be understood in the sense of إن رأيت (*in ra'ayta* – "<u>if</u> you see"). Accordingly, the double verse runs:

If you see one who (wants) to stop a worshipper (of God) (from praying) when he is praying. . . .

11–12. The second ارءيت is to be understood as a question in the sense of "to think": "do you (*then*) think <u>that</u>…." Accordingly, the falsely read إن (*in*) must be read as أن (*an*). As a result, this double verse reads as an *apodosis*:

do you (*then*) think <u>that</u> he is on the right path or *is thinking pious thoughts*?

13–14. Parallel to Verse 9, the repeated ارءيت is in turn to be read إن رأيت (*in ra'ayta* – "<u>if</u> you think"), followed once more by أن (*an*) (*that*) instead of إن (*in* – "if"), and understood as a counter-question with a protasis and apodosis:

If (on the other hand) you think *that* he is denying (God) and turning away (from Him), *then* does he not know that God sees *everything*?

15. What is meant by the second كلا is again Syro-Aramaic ܟܠܐ (*kullā*) (in the sense of كل شئ / *kulla šayʾ* – "everything"); as an object it belongs to the preceding verb.

The particle لئن (falsely *la-ʾēn*, actually to be read *l- n*) consists of the intensifying Arabic particle ـل / *la-* and the Syro-Aramaic conjunction ܐܝܢ (*ʾēn*).[29] This form occurs 61 times in the Qurʾān. Older Qurʾānic manuscripts should provide evidence of the full spelling لاين (= *l-ʾn*). The *little peak* considered as a ـيـ / *y carrier* was, contrary to the Qurʾānic (i.e., Syro-Aramaic) pronunciation, subsequently occupied by a *hamza*. In the canonical version of the Qurʾān, this orthography (أفإين / *af-ēn* < ܐܝܢ ܐܦ / ܐ̄ܦܶܝܢ / *āp̄ēn*) is documented twice (Surahs 3:144 and 21: 34).

The Arabic verb لنسفعا (*la-nasfaʿan*) certainly does not mean "to seize." In the *Lisān* (VIII 157b f.) the meaning is given correctly as لطم (*laṭama*) and ضرب (*ḍaraba*) (*to strike*). On the other hand, the explanation that follows, وسفع بناصيته: جذب وأخذ وقبض ("to seize" by the "forelock"), is based on the false understanding of "*forelock*." What is meant by "*to strike*," however, is "*to punish*" in a figurative sense (in modern Arabic usage, as well). According to Mandaean Orthography the final ا /-ā can also expeass the final ن /-n.[30] The terminations -ʾn and -yn are expressed by a simple alif without distinction. We often find the two orthographies in the same manuscript. The Koran applies the same rule by analogy to express the Arabic *energicus*, which is not to be confused with cases of *nunation*. A parallel to this is provided by Surah 12:32 (وليكونا / *wa-l-yakūna*^{n}).[31]

It is astounding that, of our Qurʾān translators, not one has objected to the expression "forelock" (Paret "Schopf," Blachère "toupet"). Yet, what is meant here by the spelling ناصية (except for the secondarily inserted ا / *ā*) is Syro-Aramaic ܢܨܝܐ (*naṣṣāyā*). For this, the *Thes.* (II 2435) first gives the meaning: *contentiosus, rixosus* (*contentious, quarrelsome*) (said of a woman, as in Prov. 21:9,19; 25:24). From the Syrian lexicographers it then cites, in addition to further Syro-Aramaic synonyms, the following Arabic renderings: مخاصم . مقاوم (*opponent, adversary*).

But more amazing than this is the discovery that, over and over again, even the *Lisān* (XV 327) explains the root نصا (*naṣā*), documented in earlier Arabic, as a denominative of ناصية (*nāṣiya*), presumably misunderstood in Arabic as "forelock, shock of hair," even though the *ḥadīṯ* of ʿĀʾiša that it cites actually makes the Syro-

Aramaic meaning clear. Namely, therein *ʿĀʾiša* is recorded as saying: لم تكن واحدة من نساء النبي تناصِيني غير زينب (*none of the wives of the Prophet quarreled with me except for Zaynab*). Although the *Lisān* then explains this as: أي تنازعني وتباريني (i.e., "she quarreled with me, she opposed me"), it traces this explanation back to the circumstance that in doing so the two women, so to speak, "got into each other's hair" (وهو أن يأخذ كل واحد من المتنازعين بناصية الآخر), or more exactly, "*seized* each other *by the scruff of the neck*." It can be seen from this how little the later Arab philologists have understood the earlier Syriacisms and Aramaisms.

The following understanding therefore results for Verse 15:

> If he does not stop, we will (severely) *punish* the *adversary*.

In the same way as for ناصية (*nāṣiya*, but actually *naṣṣāyā*), the apparent feminine ending for كذبة (*kāḏiba*, actually *kaddāḇā*) and خاطية (*ḫāṭiʾa*, actually *ḫaṭṭāyā*) is nothing other than the phonetic rendering of the Syro-Aramaic *emphatic* ending. Therefore, Verse 16, modeled on Verse 15, is to be understood as follows:

> The *denying*, sinful *adversary*.

17. The expression ناديه (*nādiyahu*), which occurs here, must be redefined. The "clique," as Paret translates the expression in the modern Arabic sense of "club, association," (Bell: "council;" Blachère: "clan"), is out of the question. Inasmuch as the facultative medial ا / *alif* in ناديه, according to the Eastern Syro-Aramean orthographical tradition, can occasionally designate a short *a*, the spelling yields the Syro-Aramaic ܢܕܝܗ (*naḏyeh* or *naddāyeh*). As a *nomen agentis* this form leads us to the intensive stem ܢܕܝ (*naddī*), whose primary meaning the *Thes.* (II 2291) gives as "commovit, concussit, terrefecit" (to agitate, to shake, to scare off). Applied to the *idols* that are probably meant here, this would result in the meaning "of the one who arouses fear" (i.e., whom one *fears* as a god). The *Thes.*, however, then refers to a further form: "Partic. ܡܢܕܐ (*mnaddā*) vide infra." The expression that is found further down (2292) ܫܒܝܪܬܐ ܘܡܢܕܝܬܐ (*šḇirtā wa-mnaddaytā –* something or someone] "disgusting and repulsive") brings us closer to the sense we are seeking. The Arabic meanings that are cited by *Mannā* (431b) under ܢܕ (*aneḏ*) are informative: (2) ابغض . مقت (*to hate, to detest*), (3) رذل. نبذ (*to reject, to disown*), (6) نجّس. قذّر (*to make dirty, to besmirch*), (7) ارعب. افزع (*to scare away, to frighten*). All these meanings lead namely to the "unclean spirit"

or "idols" designated with synonymous expressions in Syro-Aramaic (cf., e.g., *Thes.* I 1490, under ܛܡܐܐ *ṭanpā* "impurus, immundus;" Ρκάθαρτος de daemonibus, Matt. 10:1,…; further under ܛܡܐܘܬܐ / *ṭanpūṯā: pollutio, res quae polluit = idolum,* Exod. 8:26, Deut. 7:26, Jer. 32:34; de *idolatriis,* Deut. 20:18…; in connection with this, the following expression [1491], documented in the Qur'ān with انداد [*andād*],[32] ܢܕܝܕܘܬܐ [*nḏīḏūtā*] [*impurity*] also becomes a designation for ܦܬܟܪܐ [*ptaḵrā*] [*idols*], etc.).

Thus, with the *tertium comparationis* discovered via Syro-Aramaic, Verse 17 is to be understood as follows:

> May he then call upon his *idols* [literally: *impure ones*]!

18. The expression الزبانية (until now pronounced *az-zabāniya*)[33] is still considered a puzzle. The misreading of the preceding verbal form in the first person plural سندع (*sa-nadʿu*) is of course responsible for one's seeing in this incomprehensible expression in Arabic the "henchmen" (of hell) that God will allegedly *call in.* However, if we transcribe the original spelling (without the secondary ا / *ā*) into Syro-Aramaic, the result is the reading ܙܒܢܝܐ (*zaḇnāyā*). As the adjective from ܙܒܢܐ (*zaḇnā*) (*time*), this simply gives us, according to the *Thes.* (I 1079) under ܙܒܢܝܐ (*zaḇnāyā*), the meaning: *temporalis, temporarius, haud aeternus* (*temporal, transitory, not eternal*). This designation is a perfect match for the (*transitory*) "idols" of the (God-) *denying adversary.* It is to this extent only logical that the verbal form سيدع is to be read in the third person (*sa-yadʿu*). This results in the following understanding for Verse 18: ". . .he will (only) *call upon* a[34] *transitory* (*god*)!"

19. Although the third and last كلا can be read in Arabic as *kallā* (*no*) in connection with, and as intensifying, the negative imperative that follows it, in Syro-Aramaic (*kullā*) it has the meaning of "(not) at all."

In addition to the actual Syro-Aramaic meaning of "to bow" (as an external sign of respect), one should also assume for the Arabic borrowed verb سجد (*saǧada*) (< ܣܓܕ / *sḡeḏ*) the metaphorical meaning of "to worship God" (*Thes.* II 2522, "metaph. *adoravit Deum*").

The Arabic borrowed verb اقترب (*iqtaraba*) has in this context a quite particular content that the general Arabic meaning "approach" (without object or reference) is not able to provide. As a translation of Syro-Aramaic ܐܬܩܪܒ (*etqarraḇ*) the *Thes.* (II 3724) gives us (in particular as a *reflexive* or *intransitive* verb) the specific meaning that fits here, as follows: "spec. *celebrata est liturgia* (*to celebrate* the *liturgy*); it. *Eucharistiam accepit* (*to receive* the *Eu-*

charist). The latter meaning is logically to be assumed provided that one as a believer takes part in the *celebration of the Eucharist.* The term points in any case without a doubt to the participation in the "sacrifice of the mass," in the "celebration of the Eucharist" or in the "communion liturgy."

Those that this unambiguous explanation shocks are invited to refer to the Arabic dissertation written by Salwā Bā l-Ḥāǧǧ mentioned in the foreword of my book *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (Berlin, 2007), p. 11, note 6.[35]

In sum, the result of this philological discussion is the following reading and understanding for Surah 96 according to the Syro-Aramaic reading:

<div dir="rtl">العلق</div>

(*al-ʿalaq*) The Clay (Literally: the "*sticking*")

<div dir="rtl">اقرا باسم ربك الذى خلق</div>

1. *iqrā b-ismⁱ rabbikᵃ l-laḏī ḫalaq*

   <u>Call</u> the name of your lord who has created,

<div dir="rtl">خلق الانسن من علق</div>

2. *ḫalaqᵃ l-insānᵃ min ʿalaq*

    (who) has created man from <u>sticky</u> (*clay*);

<div dir="rtl">اقرا وربك الاكرم</div>

3. *iqrā wa-rabbakᵃ l-akram*

   <u>call</u> (indeed)[36] your <u>most venerable</u> Lord,

<div dir="rtl">الذى علم بالقلم</div>

4. *al-laḏī ʿallamᵃ bi-l-qalam*

   who has taught by the reed pen (i.e., the *scripture*),

<div dir="rtl">علم الانسن ما لم يعلم كلا</div>

5. *allamᵃ l-insānᵃ mā lam yaʿlam kullā*

   has taught man what he did <u>not</u> know <u>at all</u>.

<div dir="rtl">ان الانسن ليطعى</div>

6. *in(na)* or *n : al-insānᵘ la-yaṭʿā*

   Verily, man <u>forgets</u>,

<div dir="rtl">إن راه استغنى</div>

7. *ʾin* or *n rā-hu staġnā (Syriac ʾen > ʾin)*

   <u>when</u> he sees that he has <u>become rich</u>,

<div dir="rtl">أن الى ربك الرجعى</div>

8. *an(ᵃ) ilā rabbikᵃ r-raǧʿā*

   <u>that</u> (this) is <u>to be returned to</u> your Lord.

<div dir="rtl">اريت الذى ينهى</div>

9. *a-raytᵃ l-laḏī yanhā*

   <u>If</u> you <u>see</u> one who (wants) to stop[37]

<div dir="rtl">عبدا اذا صلى</div>

10. ʿabd^{an} iḏā ṣallā

a worshipper (of God) (from praying) when he is praying,

اريت أن كان على الهدى

11. a-rayt^a an kān^a ʿalā l-hudā

do you think (perhaps) _that_ he is on the right path,

او امر بالتقوى

12. aw amar^a bi-t-taqwā

or is even[38] thinking pious thoughts?[39]

اريت أن كذب وتولى

13. a-rayt^a an kaḏḏab^a wa-tawallā

_If_ you (on the contrary) _think_ _that_ he _is denying_ (God) and turning away (from Him),

الم يعلم بان الله يرى كلا

14. a-lam yaʿlam bi-an(n^a) llāh^a yarā kullā

(then) does he not know that God sees _everything_?

لين لم ينته لنسفعا بالناصيه

15. la-ʾin (< la-ʾēn > lēn) lam yantahi la-nasfaʿan bi-n-nāṣiya (in Syriac: naṣṣāyā)

If he does not stop (doing that), (one day) we shall punish the _adversary_ (severely),

ناصيه كذبه خاطيه

16. nāṣiya kāḏiba ḫāṭiya or naṣṣāyā kaddābā ḥaṭṭāyā

the _denying_, wicked _adversary_!

فليدع ناديه

17. fa-l-yadʿu nādiya-hu or nadya-hu

May he call (then) on his (whoever) _idol_—

سيدع الزبانيه

18. sa-yadʿu z-zabāniya or zabāniy

(in doing so) he will call on _transitory_ (god)!

كلا لا تطعه

kullā lā tuṭiʿhu

واسجد واقترب

19. wa-sǧud wa-qtarib

You ought _not_ to heed him _at all_,

    perform (instead) (your) divine service[40]

    and take part in the liturgy of Eucharist.

According to this understanding, Surah 96 proves to be a unified composition having as its overall content a call to take part in the divine service. As such it has the character of a ܡܫܘܕܥܐ (<προοίμιον proóimion [Greek]/ *prooemium*) introducing the Christian Syriac liturgy, which was replaced in the later Islamic tradition by the فاتحة (*fātiḥa*) (< Syro-Aramaic ܦܬܚܐ / *ptāḥā*) (*introductory prayer*). That this liturgy is *Communion* is indicated by the final Syro-

Aramaic term. An important task in the history of religion would be to find out which pre-Islamic Christian Syrian (or possibly Judaeo-Christian) community this was.

The term *fātiḥa* is confined to the Koran. Only in later Islamic tradition it has been used to designate the first Surah of the Koran. As its Syro-Arabic literal meaning ("the opening one," i.e., the one that "introduces") seemed perfectly clear, it comes as no surprise that it was considered superfluous to question its origin. The importance of this question for the history of religions, however, is undeniable. The Koran mentions several religious groups in three passages (Q 2:62, Q 5:69, Q 22:17): the *Jews*, the *Nazarenes* (or Christians) and the *Sabaeans* (*al-Ṣābi'ūn*) or *Mandaeans*, which indicates that the Koran emerged in Mesopotamia and not in the Mecca region. Among the Mandaeans, the *pṭāḥā* is the term for the *breadbreaking* liturgy, as explained in the Mandaean dictionary of Drower/Macuch:[41]

> **ptaha** (rt. **PTH**): (*a*) opening, beginning, (*b*) a name given to the ritual meal, sacred "Breaking of Bread," communal meal (= **laupa**), ritual meal for the dead. (p. 227b):
>
> **laupa** (rt. **LUP** = **LPP**): uniting, union, communion, name of a ritual meal eaten for the dead, the communion of living and dead. . . **laupa ḏ-hiia** (*often*) the communion of life; (p. 366a): **laupa ḏ-patura:** the communion of the (ritual) platter (= *al-mā'ida*, actually: *mayda*).

The information in the last two lines confirms the conclusion that Surah 96:19 (*al-ʿalaq*) and 5:112–115 (*al-mā'ida /al-mayda*) both refer to the liturgy of the *Eucharist* or the Breadbreaking liturgy, which was only abolished in later Islam.

Now, if the Arabic tradition considers this to be the oldest Surah, one must concede that it is right to the extent that this Surah is, in any case, part of that *nucleus of the Qur'ān*, the *Christian Syrian origins* of which cannot be ignored. Whether this is also the first that was revealed to the Prophet is probably based on a later legend grown out of the misinterpretation of the opening verse. Arguing in favor of its being very probably pre-Qur'ānic, i.e., much more pre-Islamic, is its language, hitherto perceived as mysterious and puzzling. For it is precisely this language with its unadulterated expressions that reveals to us its venerable origins.

One such expression is the Arabic اقترب (*iqtaraba*) borrowed from the Syro-Aramaic verb ܐܬܩܪܒ (*eṯqarraḇ*). As a *technical term* of the Christian Syrian liturgy it gives us a valuable, hitherto unexpected insight into the origins, not only of the oldest parts of the Qur'ān in terms of the history of religion. For only this expression opens our eyes to a parallel occurring in what is held to be the last Surah revealed, Surah 5 (*The Table*), a parallel whose actual

importance in terms of the history of religion has in a similar way been ignored until now. Between this *term* and the "table" that Jesus, the son of Mary, requests of God in Surah 5:114, تكون لنا عيدا لاولنا واخرنا "that it may become ours as *liturgy*,[42] for the first and the last of us," and which, in Verse 115, God sends down from heaven, threatening any "who would *deny* it" (فمن يكفر fa-man *yakfur*) with the severest of all punishments (فاني اعذبه عذابا لا اعذبه) (احدا من العلمين) (*him I shall punish in such a way as I shall punish no man*), there exists a connection insofar as both clearly allude to the *liturgy of Communion*, whose importance was misjudged in later Islam and has since been totally forgotten. This central item in the Christian components of the Qur'ān is, in any case, of eminent importance in terms of the history of religion.

If any should doubt, however, the importance of the Christian Syriac liturgical term اقترب (*iqtaraba* < ܐܬܩܪܒ / *etqarraḇ* – "to take part in the liturgy of Communion, to receive the Eucharist"), they may refer to the Arabic dissertation mentioned in the Foreword (p. iii, note 4) where the author (89), in the fourth chapter of the first part of her work *Religious Customs and Rites of Christian Arabs Before Islam*" refers to the Arabic compilation الأغاني (*al-Aġānī*) (vol. II 107) of *Abū l-Faraǧ al-Isfahānī* (d. 356 H./967 CE), who reports of عدي بن زيد ('*Adī ibn Zayd*) (d. circa 590 CE) and هند بنت النعمان (*Hind bint an-Nuʿmān*) (d. after 602 CE) how they went on Maundy Thursday into the church of *al-Ḥira* (located southwest of the Euphrates in modern-day Iraq) " لیتقربا (*li-yataqarrabā*) – "to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist" (or "to receive the Eucharist").

In the corresponding passage in the كتاب الأغاني (*Kitāb al-aġānī*)[43] (*Book of Songs*) *Abū l-Faraǧ al-Iṣfahānī* (d. 967) cites the traditional account of the pre-Islamic Christian Arab poet *'Adī ibn Zayd* living in *al-Ḥīra* according to which he had gone on Maundy Thursday into the church of *al-Ḥīra* لیتقرّب (*li-yataqarrab*) "to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist" (or *to receive the Eucharist*). On this occasion, he wanted to see *Hind*, the daughter of the last of the Laḥmids' kings of *al-Ḥīra*, النعمان / *an-Nuʿmān III* (580-602), who had gone to the aforementioned church تتقرّب (*tata-qarrab*) "to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist."[44] The term *taqarrab* is still used today by the Arabic-speaking Christians.

Thus, this *liturgical term* is already historically documented in the 6th century even from the Arab side as a Syro-Aramaic ecclesiastical term of the Christian Arabs of Syria and Mesopotamia.

9. Surah 5: al-Mā'ida – "the Table": The Last Supper in the Qur'ān

In Surah 5 (*al-Mā'ida*, "the Table"), considered by Islamic Tradition to be the last one revealed, Jesus, in response to the Apostles' demand (verse 112), prays to God in these terms (verse 114 , R. Blachère 15, p.150):

Q 5:114 My God ! My Lord ! . . . send a table down from the sky which will be a celebration for the first and last among us.

Paret's commentary and concordance:

Q 5:112–115: obviously allusion to the Last Supper; but could as well be influenced by St. Peters vision as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles 10,10 ff.; see Rudolph, W.: *Die Abhāngigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, Stuttgart 1922, p. 81f. [The Dependence of the Qur'ān on Judaism and Christianity]

Q 5:114: "li-awwalina wa-akhirina" should be related to the succession of generations, see Q 56:48–50.

Bell translates as follows:

Q5:114: O Allah our Lord, send down to us a table from the heaven, to be us a festival, to the first and to the last of us.

Bell's footnote to the whole scene (Q 5:112–115):

This section, which is continuous with the preceding, is apparently based, not on any knowledge of the New Testament, but on some hearsay information about the Christian sacrament.

Paret's German translation is quite similar to Bell's:

Du unser Gott und Herr (allahumma rabbana)! Sende uns vom Himmel einen Tisch herab, der (mit seinem Mahl) [=with the meal on it] für uns von jetzt an bis in alle Zukunft (?) eine Feier (id.) und ein Zeichen von dir sein wird!

Paret's footnote to "bis in alle Zukunft" [not important]: "W. (= literally): für den ersten und den letzten von uns—for the first and the last of us."

R.Blachère, who translates "table" (Q 5:112) by "table laid out "(with food), comments on this point:

[Carl Friedrich] Gerock [*Versuch einer Darstellung der Christologie des Qur'ān* (1839)] followed by W Rudolph [*Die Abhangigkeit des Qur'āns von Judentum und Christentum*, 1922], thought that it concerned a reminiscence of the Last Supper, being St.Peter's vision as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles, X.10-13.

Blachère excludes, in the same footnote, the idea of the Last Supper, the death of Jesus not being admitted by the Qur'ān (see Surah 4:156). However the latter verse in Surah 4 according to which someone else would have been crucified in place of Jesus, is one of the erroneous historical interpretations of Islamic exegesis that Western scholars themselves have taken up totally un-

critically. In fact, the intrinsic paradox that three Qur'ānic verses raise (19:33; 3:55; 5:117), where the Qur'ān clearly speaks of the death of Jesus before his Resurrection or his Ascension, should have been enough to cast doubt on such an interpretation. But as for the Houris or Virgins of Paradise, a forth-coming well-founded philological analysis will put an end to this obvious exegetical contradiction and give back to the Qur'ān its original harmony on this point. For the moment, this remark should be enough to allow the idea of the Last Supper suggested by Gerock and Rudolph.

It is in fact only by putting the words Last Supper in place of the para-phrase "laid out table" that this term will recover all its theological dimension in connection with the word which follows. The Arabic word *'īd*, borrowed from the Syriac, has been, in conformity with its Arabic meaning, correctly translated by "celebration." The table being laid out, one could have thought, in fact, that it was talking about "having a celebration." However, the same writing or script transcribed in Syriac as *'yd'*, pronounced *'yāḏā*, gives the meaning " liturgy." Thus one must understand this verse as follows :

> Lord our God, send us down from the sky a Last Supper which would be a liturgy for the first and last of us.

In his reply, God says (according to R. Blachère, op.cit., verse 115)

> I am going to send it down to you. Whoever is then impious among you will receive from me a torment the like of which I will not inflict on anyone else in the world.

Nothing to verse Q 5:115 in Paret's *Kommentar und Konkordanz*. Bell's translation is as follows:

> Q 5:115: Verily I am going to send it down to you; so if any of you afterwards disbelieve, I shall assuredly punish them as I punish no one else of (all) the worlds.

Paret's version of Q 5:114 is very similar to Bell's:

> Ich will ihn euch (nunmehr) hinabsenden. Und wenn einer von euch nach-träglich nicht glaubt, werde ich ihn (dereinst) auf eine Weise bestrafen, wie (sonst) niemand in der Welt (al-ʿālamūn)—[I want it sent down to you (now). And if any of you do not believe afterwards, I will punish him (one day) in such a manner as no one else in the world has been].

Here we are concerned with the word translated as "impious." It is true that the Arabic verb *kafara*, borrowed from Syriac, has this meaning. But more than the latter meaning, the Syriac verb ܟܦܪ *kpr* also means "to deny, to re-nounce." By this verb, according to Syriac syntax, referring back to the "liturgy," is clearly meant the latter sense here, to deny this liturgy. Thus the previous verse (Q 5:115) should be understood as:

I will send it down to you. Whoever among you henceforth dismisses it, I will punish him as I would never punish any other humans.

Islam was not impressed by this divine injunction with its threats of the most severe punishments, not having grasped its significance. If the Muslim exegetes had understood these passages as the Qur'ān intended it, there would have been a liturgy of the Last Supper in Islam.

This linguistic aspect of the Qur'ān being confirmed historically as of Syriac origin leads the author henceforth to conclude that not only the form but the substance of the Qur'ān is of Syro-Christian origin, or at least the latter constitutes the foundation. The latter more so because the word "Qur'ān" itself is nothing other than a phonetic Arabic distortion of the Syriac term *Qəryān*, designating a Syriac liturgical book corresponding to the Lectionary (Lectionarium) of the Roman liturgy, from which the Readings, constituting extracts of the Old and New Testament, are read in the Christian liturgical service. It is thus not surprising that Jesus (*ʿĪsā*) is cited twenty five times in the Qur'ān and that he is there referred to as the Messiah (*al-Masīḥ*) eleven times. Thus it is only logical to see other Syro-Christian passages being a part of this foundation which constitutes the origin of the Qur'ān and that the author intends to elucidate in a forthcoming work.

10. Surah 19: Mary

In his first work the author tackled briefly Surah 19, *Mary*, verse 24, of which he gave a detailed philological analysis. The reproach of an illegitimate conception made indirectly to Mary, according to verses 24 and 28, pushes Mary to wish for her own death before giving birth. Her son, newly born, addresses her in verse 24 his first words to comfort her. The Arabic reading of this verse had led the commentators to the following understanding (passages in need of revision are underlined):

"Don't be sad!," he cries from underneath her, "your Lord has placed below you a stream!"

Régis Blachère tries to soften this rather unlikely interpretation by translating Q 19:24 as follows:

[But] the child who was at her feet spoke to her: "Don't be sad! Your Lord has placed at your feet a stream."

Paret's commentary and concordance:

To Q 19:24: the subject of the verb "(fa-)nadaha" is Jesus, either still in his mother's womb or newly born. Muhammad seems to be influenced by a scene

in the so-called "Pseudo-Matthäus," chapter 20, where the story of the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt is told: *tunc infantulus Jesus laeto vultu in sinu matris suae residens ait ad palmam: flectere, arbor, et de fructibus tuis refice matrem meam. . . aperi autem ex radicibus tuis venam, quae absconsa est in terra, et fluant ex ea aquae ad satietatem nostram.* (Paret cites this text as commentary to verses 23–26); Translation of the Latin text: "Thereupon spoke the Infant Jesus, of joyful countenance sitting in his mother's lap, to the palm tree: Bend over, tree, and refresh my mother from your fruits. . . further open out of your roots a vein that lies hidden in the earth, and let waters stream out upon us to quench our thirst," p. 137.

Bell's version of Q 19:24:

> Then he called her from beneath her: "Grieve not; thy Lord hath placed beneath thee a streamlet;"

Bell's footnote to "he:" "Probably 'the child.'"
Paret [quite similar to Bell] renders it in German as follows:

> Da rief er ihr von unten her zu: "Sei nicht traurig! Dein Herr hat unter dir ein Rinnsal (*sari*) (voll Wasser) gemacht."

Paret's footnote to "er [he]:" [similar to Bell's interpretation]: "D. h. der Jesus-knabe. [i.e., the boy Jesus]". His to "unter dir": "D. h. zu deinen Füßen (?). [i.e., at your feet]."

However it is not by tinkering with the style that we are going to succeed in elucidating such an enigma, but only by an Arabo-Syriac reading, which leads the author to this meaning of Q 19:24:

> "Don't be sad!," he says to her as soon as he was born, "Your Lord has rendered your childbirth legitimate!" (op. cit., pp. 102–121).

There is no agreement among the Arab commentators on the Qur'ān about the real meaning of the expression occurring in two variants تحت (*taḥta*) as well as of سريا (*sarīyā*) in the following verse of the Mary Surah:

> Surah 19:24
>
> فناداها <u>من تحتها</u> الا تحزني قد جعل ربك <u>تحتك</u> <u>سريا</u>

In keeping with the majority of the Arab commentators, the Western Qur'ān translators render this verse as follows:

> *Bell* I 286:24. Then he (probably 'the child') called to her <u>from beneath her</u>: 'Grieve not; thy Lord hath <u>placed</u> <u>beneath thee</u> a <u>streamlet</u>';
>
> *Paret* 249:24: Da rief er (d.h. der Jesusknabe) ihr <u>von unten her</u> zu: "Sei nicht traurig! Dein Herr hat <u>unter dir</u> (d.h. zu deinen Füßen?) ein <u>Rinnsal</u> (*sarī*) (voll Wasser) gemacht."

Blachère 331:24 [Mais] l'enfant <u>qui était à ses pieds</u> lui parla: "Ne t'attriste pas!
     Ton Seigneur a <u>mis</u> <u>à tes pieds</u> un <u>ruisseau</u>."

For Arabic تحت (*taḥta*)*,* which is understood as the preposition *under* by all of
the commentators cited in *Ṭabarī*, Jeffery in *The Foreign Vocabulary* (32 f.)
makes a reference to as-Suyūṭī (1445-1505), who reports that Abū l-Qāsim in
his work *Luġāt al-Qurʾān* [(*Foreign*) *Expressions in the Qurʾān*] and al-
Kirmānī in his *al-ʿAǧāʾib* [*The Miracles*] had both thought that this was a
Nabatean (i.e., an Aramaic) word and meant as much as بطن (*baṭn*), (which
Jeffery renders in English, on the basis of the Arabic understanding, as *womb*,
although here, based on the Syro-Aramaic حبلا (*baṭnā*), *foetus*[45] is more
likely what should be understood), a view that is not held by anyone in
Ṭabarī. But Jeffery rejects the notion, saying that there is nothing in Naba-
taean that would confirm this assumption since, even in Aramaic, Hebrew,
Syriac and Ethiopic, the homophonic expressions have exactly the same mea-
ning as the Arabic expression تحت (*taḥta*) (namely *under*).

    Yet had Jeffery considered that in the Semitic languages precisely the tri-
literal prepositions and adverbs were originally nouns and could at times
even appear as subjects and objects,[46] he would have perhaps come to another
conclusion. The above-mentioned tradition, according to which تحت (*taḥta*)
was in this case to be understood as a noun, confirms the supposition that the
Arabic tradition has occasionally preserved a memory of the original Aramaic
form. Namely, the lack of a verbal root in Arabic suggests a borrowing from
Syro-Aramaic ܢܚܬ (*nḥeṯ*), of which the preposition ܬܚܬ (*taḥt*) (> Arabic تحت
/*taḥta*) / ܬܚܝܬ (*tḥēṯ*) is only a secondary form. Let's first of all examine this
clue in a little more detail.

    Although the corresponding Syro-Aramaic nominal form ܢܚܬܐ (*nḥāṯā*)
(as well as ܢܘܚܚܬܐ *nuḥḥāṯā*, ܢܚܬܘܬܐ *naḥtūṯā*, ܡܚܬܐ *maḥattā* and further
derivatives) does not exactly mean *foetus*, it does have something to do with it
insofar as, among other meanings, by way of the meaning *descent, origin*,
what is meant here is *delivery*.[47] Therefore, the meaning of تحتها (*min*) *taḥtihā*
would not be "under her," but "her delivery."
This Syro-Aramaic reading, however, first has the coherence of the context in
its favor to the extent that we have interpreted the preposition من (*min*)
before تحتها (*taḥtihā*) not *locally* (<u>*from beneath her*</u>), but *temporally* in the
Syro-Aramaic sense of "from (that point in time), i.e.: instantly, immediately
after her delivery."[48] This temporal use of من (*min*), though not attested in
Classical Arabic,[49] is nonetheless quite common in modern Arabic dialects of
the Near East as a Syro-Aramaic substratum, for example, in: <u>حال</u> وصولي قلت له
= <u>من</u> وصولي قلت له) (*instantly, immediately after my arrival I said to him*).

The memory of an earlier nominal use of تحت (*taḥt*) has, moreover, been retained by the *Lisān* (II 17b f.): تحت: تكون مرة ظرفا ، ومرة اسما (*taḥt sometimes occurs as an adverb, sometimes as a noun*). Even the adjectival use : قوم تحوت أرذال سفلة (*qawmun tuḥūtun: lowly people*) (*Lisān, op. cit.*) can be traced back to Syro-Aramaic ܬܚܬܝ (*taḥtāy—Thes.* II 4425: *infimi hominum*).

Now that the *Lisān* has confirmed the nominal usage of تحت (*taḥtu*), there would be nothing to criticize about the traditional Qurʾānic reading were it not that the reading من نحتها (*min naḥtihā or nuḥātihā*) based on Syro-Aramaic ܢܚܬܐ / *nḥāṭā* or ܢܘܚܚܬܐ / *nuḥḥāṭā* is better. Namely, under the root نحت / *naḥata* the *Lisān* gives a series of phases indicating the Syro-Aramaic origin of this root. For example, among others, it gives the following verse by the poet الخرنق / *al-Ḫirniq*, the sister of the Old Arabic poet طرفة / *Ṭarafa* (c. 538-564 CE):

<div align="center">
الخالطين نحيتهم بنضارهم
</div>

who brought the <u>lowly</u> among them together with their nobles

<div align="center">
وذوي الغنى منهم بذي الفقر
</div>

and the wealthy among them with the needy.

As a conjecture the *Lisān* explains the expression نحيت (*naḥīt*) as دخيل (*daḫīl*) (*stranger*). Yet the opposites of *lowly*[50] and *noble*, *poor* and *rich* in both parts of the verse clearly refer to members of one and the same community. The ignorance of Aramaic prompts the Arab lexicographers to guess the meaning of borrowed expressions from the context. That the error rate in the process is relatively high is evidenced by the countless unrecognized Aramaic roots in the *Lisān*, the encyclopedic dictionary of the Classical Arabic language. In our case, نحيت (*naḥīt*) is a clear borrowing from Syro-Aramaic ܢܚܝܬ (*naḥīṭ or naḥḥīṭ*), documented by the Thesaurus with ܢܚܝܬ ܓܢܣܐ (*naḥīṭ /naḥḥīṭ gensā*) *vir infimus, e plebe oriundus*: (*a man*) *of lowly origin*, and, citing the Syrian lexicographers, with the corresponding Arabic translation: لئيم الحسب والنسب والجنس , *ignobilis, humilis genere et conditione,* قليل . وطيّ الاصل . وضيع الحسب والنسب as well as further ܢܚܝܬ (*naḥīṭ*): *descendens,* نازل هابط (*Thes.* II 2345). As in opposition to نحيت (*naḥīt*) is also how the *Lisān* explains النضار (*an-nuḍār*—actually النصار / *an-nuṣār*): الخالص النسب[51] (*al-ḫāliṣu n-nasab*) (*a man*) *of noble descent*, which clearly confirms the antonymous Syro-Aramaic meaning of نحيت (*naḥīt*).

The situation is similar for the other expressions connected with this root, all of which the *Lisān* tries to explain through popular etymology, but whose real meaning is to be determined through Syro-Aramaic. Rich pickings are guaranteed to anyone willing to devote himself or herself to the deserving task of studying the Aramaisms in the *Lisān*. Such would reveal the extent of the Aramaic influence on the Arabic language[52] and smooth the way for a yet non-existent etymological dictionary of Classical Arabic.

Still, the above-mentioned evidence merely confirms the Syro-Aramaic meaning "to be low(ly)." For the meaning "to be hereditary, innate," the *Lisān* cites والنحيتة : الطبيعة التي نحت عليها الانسان أي قطع (*wa-n-naḥīta: aṭ-ṭabīʿatu l-latī nuḥita ʿalayhā l-insānu, ay quṭiʿa*—"an-*naḥīta* is the nature that is hereditary to a person = that is innate to him"). In the definition of the loan term from Syro-Aramaic *naḥīta* (possibly in Syro-Aramaic *nḥāṭā*), the *Lisān* uses the loan verb from Syro-Aramaic *nuḥita* (in the passive voice – "to be descended from, to come away from, to be delivered of" in the sense of "to be born"), which it takes to be the possibly homonymous root نحت (*naḥata*), but which was probably first borrowed from Syro-Aramaic and only understood in later Arabic in the sense of *to chisel* (actually *to knock off, to chop off, to knock down*), and correspondingly explains it as (the nature according to which one) "was hewn, cut, cut to fit," i.e., in its sense as "shaped." There is then a citation from *al-Liḥyānī*, which somewhat correctly explains the expression in question: هي الطبيعة والأصل (*hiya ṭ-ṭabīʿatu wa-l-aṣl* – "it is nature and origin, i.e., the innate").

The other examples in the *Lisān*, الكرم من نحته (*noble-mindedness is innate to him*), وقد نحت (*he is of a noble-minded nature and birth*), إنه لكريم الطبيعة والنحيتة على الكرم وطبع عليه (*noble-mindedness is his by birth and nature*),[53] furnish evidence of the earlier use of the root نحت (*naḥata*) (or *naḥita*) in Arabic as a borrowing from Syro-Aramaic ܢܚܬ (*nḥeṭ*) in the meaning "to come down from, to give birth to, to be descended from."

Now, whether one were to read من تحتها (*min taḥtihā),* من نحتها (*naḥtihā),* or (on the basis of the customary defective spelling in the Qurʾān) *nuḥātihā*,[54] would, to be sure, change nothing in terms of the sense, in any event what does speak for the last reading is the fact that both in Syro-Aramaic and in the *Lisān* this root corresponds more closely to the meaning "delivery," which the *Lisān* also documents with further derivatives. Since the Qurʾān elsewhere uses the root ولد (*walada*) for the general sense of *to give birth* and *to procreate,* but specifically uses the root وضع (*waḍaʿa* – "to lay, to lay down;" cf. Surahs 3:36; 22:2; 35:11; 41:47; 46:15; and 65:4,6) for "to be delivered of, to give birth to," the latter appears to correspond lexically to the Syro-Aramaic ܢܚܬ[55] (*naḥḥeṭ*). Accordingly, من نحتها (*min nuḥḥātihā*), expressed otherwise in Qurʾānic Arabic, would be من وضعها (*min waḍʿihā*) in the sense of حال وضعها (*ḥāla waḍʿihā*), which in turn could be rendered in modern Arabic as حال توليدها (*ḥāla tawlīdihā*) or حال ولادتها (*ḥāla wilādatihā* – "*immediately* upon her giving birth").

The fact that the Qurʾān here uses as a *hapax legomenon* borrowed from Syro-Aramaic this verbal root نحت (*naḥḥata*) (in the sense of نزل /*nazzala,* أنزل /*anzala: to make descend, to bring down = to give birth*), instead of the otherwise customary Arabic root وضع (*waḍaʿa* – "to lay, to lay down, to give

birth to"), raises the question, relevant both theologically and in terms of the history of religions, as to whether the Qur'ān does not want deliberately, by this unusual expression, to connect and emphasize in a special way the extraordinary *delivery* of Mary with the supernatural *descent* of her son. This question imposes itself all the more since the basic stem ܢܚܶܬ (*nḥeṭ*) "to come down" (said, for example, of Christ, who came down from heaven) and the causative stems ܢܰܚܶܬ (*naḥḥeṭ*) / ܐܰܚܶܬ (*aḥḥeṭ*) "to cause to descend, to send down" (said, for example, of God, who sent down his son) have in fact been documented in this sense in Syro-Aramaic, though not in the specific meaning of "to give birth, to be born" in the sense of a natural birth.

The search for an equivalent usage in Aramaic finds its confirmation in a synonymous expression that Gesenius[56] gives under the Aramaic root נפל *n-p-l* "to fall" in the meaning of "to be born" and explains as "actually an extra term for a birth standing in opposition to regular natural processes." This usage, attested nowhere else in Arabic, of نحت (*naḥata*) or (*naḥḥata*) < Syro-Aramaic ܢܚܶܬ (*nḥeṭ* or *naḥḥeṭ*) in the meaning of "to give birth, to be born" (actually *"to cause to descend [from above]"*)[57] would imply, at least in the case of this segment of the Mary Surah, an earlier period in the editing of the Qur'ān than the second Meccan period estimated by Nöldeke-Schwally.[58] In it one can recognize with certainty a central element of the Christian components of the Qur'ān.

According to the Syro-Aramaic reading, the first verse segment of Surah 19:24 should therefore be understood as follows:

> Then he called to her *immediately after her giving birth*: Be not sad!

Based on this understanding, the concerns expressed by Paret in his Qur'ān commentary to this passage (324) as to whether the caller is *the new-born infant Jesus or the infant Jesus still located in the womb*, as well as the reference to the text from Pseudo-Matthew cited below, are unnecessary.

It follows from the preceding remarks that in the second part of the verse قد جعل ربك تحتك سريا (according to the previous understanding) "Your lord has made a <u>rivulet</u> <u>beneath you</u>," the repeatedly occurring تحتك (*taḥtaki*) does not mean "<u>beneath you</u>," but "<u>your giving birth</u>." Still to be explained, however, is the expression سريا (*sarīya*), misinterpreted as "rivulet," with which we would have an example of case (c) (see page 24).

Ṭabarī (XVI 69 ff.) prefaces the explanation of the word سري (*sarī*) with the stereotypical remark that the commentators are of different opinions about its meaning. The majority (over nineteen traditionary chains) favor the meaning *river, little river, a river named Sarī, designation of the ʿĪsā river (= Jesus river), stream, rivulet*. In particular, *Muǧāhid* and *aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk* believe it is *river* or *stream* in Syriac, whereas *Saʿīd b. Ǧubayr* is of the opinion that it is a *stream, rivulet* in Nabatean. On the other hand, two traditionists object and advocate the view that Jesus himself is meant by the designation *sarī*. Pro-

bably on the basis of the conjectured Persian meaning *noble, honorable,*[59] *Ibn Zayd* asks:

> But who, after all, could be أسرى منه (*asrā minhu*) *nobler* than Jesus!" Concerning the erroneous opinions of those who see a river in this term, he makes use of his good common sense and argues: "If this is a river, then it ought to be *beside her* and not, of all places, *beneath her!*[60]

But *Ṭabarī* does not follow him. Like an arbitrator, on democratic principles he agrees with the majority that sees in it a stream, from which—in his opinion—God has, according to Surah 19:26, expressly ordered Mary to drink: فكلي واشربي "*So eat and drink.*"

Among our selected Western translators of the Qur'ān, only Paret (by placing *sarī* in parentheses) suggests that the meaning of this expression is unclear. Blachère and Bell seem for the most part to approve of the explanation *Ṭabarī* gives. Blachère only observes concerning من تحتها (*min taḥtihā*) that in accordance with Qur'ānic usage this expression means "at her feet," and not, as so often translated, "from beneath her."[61] Bell, on the other hand, refers to *Ṭabarī* (XVI 67 f.) and the controversial issue among the Arab commentators as to whether it was the Angel Gabriel or the Infant Jesus that called to Mary "from beneath her," concerning which he rightly supposes: "probably 'the child.'" [62] As to the word *sarī*, in his commentary (I 504 f., v. 24) he considers "stream" to be the most likely meaning, but points to the opinion held by several commentators that it could also mean "chief, head" (referring to Jesus) in accordance with the (probably Persian) meaning "to be manly, noble," which is listed in the *Lisān* (XIV 377b) under سرا (*srw*) and with a reference to سيبويه / *Sībawayh* and اللحياني / *al-Liḥyānī.*

In examining the corresponding passage more closely, Paret refers in his Qur'ān commentary (323, on Surah 19:23-26) to W. Rudolph,[63] who says about the *attendant circumstances* of the birth of Jesus described therein:

> The most likely explanation is that Muhammed is here influenced by a scene the so-called Pseudo-Matthew reports of the flight to Egypt in chapter 20 and transfers this to the birth:
> "*tunc infantulus Jesus laeto vultu in sinu matris suae residens ait ad palmam: flectere, arbor, et de fructibus tuis refice matrem meam … aperi autem ex radicibus tuis venam, quae abscotta est in terra, et fluant ex ea aquae ad satietatem nostra*m." [Translation of the Latin text]:
> "Thereupon spoke the Infant Jesus, of joyful countenance sitting in his mother's lap, to the palm tree: Bend over, tree, and refresh my mother from your fruits. . . further open out of your roots a vein that lies hidden in the earth, and let waters stream out upon us to quench our thirst."

Blachère, too, sees a parallel to our Qurʾānic verse and an explanation for *the stream at Mary's feet* in this description from Pseudo-Matthew.[64] Bell argues along similar lines in his commentary (*loc. cit.*). By citing the quoted passage from Pseudo-Matthew the Western Qurʾān scholars had their proof that in the case of the expression سري (*sarī*) it must indeed be a question of a *watercourse, a stream*, just as the Arab exegetes had also finally assumed after all.

The commentators in the East and the West will be shown, however, that in the interpretation of this Qurʾān passage they have succumbed in the first case to a linguistic error and in the second to fallacious reasoning.

Careful attention to the Qurʾānic context is the fundamental prerequisite for a linguistically coherent understanding. That the Qurʾān transferred the scene depicted by Pseudo-Matthew of the flight to Egypt to the birth of Christ is in no way proven by the passage cited above. The sole parallel is the palm that is spoken of in both passages. The other circumstances, however, are completely different.

Namely, when according to Pseudo-Matthew the infant Jesus directs the palm to cause water to flow forth, the logical reason may lie in the fact that for mother and son there was otherwise no water in the surrounding desert. Hence the command that water bubble forth to slake their thirst.

Not so in the Qurʾān. Namely, when Mary according to Surah 19:23 calls out in despair, يليتني مت قبل هذا وكنت نسيا منسيا "If only I had died beforehand (i.e., before the birth) and been totally forgotten!" it is clearly not because she was *dying of thirst*! What depressed her so much was much more the outrageous insinuations of her family that she was *illegitimately* pregnant, something which is clearly implied by the scolding she receives in Verse 28: يأخت هرون ما كان ابوك امرأ سوء وما كانت أمك بغيا "Sister of Aaron, your father was after all no miscreant and your mother no strumpet!" (Paret: "Sister of Aaron! Your father was after all not a bad guy [note: man] and your mother not a prostitute!"). Most likely for the same reason it is also said, after she became pregnant, in Verse 22, فانتبذت به مكانا قصيا "whereupon she *was cast out* with him to a remote place" (Paret: "And she withdrew with him to a distant place").

What is crucial here is the Arabic verb فانتبذت (*fa-ntabaḏat*), which our Qurʾān translators have incorrectly rendered with "she withdrew" (Bell), "sie zog sich zurūck" (Paret), and "elle se retira" (Blachère). Despite the original meaning of Arabic نبذ (*nabaḏa*), namely, "to send back, to reject, to cast out," this expression is actually explained in Ṭabarī with فاعتزلت (*fa-ʿtazalat*) and وتنحت (*wa-tanaḥḥat* – "she withdrew").[65] The reflexive eighth Arabic verbal stem may have also led the Qurʾān translators to make this grammatically equivalent, but nonetheless nonsensical assumption. When one considers, namely, that the Qurʾān, following Syro-Aramaic usage, also uses reflexive stems with a passive meaning,[66] the result is the better fitting sense for this

verse, "*she was cast out,*" which indeed also represents a continuation of the introductory statement of Verse 16:

<div dir="rtl">واذكر في الكتب مريم اذ انتبذت مِن اهلها مكانا شرقيا</div>

Make mention further in the scripture of Mary when she was *cast out by* her family to an *empty* (= a *waste*)[67] place." (Paret: "Und gedenke in der Schrift der Maria (Maryam)! (Damals) als sie *sich vor* ihren Angehörigen an einen *östlichen* Ort *zurückzog*! ["And make mention in the scripture of Mary (Maryam)! (that time) when she *withdrew* from her family to a place in the *East*"]).

The passive usage is additionally confirmed here by the preposition من (*min*) (*by*), which again corresponds to Syro-Aramaic practice,[68] but is totally impossible according to Arabic grammar. There is namely no reason for the Qur'ān to submit, as classical Arabic grammar would have it, to the prohibition imposed by later Arabic (or Persian) grammarians against naming the active subject in a passive sentence by means of the preposition من *min* (*by*).[69] Therefore, seen in this light, the classical Arabic grammar proves rather to be a hindrance in determining the proper understanding of particular passages in the Qur'ān, while attention to Syro-Aramaic grammar assists in opening up insights into heretofore unimagined aspects of the Qur'ānic language. This basic Syro-Aramaic structure of the Qur'ānic language must be gone into in more detail.

Thus Verse 22—correctly understood—indicates that Mary is cast out by her family because she is suspected of illegitimate conception, especially considering that the Qur'ān does not place any fiancé or *sham husband* at her side to protect her from malicious tongues. As a result it is understandable that Mary in Verse 23, immediately before giving birth, longs desperately for her own death. The initial words of consolation from her newborn child would naturally need to be directed first of all to removing the reason for her desperation. But this could surely not occur by attempting to console her with the simple reference to a *stream* allegedly located beneath her. The idea assumed by *Ṭabarī* that God according to Verse 26 had commanded Mary to drink from it (واشربي فكلي / *so eat and drink*), therefore misses the mark. For it is not, say, the lack of food and drink that keeps Mary from eating and drinking, but much more her depressive mental state. That is why the consoling words of her child had to have such a content, so that she would no longer have any reason to be depressed and would therefore regain her desire to eat and drink.

The Western Qur'ān scholars' reference to the above-mentioned passage from Pseudo-Matthew is also wrong because the expression سريا falsely read *sarīyā*—in today's Qur'ān, and was traditionally interpreted as a *watercourse*.

But this unphilological and conjectural reading and interpretation, unfortunately, was taken to be definitive, and thereby sealed off further research.

Namely, in the case of this spelling سريا it is not a question of an Arabic, but of a Syro-Aramaic root. The problem is also already solved if it is presented in its original Syro-Aramaic form as ܫܪܝܐ (*šaryā*). For what one expects in the Qurʾānic context is a countering expression to the reproach of her illegitimate pregnancy that would suffice to free her of this stigma. Now if one understands *unmarried* in the sense of *unlawful, illegitimate*, then its countering expression *married* would accordingly be *lawful, legitimate*. And so it is in modern Arabic usage that an *illegitimate son* (especially as a swearword) is إبن حرام (*ibn ḥarām*), which is countered by its opposite إبن حلال (*ibn ḥalāl* – "a legitimate, legally born = an upright, honest person").

In this context the Syro-Aramaic expression ܫܪܝܐ (*šaryā*) has exactly this meaning, however, here it is not to be understood as a substantive (*stream, rivulet*), but as a verbal adjective in the sense of "legitimate."[70]

The twenty-fourth verse of the Mary Surah, which has previously been misunderstood as follows by all of the Qurʾān commentators we know of,

> Then he (probably "the child") called to her <u>from beneath her</u>: "Grieve not; thy Lord hath <u>placed</u> <u>beneath thee</u> a <u>streamlet</u>." (Bell)

is now, after this elucidation of its original meaning, to be understood as summarized in the following way:

> Then he called to her *immediately after her delivery*: "Do not be sad, your Lord has made your *delivery* *legitimate*."

Only after the infant Jesus has consoled this hitherto despairing mother with the *acknowledgment of his legitimacy* does he direct to her the encouraging words (from Verse 26) that she is therefore (and not because she is dying of thirst) "to eat and drink and be <u>happy</u>."[71] Just as logically does Mary (according to Verse 27) then take heart and return with her newborn child to her family. Confronted with the family's initial indignation (Verse 28), she follows the instructions of her newborn and allows her child to respond (Verses 30–33) and in so doing to reveal his miraculous birth.

Thus, in contrast to the hitherto distortedly rendered Arabic reading of this passage, the Qurʾānic presentation of the birth of Christ now for the first time acquires its original meaning through the bringing in of Syro-Aramaic.

11. Christmas in the Qurʾān—Surah 97: al-Qadr – "the Destiny"

11.1   Problems of the Traditional Understanding

If then the birth of Christ is mentioned it is only logical to pose the question as to other possible passages in the Qurʾān which could have been originally

connected to a liturgy of Christmas. The author believes he has recognized just such a connection in the text, considered engimatic up to now, of Surah 97, entitled al-Qadr / Destiny. Here is how Régis Blachère translates this Surah agreeing with Arab commentators :

Surah 97. The Destiny (Al-Qadar).
1. We made it come down during the Night of Destiny
2. Who will teach you what the Night of Destiny is ?
3. The night of Destiny is worth more than a thousand months .
4. The Angels and the Spirit descend with your Lord's permission, with all orders
5. Peace . It is until the break of dawn.

Bell:

Surat al-Qadr – "Chapter of Power" [different to Blachère!]
1. Lo, We have sent it down on the Night of Power.
2. What has let thee know what is the Night of Power?
3. The Night of Power is better than a thousand months;
4. In it the angels and the spirit let themselves down, by the permission of their Lord, with regard to every affair.
5. It is peace until the rising of the dawn.

Paret's commentary und concordance:

To the whole Surah see K. Wagtendonk: Fasting in the Qur'ān. Leiden 1968, p. 82–122. Wagtendonk examines the question whether or not and how close the fasting of the Ramadan and the revelation of the Qur'ān are related to each other, and what the Laylat al-Qadr is. He comes to the following conclusion (*Paret cites him as follows:)* "The date on which Surah 97 was revealed can now be determined. Mohammed must have indicated the night of the 27th Radjab as the night of his (first) revelation, after he abolished the 'Ashura' and before the battle of Badr took place (p.113)."
To v. 1 "inna ansalnahu fi laylati l-qadri": see 44:2f; 2:185
To v.2 "wa-ma adraka…": see 82: 14–18; 77:13f.; 101:1–3; 69:1–3; 74:26f.; 104:4f.; 101:9f.; 83:7f. and 18f.; 86:1f.; 90:11f.; 97:1f.; (33:63; 42:17; 80:3).
To v.4: see 16:2; 40:15; 42:52; 17:85; 97:4; 26:192–194; 16:102;
"amr": see 10:3; 13:2; 32:5; 10:31; (65:12; 7:54; 41:12); "amr" in these passages seems to mean a being of cosmological kind, in (as Paret says in his commentary to 2:109 to where he refers) the sense of the Greek 'logos' or the Syro-Aramaic *memra* 'min kulli amrin': various interpretations are possible; e.g., Wagtendonk (Fasting in the Qur'ān, p. 83f., annotation 5 and p. 86, anno-

tation 3) gives several interpretations and translates it (as follows, cited by Paret): "by virtue of every decree."

But Paret prefers his own interpretation and. 44:4 has a similar wording: *kullu amrin ḥakīmin* but probably another meaning. He proceeds:

> To v. 5: see H. Ringgren: *Islam, aslama and muslim.* Uppsala 1949, p. 10

In his introduction to the Surah, Bell writes:

> The origin of the idea of the Night of Power is unexplained. The only other passage in the Quran which has any bearing on it is 44:2a, 3. In some ways what is here said of it suggests that some account of the Eve of the Nativity may have given rise to it.

Bell's footnote to "it" in verse 1:

> "It" must refer to something in the original context now lost, usually assumed to be the Qur'an.

Bell's footnote to "Night of Power" in verse 1:

> The common translation of the prase has been retained; 'Night of Decree' would perhaps correspond better to the sense.

Bell's footnote to the whole verse 4:

> The exact construction and sense of this phrase are uncertain. It is usually taken with the verb "let themselves down," not with "permission."

Paret's German version:

> Die Bestimmung [This word is a very clever choice: In German, it can mean "destiny" as well as "power" as well as "decree"!]
> 1. Wir haben ihn in der Nacht der Bestimmung herabgesandt.
> 2. Aber wie kannst du wissen, was die Nacht der Bestimmung ist?
> 3. Die Nacht der Bestimmung ist besser als tausend Monate.
> 4. Die Engel und der Geist kommen in ihr mit der Erlaubnis ihres Herrn herab, lauter Logos(wesen) (*min kulli amrin*).
> [Paret interprets the last part of the phrase in a totally different way: He thinks that *min kulli amrin* refers to "die Engel und der Geist" = "the angels and the spirit" and means "beings of logos"]
> 5. Sie ist (voller) Heil (und Segen), bis die Morgenröte sichtbar wird. [Heil = the "salut" of Blachère].

Paret's footnote to „ihn:"

> [=it, see Bell's footnote] in verse 1: "D. h. den Qur'ān. [i.e., the Qur'ān]"

Paret's footnote to "sichtbar wird" ["becomes visible"] in verse 5:

[not important]: „W. (=literally): aufgeht. ["rises"]

Henning's prestigious German translation from the 19th century:

Die Macht [=power, like Bell]
1. Siehe, wir haben ihn in der Nacht El-Qadr <u>geoffenbart</u>.
   [El-Qadr: Another clever solution: He translates the Arabic term 'al-qadr' in
   the title, but in the text itself he leaves it in Arabic, as a proper name!]
   [author's note: <u>*geoffenbart*</u> means "revealed," so the term is more specific
   than Paret's "*herabgesandt*" which only means "sent down."]
2. Und was lehrt dich wissen, was die Nacht El-Qadr ist?
3. Die Nacht El-Qadr ist besser als tausend Monate.
4. Hinab steigen die Engel und der Geist in ihr mit ihres Herrn Erlaubnis zu
   jeglichem Geheiß. [this is again like Bell's and Blachères interpretation].
5. Frieden [=peace, like Bell] ist sie bis zum Aufgang der Morgenröte.

Rudolph's footnote to „ihn" [=it] in verse 1:

Der Qur'ān (so die Muslime) oder der Engel bzw. Geist der Offenbarung."
 [="It" refers either to the Quran, like the Muslims think, or to the angel or
spirit of revelation]

Rudolph's footnote to "Nacht El-Qadr" in verse 1:

D. h. die "Nacht der (göttlichen) Bestimmung" [this is exactly the word Paret
choose] oder "Zumessung" [=allotment, apportion] (lailat al-qadr). In ihr soll
Gabriel den Qur'ān aus dem siebenten Himmel zu Mohammed hernieder
gebracht haben. Vgl. 2:181! Die Herkunft und ursprüngliche Bedeutung des
Ausdruckes ist noch ungeklärt (Name der altarabischen Neujahrsnacht?). Ver-
mutlich hat ihn Mohammed rückblickend auf sein Berufungserlebnis, das in
einer Nacht stattfand. . ., geprägt. [=It is said that in this night the angel
Gabriel brought the Qur'ān from the seventh heaven down to Muḥammad,
see Surah 2, verse 181. The origin and exact meaning of the word are not yet
clear, might be the name of the New Year's night of the ancient Arabs, for
example. Muhammad seems to have chosen it, looking back, for the night
when he received his first revelation.]

Rudolph's footnote to "zu jeglichem Geheiß" [to whatever behest] in verse 4:

Unsicher. Eher: "wegen jeder Ordnung (amr)," oder "aus jedem Logos." Vgl.
10,3; 16,2; 32,4; 42,52. [Rudolph doesn't agree with Henning and proposes
"because of every order"—which doesn't make sense, does it? —or "from/of
every logos" which is more like Paret's interpretation.]

Islamic tradition sees in this brief Surah, entitled the Night of Destiny, an allusion to the revelation of the Qurʾān on this very night. It is for this reason that towards the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, that vigils take place. However with regard to the history of religions this fact is all the more remarkable since Islam does not have a nocturnal liturgy (apart from the *tarāwīḥ*, prayers offered during the nights of Ramadan). There is thus every reason to think that these vigils corresponded originally to a Christian liturgical practice connected to the birth of Jesus Christ, and which was later adopted by Islam, but re-interpreted by Islamic theology to mean the descent of the Qurʾān. Islamic tradition meanwhile finds it difficult to explain to itself this new interpretation. It is enough to consult the great commentary on the Qurʾān of al-Ṭabarī (828–923) to confirm the confusion that Arab commentators manifest in their attempts to justify such an interpretation. The contradictory contents of the Islamic tradition, recorded by Ṭabarī, could be summed in the following way:

a) The Qurʾān descended in one go during the Night of Qadr, in the month of Ramadan, into the lower sky, at the site of the stars;

b) According to his decision, God made parts of it come down successively on earth until the Qurʾān was complete;

c) Between the beginning and the end of the revelation there was an interval of twenty years ;

d) Only the beginning of the Qurʾān came down during this night.

This perplexity of the Arab commentators could nevertheless find a simple solution in the deciphering of this Surah with the aid of Syriac. Three terms well-understood upto the present undoubtedly incited Richard Bell, in his introduction to this Surah, to suspect there an allusion to the liturgy of Christmas Eve, namely : i) *night* ii*) angels* iii) *peace*. But the key Arabic word *al-qadar*, which serves as an introduction to this Surah has remained unexplained upto now. The only laconic explanation that Ṭabarī reports of the Arab commentators is that God decided this night the events that were [destined] to take place during the year. However, the third comparison to which in reality this destiny relates can only be discovered by translating this word into Syriac, which gives us the Syriac word *ḥelqa* that the Thesaurus (I,1294) explains first of all by "fatum, sors" —destiny, and fate, *qadar* which uses here the *qdr* and *qda* in citing the corresponding Arabic words in the Qurʾān. But it then combines the word with its synonym "*ḥelqa w-bēṯ yalda* – 'fate and horoscope.'" The latter is, in Syriac, a composite word (*bēṯ yalda*) and has three meanings, designating i) *the birth* (meaning the moment of birth), ii) *the star under which one is born* and which determines the fate of the newly born, iii) *The Nativity* or *Christmas*. Thus defined, the term *al-qadar*, "destiny" is related to the star of birth, that the Qurʾānic *al qadr* implies, and in the context of this Surah, to the Star of Christmas. As a result, a connection is found to be established with Matthew 2:2:

> Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in
> the East and are come to worship him.

These words are attributed to the Wise Men of whom it is said that they were
astrologers come from the East, that is to say Babylon, considered the cradle
of astrology, and whose cultural impact remains alive and well in our daily
horoscope. It is with this very tradition that the Qur'ān joins hands with this
term *al-qadar*, destiny, which, in this case, it substitutes in place of star of
birth, that of the Nativity. This enigmatic word thus elucidated henceforth
leads us to philologically analyze Surah 97, in its Arabo-Syriac reading, in this
way:

11.2   Towards a New Interpretation of the Surah

The Destiny (of the Star of the Nativity)

Verse 1:

"We made it come down in the night of destiny"; that is to say the star of
birth or horoscope which determines the destiny of the new-born—here to be
taken in the sense of the Star of Nativity or Christmas. The Arabic verb
anzala, "to send dow" corresponds perfectly with the Syriac noun *nuḥḥāt*,
cited twice in verse 24 of Surah 19 (Mary), and means literally "send down,"
speaking of the childbirth of Mary, a term exclusively used in this passage and
by which the Qur'ān wishes to point to the supernatural character of the birth
of Jesus, whom, besides, they make speak right from the moment of his birth
(op. cit. p.102–112).

Verse 2

In posing the question which follows verse 2,

> What do you know of what the night of destiny is?,

the Qur'ān wants to underline the special significance of this night considered
as the night or the eve of Christmas. In fact, the Syriac word ܠܠܝܐ *lelyā*, night,
is at the same time a liturgical term, a shortened form of ܨܠܘܬܐ ܕܠܠܝܐ *ṣlōṭā
ḏ-lelyā* ("office of the night"), corresponding to the nocturns of the Catholic
office. By night the Qur'ān thus does not mean here simply the natural phe-
nomenon but more precisely this Syriac liturgical term.

The Qur'ānic word شهر *šahr*—normally understood as "month" —is in
fact a transliteration of the Syriac ܫܗܪܐ *šahrā* which signifies first, "evening"
but which is, like *lēlyā*, also a liturgical term in Syriac corresponding to
"vigils" of the office, and which should be read in Arabic as *sahar* (*s* in Arabic

usually corresponds to š in Syriac), i.e., without the three diacritical dots on the first letter.

These two terms thus being confirmed as synonyms of the Syriac liturgy, the Qur'ānic comparison becomes more logical. On the other hand, it is astonishing that no commentator, in the East or the West, has raised the slightest doubt as to the incoherence of the comparison between "night" and "month."

Verse 3

This leads us then to the Arabo-Syriac reading of verse 3:

> The night [taken here in the sense of nocturnal office] of Destiny [linked to the star of birth, i.e., of the Nativity] is more beneficial than a thousand vigils.

Verse 4

In place of the actual Qur'ānic reading ("tanazzalu l-malā'ikatu wa-r-rūḥu fīhā") of the verb *tanazallu* (intransitive) one must read *tunazzilu* (transitive) which gives us the following reading:

> The Angels, accompanied by the Spirit, send down

literally,

> The Angels, the Spirit (being) in them, among them

The Arabic particle does not here have the function of the conjunction "and" expressing the binding together, but introduces a so-called *ḥāl*-sentence, i.e., a sentence describing an accompanying circumstance. When translating such a sentence into English, the conjunctions "while," "whereas," "although" should be used, but rarely ever "and," the *wa* indicating simultaneity (cf. Surah 16:2, where the particle *wa* was replaced by *bi,* which has the same meaning as "accompanied with"). To understand, "the Angels and [particle] the Spirit" would be theologically untenable, "with the permission of their Lord " excluding the fact that the Lord is also that of the Spirit. To come back then to the verse:

> the Angels (accompanied by) the Spirit, send down with the permission (*amr*) of their Lord, all sorts of hymns.

The Arabic noun borrowed from the Syriac, could not have the meaning of the Arabic of order such as rendered by Régis Blachère agreeing with the Arab commentators. Moreover it is for this reason the latter have understood that God decided (ordered), this night, what was going to happen during the year. *Amr* is rather to be taken here in the sense of the Syriac noun ܡܐܡܪܐ *memrā* which means, among other things, speech in verse, "hymn." Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 C.E.) is known moreover for his *Memre* verses,

some of which are still used in the Syriac liturgical office. Besides the following verse is going to show us that it really does concern the hymn chanted by the Angels.

Verse 5

With the word "*salām* – سلام – peace," this verse gives us the leitmotiv of these hymns and sends us back to the hymn of the Angels cited by Luke 2:14:

> Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.

This chant of the Angels has always constituted the principal theme of the Syriac vigils of the Nativity which lasts into Christmas night, with all sorts of hymns, more than all the other vigils. According to the Qur'ān, the vigils went on *ḥattā maṭlaʿ al-faǧr*–"until daybreak," confirming thus, once more, the tradition of the Syrian Church, according to which the Mass of the Nativity is celebrated not at midnight but at dawn. Whence the theme of these vigils of Christmas that the Qur'ān specifies for us:

> Peace (on earth) until daybreak.

Conclusions about the Surah

The fact that this Surah goes back very probably to a Syro-Christian or Arabo-Christian tradition is attested by the encyclopedic lexicon, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Ibn Manẓūr [1233–1312 C.E.] *The Language of the Arabs*, completed 1290 C.E., encompassing Arabic lexicography from the 9th century onwards). Making a reference to the celebrated Arab philologist al-Aṣmaʿī (c.740–828) originally from Baṣra (Southern Iraq), the *Lisān al-ʿArab* makes under the word *Tamām* (indicating the longest night of the winter) the following observation:

> The night of *at-Timām* is, in winter, the longest one. This night lasts so long that all the stars appear during it. It is also the night of the birth of Jesus—on our Prophet and on him blessing and well-being, and the Christians honour it and hold vigils during it.

This astonishing testimony of an Arab is of the utmost importance for the historical understanding of the Surah in question. It should have in fact earned its place in the Qur'ānic Commentary of al-Ṭabarī, who however seems never to have heard of it. It also explains to a large extent the actual Islamic Tradition according to which during the night of *al-Qadar* some vigils are held. But the blurred historical memory, as to the origins of this tradition, has resulted in the fact the Muslims of today are no longer aware

that the night that they celebrate and honour with so much fervour is in reality the night of Christmas.

Furthermore, that that, in all probability, was really the case before the coming of Islam, is signaled to us more precisely by another *ḥadīt* of Aisha, the youngest wife of the Prophet, recorded in the *Lisān al-ʿArab* under the same word *at Tamām* in these terms :

> The Messenger of God—may the blessings of God and peace be upon him— had the habit of spending the night of at-Timām in vigil. He recited at that time the Surahs *The Cow*, *the Family ʿImran* and *the Women*. While doing this, he did not fail to implore God at each verse.

Regarding this *ḥadīt*, it is appropriate to note first of all the following:
The order of the Surahs cited is a later addition, for
a) according to Islamic tradition, the Qurʾān was not yet established in writing during the lifetime of the Prophet;
b) the actual order of the Surahs, according to the same tradition, goes back to the third caliph ʿUṭmān (644–656) or earlier;
c) the names of the Surahs as well as the division of the text into verses were introduced even later .

The only authentic kernel which remains of this *ḥadīt* would be then that the Prophet kept vigil the night of *at-Timām*. The latter being, according to the testimony of al-Aṣmaʿī, *laylat al-qadar* ليلة القدر identical to the night of the Nativity, which the Qurʾān qualifies as the night of Destiny, it is legitimate to deduce that the Prophet, followed before Islam the tradition, well-established among the Syrians or Arab Christians, of vigils of Christmas. Thus elucidated, *Surah al-Qadr* constitutes a precious document for the history of religions, in so far as it brings to light a pre-Islamic Christian liturgy of Christmas.

The already cited *ḥadīt* of ʿĀʾiša finds confirmation in another detail noted by Ibn Hišām in the Sīra, the biography of the Prophet, where it is reported that the Prophet before his mission used to spend one month a year in the cave of Ḥīra, near Mecca where he devoted himself to *taḥannuṭ* – تحنّث , an enigmatic word which he explains as being a synonym of *taḥannuf,* which designates the religious practice of a *ḥanīf*, someone who professes the pure faith, whereas the Qurʾān, identifying Abraham as a *ḥanīf*, means by this word, borrowed from the Syriac, the "pagan." God had in effect recognized Abraham's faith while he was still a *pagan (ḥanīf,* Syriac: *ḥanpā)* which has nothing in common with *taḥannuṭ* but neither with "idolator." On the other hand, the preceding word is the Arabic form of a Syriac liturgical term ܬܚܢܢܬܐ *taḥnantā* which means "supplication." In so far as Ibn Hišām vouches for the fact this religious service was practised by the Qurayš at Mecca before Islam, we have with this detail a further confirmation that the Prophet before his mission, had truly lived in an Arabo-Christian or Syro-

Christian tradition. This confirmation renders so much the more plausible the Syro-Christian understanding of *Surah al-Qadr*.

It is no doubt not only ignorance of the language of the Qur'ān but also and above all the political evolution of the Arab Empire which led to the estrangement of Islam from the origins of its founding text. The mounting political tensions between the Muslims and the Christians were doubled in the East, right from the beginning of the 8th century, taking the form of a religious polemic of an ideological character. It is under such circumstances that we have to imagine the new interpretation of this Surah and of its theological implications in the sense of Islamic theology. It is not *in Christ* that the Word of God is incarnated, but *in the Qur'ān*. In other words, to the Christian theological concept of the *Incarnation of Logos (al-Kalima) in Christ*, Islamic theology opposes the word of God incarnated in the Qur'ān. As a consequence, it is not the Infant Jesus who is born this night, but the Qur'ān which descends the same night.

The philological analysis of Surah 97 leads us to understand it henceforth, in its Arabo-Syriac reading, as:

Surah 97: The Destiny (of the Star of Nativity)
1. We sent him down (Infant Jesus) during the Night of Destiny (of the Star of Nativity).
2. What do you know what the Night of Destiny is?
3. The Night (Nocturnal Office) of Destiny (of the Star of Nativity) is more beneficial than a thousand vigils?
4. The Angels (accompanied by) the Spirit, send down with the permission of their Lord, all sorts of hymns.
5. Peace there is until the break of day.

Surah 97 could have served as an introduction to a liturgy of the Nativity of the Christian Arabs before Islam. Its linguistic understanding in its historical setting reveals its link to a Syro-Christian liturgical tradition. This account is a contribution to the history of religions in so far as it shows the initial closeness of Christianity and Islam.

12. The Difference Between the Methods of Lüling and Luxenberg

The author has been criticised many times for not having referred to the work of Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Quran* 34. The author however had clearly stated in his preface that he had no intention of taking into account all that had been written upto the present on this subject, these works hardly con-

tributing anything to the new method purely philological that he intended to propose.

As for Günter Lüling, the precise difference between his method and that of the author seems to have escaped the scrupulous scrutiny of the critics. Lüling expresses first of all the thesis that a part of the Qur'ān is made up of Pre-Islamic Christian hymns, in this he was certainly not wrong. However, it is appropriate to note that he was not the first to discover this point. It is enough to glance at the introduction of the Swedish theologian and Islamologue Tor Andrae to realise that more than a generation of Orientalists had already worked on the question, beginning with the Austrian Alois Sprenger. While Lüling cites a number of others in his "Literaturverzeichnis," he omits nonetheless to cite the work though remarkable of Wilhelm Rudolph. The merit of Lüling has been nonetheless to relaunch the debate on this crucial question fallen into oblivion, but above all to state clearly that the Qur'ān contained Pre-Islamic Christian hymns. There we have the first constituent of his thesis and his point of departure.

In the second, Lüling intends to elucidate the Qur'ānic passages said to be obscure by modifying the diacritical points of Arabic writing, which in the early Qur'ānic manuscripts were lacking but which are of course essential in distinguishing the 22 phonemes of the actual Arabic alphabet comprising 28 signs. It is precisely on this point that the criticism has some weight as to the omission by the author of any reference to the person the critics consider to have been his predecessor. And it is also precisely there the critics misunderstand the essential difference between the two methods seemingly similar. However this method is not in itself entirely new. Ignaz Goldziher had already drawn attention to the haphazard way the diacritical points were introduced rather late into the Qur'ānic text. In this work, Goldziher describes the early efforts of Islamic exegesis in search of a Qur'ānic reading whose defective writing was far from creating a consensus. This debate generated moreover all a literature of variants (see R.B. ...) which incited Western orientalists to pursue research in this field. In this way the first attempt aiming to modify the diacritical points with a view to a more plausible reading of the Qur'ān was undertaken by Jacob Barth in *Studien zur Kritik und Exegese des Qorans*. In this essay, Barth, starting with Arabic, succeeded in displacing the points correctly in just four cases. But this first timid attempt did not have the expected impact since the number of words thus modified was limited.

Günter Lüling, more half a century later, thus was not the first to apply this technique, which, on its own, does not yet constitute a method. For the essence of the method is the linguistic base on which is founded this technique, and it would be too easy to reduce it to a simple deplacement of diacritical points. Anyone who has read the basics of the method of the author which Rémi Brague has so magisterially summarized in his review, could have judged the complexity. This method is not limited to an etymological

explanation of simple words, it extends also to linguistic phenomena such as morphology, syntax and phraseology. It demands thus a very careful reading of the Qurʾān in a double Arabo-Syriac perspective with all the hazards such a reading entails. That is what critics do not seem to have clearly distinguished between the two methods.

The point of departure of Lüling is a Christian Arabic literary language, Pre-Islamic and Pre-Classical, a sort of *koiné*, but essentially Arabic. For the author, on the other hand, it is a matter of a mixed Arabo-Syriac language, such as must have prevailed at the time of the editing of the Qurʾān. There you have all the difference between the two methods. Surah 96 that Lüling has interpreted according to his method well illustrates moreover the gulf that separates it from the Syro-Syriac reading of the author. It is true that Lüling refers quite rightly to Gustav Weil and Hartwig Hirschfeld in rendering *iqra'* (verses 1,3) by "invoke," instead of the traditional reading "read," and that he interprets *ʿalaq* (verse 2) correctly as a metaphor for "clay," but apart from these two words, all the rest is far from being convincing, including and above all the syntax. And even where Lüling occasionally suspects a Syriac word, such as for *zabaniya* (verse 18) which he reads *rabbaniya* (that he takes for *Archangels*, instead of *zaḫnāyā*, an adjective signifying temporary, passing, in connection with the idol, to the mortal god of the adversary), he misses the point.

Another detail is worth noting: Lüling first presents his thesis and claims to prove it linguistically. In reality, he bases himself on essentially theological arguments that he projects into the text and that he tries to demonstrate in so doing, if necessary, without respecting the principles that should be applied when reading a *lectio difficilior*. His Arabic understanding of certain passages, that one can only understand, in my view, by means of Arabo-Syriac, pushes him to modify, even eliminate not only words but also entire verses that he judges to be misplaced or superfluous for not having revealed the true meaning. It is undoubtedly for this reason that he has not managed to be convincing. Although, he is certainly correct regarding the Christian origins of the Qurʾān, especially the strophic hymns.

The author proceeds in an inverse sense: he first submits the text to a rigorous philological analysis, with references always in support, and then reaches a double conclusion:

   a) that the founding texts of the Qurʾān were originally in part Syro-Christian liturgical texts;
   b) that the language of the Qurʾān is a mixed Arabo-Syriac.

The latter observation is the key which gives us access to an adequate understanding of the language of the Qurʾān. The author was thus justified in setting aside everything that was written, from a linguistic point of view, upto

now on the subject of the language of the Qur'ān, since the previous scholars were not aware of the mixed Arabo-Aramaic character of its language.

In consequence, it is not at all for lack of intellectual probity that he, in his first study, passed over in silence that of Günter Lüling. He remains indebted nonetheless to criticism for having incited him to clearly discern the difference and to articulate it with precision.

Notes:

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1 Bell's introductory remarks: "SURAH CVIII: This looks like a fragment, but it is difficult to find a suitable context for it. The rhyme might indicate a position in LXXIV—after v. 39 (?). That, however, necessitates a fairly early date, and the reference to sacrifice is difficult to explain, unless we are prepared to assume that Muhammad continued to take part in heathen rites in Mecca. Otherwise it seems necessary to assume that the Surah is Medinan. It is, in any case, an encouragement to the prophet under insult."

2 Bell's note 1: "Al-kauthar, from the root meaning 'many,' is interpreted as meaning much wealth, or by others as referring to the number of his followers; others again take the word as the proper name of a river or pool in Paradise."

3 Bell's note 2: "'Mutilated,' 'having the tail cut off,' probably in the sense of having no son. The word has presumably been applied to Muhammad by an enemy."

4 Blachère's note 1: "al-Kawṯar 'l'Abondance.' Ce thème, d'un emploi rare, est une épithète substantivée. Ce sens est ressenti par tous les commt., mais la tradition (cf. Buhl) prétend que ce terme désigne un des fleuves du Paradis." [This stem, of rare usage, is an attributive adjective that has been nominalised. This sense is felt by all the commentators, but the [Islamic] tradition claims that this term designates one of the rivers of Paradise.]

5 Although Bell here translates the adverb كثيرا (kaṯīrā) according to modern Arabic usage as "often," the Syro-Aramaic semantics and the context suggest the meaning "constantly." Another example of the Syro-Aramaic meaning can be found in Surah 56:32,33, wherein the believers are promised وفكهة كثيرة لا مقطوعة ولا ممنوعة (wa-fākiha kaṯīra, lā maqṭūʿa wa-lā mamnūʿa) "And fruit profuse, Not cut off and not forbidden" (Bell). The Arabic verb منع / manaʿa (to forbid) is, however, only one possible equivalent of the Syro-Aramaic verb ܟܠܐ / klā (see Mannā 337b), the more common meaning being "to cease, to come to an end " (Mannā: 5. توقف / tawaqqafa, 6. انتهى / intahā). Moreover, قطع / qataʿa here does not mean (as in modern Arabic) "to cut off," but according to the wider Syro-Aramaic semantics "to cease, to come to an end, to be used up." A preferable translation of the whole verse would therefore be: "and constant(ly available) fruit, never ending nor running out." The latter meaning is furthermore attested in Sura 38:54: ان هذا لرزقنا ما له من نفاد (inna hāḏā la-rizqunā mā lahu min nafād) "this is our provision, of it is no failing " (Bell).

6 Cf. *Thes.* I 1859 f., ܟܘܬܪܐ (kuttārā) (1) mora, expectatio, στηριγμός, duratio, fixitas. Further, in Mannā 360b, ܟܘܬܪܐ (kuttārā), ܟܬܪ (kattar) (2): دام . استمر. ثبت . استمر. ثبت / dāma, istamarra, ṯabata, baqiya (to last, to continue, to persist, to remain).

7 The و / waw in the irregular form *kawṯar* could also be justified as an element serving to dissolve the following gemination. However, for such a reading there is no evidence. A parallel case of Syro-Aramaic nominal forms of the second stem

can be found in Surah 78:28: وكذبوا بايتنا كذابا (*wa-kaḏḏabū bi-ʾāyātinā kiḏḏābā*) (Bell: And they counted Our signs false utterly), and 78:35: لا يسمعون فيها لغوا ولا كذابا (*lā yasmaʿūna fīhā laġwan wa-lā kiḏḏābā*) (Bell: In which they will hear neither babble nor accusation of falsehood). The form *kiḏḏābā* is an erroneous reading and reflects Syro-Aramaic ܟܘܕܒܐ /*kuddāḇā*, in this case, however, without mater lectionis for the short vowel *u*. The equivalent truly Arabic nominal form of the second stem كذّب /*kaḏḏaba* is تكذيب /*takḏīb*, as in Sura 85:19: بل الذين كفروا في تكذيب (*bali l-laḏīna kafarū fī takḏīb*) (Bell: Ney, those who have disbelieved are engaged in counting false). A similar same case is attested of the Syro-Aramaic second stem verb ܢܚܛ / *naḥḥeṯ*, of which the correct nominal form would be ܢܘܚܛܐ /*nuḥḥāṯā*. In Sura 19:24 the form occurs twice, in the first case as the false Arabic reading من تحتها / *min taḥtihā* (Bell: from beneath her), which should be read as Syro-Aramaic *min nuḥḥātihā*, i.e., "right after her accouchement," and in the second case as the erroneous Arabic reading تحتك /*taḥtaki* (Bell: beneath you) for Syro-Aramaic *nuḥḥātaki* – "your accouchement." See above, p. 127 ff., for the discussion of the passage from Surah 19:24. A remnant of this Syro-Aramaic form in today's Arabic is found in the specific (and abnormal) word كتّاب / *kuttāb* (Koran school or elementary school—plural: كناتيب / *katātīb*), that morphologically could be taken for the plural of the Arabic singular كاتب / *kātib* (writer, author). But actually, it is the Syro-Aramaic infinitive of the second stem كتّب / *kattaba* (to make write = to teach the art of writing), corresponding to the Arabic infinitive تكتيب / *taktīb*.

8   Cf. *Thes.* II 2284 ff.: ܢܓܪ /*nḡar* (1) longus fuit, productus, extensus est (to continue, to go on and on); (2) patiens, longanimis fuit (to be patient, to have patience), ‏ اصطبر . صبر . تمهّل‎ .

9   Cf. *Thes.* II 2668 ff; actually Arabic *šāniyaka*.

10   The *Lisān* (XII 24b f.) quotes as sole exception the plural of إمام (ʾimām) = أئمة (ʾaʾimma) (where the second *hamza*, however, is not vowelless) and explains nevertheless that this form with two *hamza*, according to the philologists of Kufa, is an exception and not a norm (شاذ لا يقاس عليه), since the most Koran readers read أيمة (ʾayimma). Hence he concludes that "two successive radical *hamza* never occurred" in Arabic:

فلهذا لم يأت في الكلام لفظة توالت فيها همزتان أصلا البتة !

11   This is not the unique secondary Arabic formation from a Syro-Aramaic verbal root. The Koran offers us two further secondary derivations from the Syro-Aramaic verbal root ܐܬܐ /*eṯā*: 1. From the 2nd intensive stem ܐܬܝ / *attī* (to bring) (by secondary sonorization of the t > d) > Arabic أدّى / *addā* (in the Koran in the meaning "to bring, to give back" in the following passages: Surahs 2:283; 3:75 [2x]; 4:58; in the vernacular Egyptian Arabic ادّيني / *əddīnī* means means = اعطني /*aʿṭinī* [give me]); 2. from the most used Syro-Aramaic Afʿel stem ܐܝܬܝ / *aytī* in the sense of "to bring," the Qurʾān forms by monophthongization of the diphthong *ay > ā* the 4th Arabic stem آتى /ʾātā (formally equal to the 3rd stem), as it is attested in numerous passages with the same meaning. A further secondary derivation is to be found in the today's spoken Arabic of Irak, where for example the imperative form انطيني /*anṭīnī* (give me) shows its derivation from the Syro-Aramaic intenxsive stem ܐܬܝ / *attī* (imperative ܐܬܝܢ / *attī-n[ī]*) after the dissolution of the

gemination of the medial radical by insertion of a preceding ـنـ /n, as it can be observed in a number of Arabic verbs borrowed from the Eastern (Mesopotamian) vernacular Aramaic, as it is relatively frequent e.g., in Mandaic (cf. Th. Nöldeke, *MG*, § 68).

This phenomenon can help to clarify the etymology of the Hebrew (and Old Aramaic) verbal root נתן / *n-t-n* (to give) as a secondary formation from Eastern Aramaic with a secondary first and third radical from the second intensive stem אתא / *attā* > *antā* + the enclitic object suffix of the first person singular –*n(ī)* or plural –*n* = אנתני* or אנתן* / *antān(ī)* / *antān*, thereby accent-shifting on the last syllable and consequently dropping of the unaccented initial radical נתן(א) / *(a)ntān* > נתן / *natān* > *ntān* (hence no spirantization of the originally geminated ת / *t* after the vocalized secondary נ / *n*).

The end- ܠ / *l* in the parallel Syriac variant ܢܬܠ / *n-t-l* is the enclitic preposition ܠ / *l* marking the dative (or indirect object), by analogy with the verb ܝܗܒ ܠ / ya(h)ḇ *l*- (to give "to" someone). This formation has been nearly recognized by Stade (according to Th. Nöldeke, *MG* 52, note 6: in *Lit. Centralbl.* 1873 Nr. 45, p. 1418), who, however, sees in this end-*l* (as well as Nöldeke) an assimilation of the end-*n* of the previous form, that Nöldeke regards as a former original one. But in reality, both variants are parallel secondary formations depending on the use of the original verb: a) *attā* as ruling the accusative (or direct object), b) *attī* as ruling the dative by means of the preposition ܠ / *l*.

While C. Brockelmann does not quote this irregular form in his *Lexicon Syriacum*, Mannā and the *Thesaurus* adduce it in alphabetical order under ـن /*n*. Mannā (470b) explains the fictitious verbal root *ܢܬܠ / *ntal* as (ممات / *mumāt*) (died out); the Thes. (II 2480) explains it as verbum defectivum and compares it to Hebrew נתן / *natan* and Eastern Aramaic נתן / *ntan* beside נתל / *ntal* (without further etymological explanation). In his *Syrische Grammatik* [Syriac Grammar], p. 128, Th. Nöldeke refers only to נתן / *n-t-n* as root of the Syro-Aramaic infinitive ܡܬܠ / *mettal*, without further explanation.

12 Cf. Nöldeke-Schwally, *GdQ* I 74–17.

13 Cf. Tor Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum* [Christianity and the Origin of Islam] (Uppsala, 1926) 139: "The eschatalogical piety of the Qur'ān is thus very closely related to the religious viewpoint predominant in the Syrian churches before and at the time of Muhammed. This Syrian piety is actually a monastic religion. . . ."

14 Pickthall translates as follows: "1. Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth, 2. createth man from a clot. 3. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, 4. Who teacheth by the pen, 5. Teacheth man that which be knew not. 6. Nay, but verily man is rebellious 7. That he thinketh himself independent! 8. Lo! unto thy Lord is the return. 9. Hast thou seen him who dissuadeth 10. A slave when he prayeth? 11. Hast thou seen if he (relieth) on the guidance (of Allah) 12. Or enjoineth piety? 13. Hast thou seen if he denieth (Allah's guidance) and is froward? 14. Is he then unaware that Allah seeth? 15. Nay, but if he cease not. We will seize him by the forelock 16. The lying, sinful forelock 17. Then let him call upon his henchmen! 18. We will call the guards of hell. 19. Nay! Obey not thou him. But prostrate thyself, and draw near (unto Allah)."

15 The phrase that is cited in Nöldeke-Schwally, *GdQ* I 33, قرأ على فلان السلام and قرأ فلانا السلام (to greet someone) can certainly be traced back to the Syro-Aramaic

expression ܩܪܐ ܫܠܡܐ (*qrā šlāmā*), as given in the Thes. (II 3713) and explained with salutavit. The same is in Mannā 698: ܩܪܐ ܫܠܡܐ ܥܠ (*qrā šlāmā ʿal*): قرأ . سلّم على سلاما . The *Lisān* (XV 174a ff.) lists under the root قرا (*qarā*) (with the variants قرو / *q-r-w* and قرى / *q-r-y*) a whole series of no longer common expressions in modern Arabic that can only be explained on the basis of their Syro-Aramaic origin. One of them is, for example, قرى الضيف (*qarā ḍ-ḍayf*), which the *Lisān* (179b) conjecturally explains with "to honor a guest," but which in Syro-Aramaic means "to call = to invite" a guest. Also interesting are the further forms such as إنّه إنّه لَقرىّ وإنها لقريّة للأضياف , whose form already betrays لمقرى للضيف ومقراء as well as their Syro-Aramaic origin.

16 Cf. *Thes.* II 3713: ܩܪܐ ܒܫܡ… (*qrā b̲-šem*) proclamavit nomen ejus; vocavit, invocavit Deum. Furthermore in Mannā 698: ܩܪܐ ܒܫܡ ܡܪܝܐ (*qrā b-šem māryā*) نوّه باسم الرب . صلّى . سجد. عبد الرب (to invoke God's name, to pray, to worship, to worship God). G. Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾān* [About the Original Qurʾān], p. 30; A Challenge to Islam for Reformation, p. 32, was right in confirming this understanding by Gustav Weil and Hartwig Hirschfeld.

17 Avānī III 16, cited from: Jawād ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī tārīḫ al-ʿArab qabl al- Islām* (Exhaustive History of the Arabs Before Islam), vol. 6, Beirut, ³1980, p. 651.

18 In the article WARAQA b. Nawfal b. Asad al-Qurašī in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1934, 631) it is reported that Waraqa "encouraged and possibly influenced the Prophet in the first years of his mission" (in Mecca). As a Christian "he was abstemious, knew Hebrew, studied the Bible, and had written down" (i.e., translated) "the Gospels" (probably one Gospel) allegedly in the Hebrew alphabet. It was he "who found Muḥammad as a child when he strayed from his nurse." He is also the one who "warmly approved" of the first marriage of the Prophet to Waraqa's cousin Ḫadīja. The (Islamic) tradition admits that Waraqa was nonetheless never converted (to Islam).

19 Arabic بيعة (*bīʿa*) has already been recognized by S. Fraenkel, *Aram. Fremdwörter* [Aramaic Foreign Words] 274, as a borrowing from Syro-Aramaic ܒܝܥܬܐ (*bīʿtā*) (egg, dome = church); the plural بيع (*biyaʿ*) occurs in the Qurʾān in Sura 22:40. The expression is still common today among Arabic-speaking Christians in the Mesopotamian region.

20 As a Syro-Aramaic substratum *al-Munǧid fī l-luġa wa-l-aʿlām*, Beirut 1987, 526b, has recorded the expression العلق (*al-ʿalaq*) in the meaning الطين الذي يعلق باليد (*aṭ-ṭīn al-laḏī yaʿlaq bi-l-yad*) (the clay that sticks to one's hand). This meaning is missing in the *Lisān*.

21 Even though the meaning of the Arabic لازب (*lāzib*) "sticky, clinging" is actually clear, Paret (368) translates "of pliant [literally, consistent] clay," ["aus geschmeidigem (W: konsistentem) Lehm"], Blachère (475) "of solidified clay," ["d'argile solidifiée"]; and Bell (II, 443), approximately, "of clay cohering."

22 Paret begins the sentence with "Nein!"; Blachère sees in it a warning: "Prenez garde!" Like Paret, Bell understands "Nay."

23 The same sense has the Syro-Aramaic adverbial expression ܠܓܡܪ / *la-ḡmār* (Mannā 112b: بتّة. قطّ. ابدا / abadan, qaṭṭ, batta; C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* 121b: absolute, omnino [absolutely, completely, ever / never]).

24 Carl Brockelmann, *Syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1938), p. 15; a more modern reference book is Burkhart Kienast, *Historische Semitische Sprachwissenschaft* (Wiesbaden, 2001).

25 This sense is attested in the Qur'ān in Sura 2:117 and 6:101: بديع السموت والارض / *badī' as-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* = Syro-Aramaic ܚܛ ܥܬܒܚ ܘܒܪܚܚ / *'āḇeḏ šmayyā w-ar'ā* (Creator of the heaven and the earth). The secondary Arabic verb بدأ / *bada'a*, with the secondary common meaning "to begin," has in the Qur'ān partially the original meaning of "to create," as it arises e.g., from Sura 7:29: كما بداكم تعودون / *kamā badākum or bada'akum ta'ūdūn* (As He created you, you will turn again) (Bell I 139 translates: "As He began you, ye will come again").

26 Cf. Th. Nöldeke, *Syrische Grammatik* [Syriac Grammar] § 223: "The personal pronouns must also express the reflexive wherever this function is not already performed by the verbal form… . That is, very often one uses ܢܦܫ (naḇšā) "soul," and less frequently ܩܢܘܡܐ (qnōmā) "person" with the personal suffixes for the exact expression of the reflexive relationship. . . ." In Arabic the only way to express the reflexive is by means of the equivalent expressions نفس (*nafs*) and حال (*ḥāl*). Accordingly, إن رءاه (*in ra'ā-hu*—properly: *rā-hu*) in Arabic should have properly been إن رأى نفسه (*in ra'ā nafsahu*).

27 Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Verneinungs- und Fragepartikeln und Verwandtes im Kur'ān. Ein Beitrag zur historischen Grammatik des Arabischen* [Negative, Interrogative and Related Particles in the Qur'ān: A Study of the Historical Grammar of Arabic] (Leipzig, 1914) 89–100. Concerning ارايت (3-91) he says laconically: "Subordinate clauses are occasionally inserted after *a*, but then the *a* is usually repeated. The text causes more difficulties here than elsewhere. . . ."

28 Cf. Thes. I 47, particula (1) distinctiva; (48) (2) interrogativa, num, an, ne. The Hebrew particle הַ (ha) that Brockelmann associates with the Arabic interrogative particle أ ('a) in *Arabische Grammatik* [Arabic Grammar] § 86, note (a), would suggest a sound shift from *ha* to *'a*. But the parallel use of أو ('aw) and أ ('a) as an interrogative particle in the Qur'ān would seem to verify the creation of the latter through the monophthongization of the Syro-Aramaic particle ܐܘ (*aw*). This, however, does not rule out the possibility that the former was also first created through a sound shift of the demonstrative particle ܗܘ (*haw*) to ܐܘ (*'aw*).

29 The Thes. (I 249) gives the spelling ܐܝܢ ('yn), in addition to ܐܢ ('n), as Chaldean; the first spelling also appears at times in Christian Palestinian (250): ܐܝܢ ⁖ For this: "Est ubi scriptum est ܐܝܢ . . . ."

30 See Theodor Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik* (Darmstadt, 1964), p. 162.

31 Cf. W. Diem, "Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie III. Endungen und Endschreibungen" [Studies in the Early History of Arabic Orthography III: Endings and Their Spellings], in *Orientalia*, vol. 50, 1981, § 193, 378. But actually, this orthography goes back to an Eastern Syro-Aramean (Babylonian) tradition.

32 The translation of the Qur'ānic plural انداد (*andād*) by (gods) "of his own kind," as our Qur'ān translators render it, trusting in the Arabic commentators (e.g., Paret at Sura 2:22), is therefore false.

33 In Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary* 148: "The guardians of Hell."

34 This would be justified as an appellative by the word determined by the Arabic article ال / al. The Qur'ān, however, does not always orient itself according to the

Arabic norm, and so it often happens that the Qur'ān also leaves out an article required by Arabic, as in Sura 95:5, ثم رددنه اسفل سفلين , where what is seen in Arabic as an indeterminate (and therefore as a false) genitive of the status constructus is considered as determinate (and as correct) in Syro-Aramaic. Variations in both directions are to be observed in the Qur'ān, so that criteria of Arabic as well as of Syro-Aramaic grammar must be taken into account depending on the context. Cf. for example the variants in the old codices edited by Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*, Leiden 1937, p. 178 (Codex of Ubai b. Ka'b), Surah 95:5, where سفلين (*sāfilīn*) is transmitted with the article ال / al السافلين : (*as-sāfilīn*), "as Ibn Mas'ūd." The same occurs in the following Surah 96:16 : "He read الناصية الكاذبة الخاطئة (*an-nāṣiya al-kāḏiba al-ḫāṭi'a*). So Abū Ḥaṣīn."

35 Salwa Bā l-Ḥaǧǧ Ṣāliḥ al-'Āyub, *Al-masīḥīya al-'arabīya wa taṭawwurātuhā min naš'atihā ilā l-qarn ar-rābi' al-hiǧrī/ al-'āsir al-milādī* [Arab Christianity and its Development from its Origins to the Fourth Century of the Hegira/Tenth Century of the Christian Era] (Beirut, 2007), part I, chapter 4, p. 89.

36 Namely, in Arabic the conjunction و /wa also has an explicative function, including that of a more detailed explanation.

37 Syro-Aramaic ܟܠܐ (*klā*) is the supposed lexical equivalent for Arabic نهى (*nahā*). For this, Mannā (337b) cites in Arabic, besides نفى نهى (*nahā, nafā*) (to forbid), also صدّ. عاق (*ṣadda, 'āqa*) (to hinder, to hold back).

38 Among the eight different aspects (ܦܪ̈ܨܘܦܐ /parṣōpā) of the Syro-Aramaic conjunction ܐܘ (*aw*) that Bar Bahlūl names, the Thes. (I 48) cites the "intensifying" meaning designated with ܝܬܝܪ (*yattīr*). This conjunction is also used with such a meaning in the Qur'ān, in Sura 37:147, where it is said of Jonas وارسلنه الى مائة الف او يزيدون "and we dispatched him to one hundred thousand or (even) more." The Arab philologists have noticed this nuance (see *Lisān* XIV 54b).

39 The single meaning of the Arabic borrowed verb أمر (*amara*) "to command" does not do justice to the present context. It is not a question of "commanding," but rather of the "beliefs" or "convictions" upon which the action is based. To that extent the meaning given by Mannā (26a) in Arabic under (4) for the Syro-Aramaic ܐܡܪ (emar) ارتأى (*irta'ā*) (to think, to consider, to ponder) is appropriate.

40 Literally: Bow (instead) (to honor God). As a terminus technicus, سجد (*saǧada*) here means "to hold divine service."

41 Ethel Stefana Drower and Rudolf Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 383b.

42 The true meaning of the term عيد ('*īd*), which occurs as a *hapax legomenon* in the Qur'ān, has until now been overlooked. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (515b), explains the derivation of Arabic عيد ('*īd*) in the meaning "feast" as the phonetic rendering of the common Aramaic pronunciation of ܥܐܕܐ ('*ēḏā >'īḏā*). As a faithful rendering of the Syro-Aramaic ܥܝܕܐ ('*yāḏā*), however, the Qur'ānic term has accordingly, in addition to the original meaning of "practice, custom," the meaning of "liturgy," which is clear here from the Qur'ānic context. Cf. also the Thes. II 2827: Valet etiam ܥܝܕܐ ('*yāḏā*) ritus, caeremonia (rite, ceremony).

43 Vol. II, 1st edition (Cairo, 1928) 129.

44 This term is still used among the Arabic speaking Christians of the Near and Middle East.

45 Cf. Thes I 514: Improprie de foetu, ܒܛܢܗ (*baṭnāh*): id quod conceperat.

46 Cf., e.g., C. Brockelmann, *Arabische Grammatik* [Arabic Grammar] § 85; *Syrische Grammatik* [Syriac Grammar] § 201.

47 Cf. Thes. II on ܢܚܬ (*nḥet*) 2344, (γ) ortus est, genus duxit; further in C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* 424a, under 10: oriundus fuit (to spring from, to be descended from, to be born).

48 Cf. Thes. II 2155: Valet etiam ܡܢ ܕ (*men d-*): postquam (after). Mannā, 407a: ܡܢ ܕܩܪܝ (*men da-qrāy*) : حالما دعاه (as soon as he called him).

49 Not to be confused with the temporal من in the sense of مذ ، منذ (cf., e.g., *Lisān* XIII 421 b): من سنة = مذ سنة (min sana^tin : for a year).

50 Discovered with the help of Syro-Aramaic.

51 *Lisān* II 98a. The reading النصار / *an-nuṣār* results from the lexical equivalent of Syro-Aramaic ܢܨܝܚܐ / *naṣīḥā*, the meanings of which Mannā (461b) gives as follows: (4) مظفر. قاهر. فائز (successful, victorious, triumphant), and under (7) شريف. جليل. نبيل. فاضل (noble, honorable, highborn, illustrious). The Arabic expression النصار /*an-nuṣār* renders the Syriac meaning under (4), presupposing that the semantic nuance under (7) is included. Thus here النصار /*an-nuṣār* means الأشراف / *al-ašrāf* (the notables).

52 Theodor Nöldeke writes about this influence in a work that he labels a "sketch:" *Die semitischen Sprachen* [The Semitic Languages] (Leipzig, 21899) 52:

> During the entire dominance of Aramaic this language had at least a great influence on the vocabulary of Arabic. The more meticulous one's examination, the more one recognizes how many Arabic words signifying concepts or objects of a certain culture have been borrowed from the Arameans [Reference to the aforementioned work by Siegmund Fraenkel, Die aramäischen Fremdwīrter (Aramaic Foreign Words)]. The northern cultural influence expressed in these borrowings contributed considerably to preparing the Arabs for their powerful intervention in world history.

Nöldeke correctly traces the richness of the Arabic vocabulary partially to the arbitrarily devised expressions of Arabic poetry and partially to words that were common only to individual tribes. His concluding opinion on the subject (58) is all the more surprising:

> But still the abundance of words is exceedingly large, and the Arabic dictionary will always remain the principal aid in the search for instruction on obscure expressions in other Semitic languages [where just the opposite seems to be the case, though he then adds the qualifier]: only if this occurs with the requisite amount of level-headedness; then it's quite all right.

53 *Lisān* II 98b; through the conjectural explanation of Arabic نحت (*naḥata*) (97b) — النحت (*an-naḥt*) with النشر والقشر (an-našru wa-l-qašr): "to saw, to peel" —the *Lisān* testifies to its ignorance of the original meaning of this root originally borrowed from Aramaic, when, for example, it explains النحاتة / *an-nuḥātā* with ما نحت من الخشب (*mā nuḥita min al-ḥašab* – "what has been planed from wood"). At the same time, this nominal form already exhibits a direct borrowing from Syro-Aramaic ܢܚܬܐ (*nḥātā*) or ܢܘܚܚܬܐ (*nūḥḥātā*) with the correspondent meaning here,

"what has fallen off." Also, نحت الجبل (*naḥata l-ǧabal*) does not actually mean قطعه (*qaṭaʿahu*) "to cut," but according to the original Syro-Aramaic meaning "to chop off, to strike down" (the mountain); the same is true for النحائت (*an-naḥāʾit*) (98a): آبار معروفة (*ābār maʿrūfa* – "well-known wells"), whose original meaning the *Lisān* again derives from "to cut." The figurative sense "to degrade," on the other hand, derives from the following expressions (98b): نحته بلسانه : لامه وشتمه (*naḥatahū bi-lisānihi: lāmahu wa-šatamahū*) (to "degrade" somebody with the tongue: to rebuke, revile him); النحيت (*an-naḥīt*) (< Syro-Aramaic سحى / *naḥīṭ*) means نحته بالعصا : ضربه بها (*naḥatahū bi-l-ʿaṣā : ḍarabahu bi-hā*— "to hit somebody with a stick," actually in this way "to degrade" him, "to knock" him "down" with it); the same is true when one is said نحت المرأة : نكحها (*naḥata l-marʾa: nakaḥahā* – to "degrade = to dishonor" a woman: to lie with her).

On the other hand, in his *Lexicon Syriacum* 424b, C. Brockelmann categorizes the Syro-Aramaic سحى (*nḥeṭ*) etymologically with the Arabic حتّ (*ḥatta*), and that its first radical ن / ـ (*nūn*) has fallen off suggests, in turn, according to the expressions cited in the *Lisān* (II 22a ff.), a borrowing from this very Syro-Aramaic root with the original meaning "to fall off." That this root was unknown to the Arabs is shown not least by its reduction in colloquial modern Arabic to a verbal form with the meaning "to rub off, to scratch off" (see, for example, Hans Wehr) as well as "to become worn through use" (said of pieces of clothing and carpets, actually "to be worn out, run down").

54 Cf. *Lisān* II 98a where النحاتة (*an-nuḥāta*) is explained with the help of البراية (*al-burāya* – "shavings"). For this unidentified Syro-Aramaic root in the *Lisān* the derivation of the Arabic نحاتة (*nuḥāta*) from Syro-Aramaic سحها (*nḥāṭā*) or سحها (*nuḥḥāṭā*) would nevertheless be obvious, whereby the Arabic feminine ending is to be viewed occasionally as a purely phonetic rendering of the Syro-Aramaic emphatic ending of the masculine nominal form. This, however, does not rule out the possibility that an Arabic feminine ending may be derived from such an ending in Syro-Aramaic. Concerning this nominal form Nöldeke writes in his *Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* [Essays on Semitic Linguistics] (Strasbourg, 1904) 30, under Nomina of the Form Fuʿāl : "In Arabic, then, the femininum فعالة (*fuʿāla*) is still quite alive as the form of refuse, of shavings. This is shown, among other things, by the fact that it can even be formed from recently borrowed words."

That Nöldeke, in the case of the examples named here نشارة (*nušāra*) (wood shavings) and كناسة (*kunāsa*) (sweepings), does not already recognize a borrowing from the Syro-Aramaic equivalents that he has also cited, سحها (*nsārtā*) and حنسحها (*knāštā*), may be because he views his presentation from the sole perspective of a neutral study in comparative Semitistics. The same applies for the Arabic form فعال (*fuʿāl*), which Nöldeke would like to see as separate from the preceding form, but which seems merely to be the Arabic pausal form or the reproduction of the status absolutus of the Syro-Aramaic nominal form حدحا (*pʿālā*), as several of the examples he cites also attest. Thus سعال (*suʿāl*) (coughing) can most likely be derived from حدحا (*šʿālā*), عطاس (*ʿuṭās*) (sneezing) from

ܛܝܫܐ (ṭāšā), خناق (ḥunāq) (angina) from ܚܢܩܐ (ḥnāqā). Other forms derived from Arabic roots would be merely analogous formations. From a purely philological perspective, comparative Semitics may be useful, but it leads one all too easily to blur the reciprocal influences, relevant to cultural history, of its individual languages.

55 Although not specifically in the meaning "to be delivered of, to give birth to," but in the general meaning "to send down, to drop, to lower," the Eastern Syrian lexicographers include among the various derivations the following Arabic equivalents: أنزل (anzala), أخفض (aḥfaḍa), حط (ḥaṭṭa), واضع (wāḍaʿa). (Cf. Thes. II 2344 f.; Mannā 442b f.). Since the Thes. does not provide any examples for ܢܚܬ (naḥḥet) in the meaning "to be delivered of, to give birth to," it would be interesting to document this usage in other Aramaic dialects.

56 Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch* [Concise Dictionary of Hebrew and Aramaic], 1915, unrev. reprint (Berlin, Göttingen, Stuttgart, 171959) 512b, under (b).

57 What is striking here is that, regarding the "sent-down Scriptures" in the sense of revelations, the Qurʾān usually employs the Arabic انزل (anzala – "to have come down, to send down") in addition to آتى (ātā < Syro-Aramaic ܐܝܬܝ / aytī – "to have come, to bring, to deliver").

58 Cf. *GdQ* I 117–143; but on page 130 (line 3) it is conceded: "The Surah is the oldest, or at least one of the oldest, in which holy persons from the New Testament such as Mary, Zachary, John the Baptist and Jesus are mentioned."

59 Cf. *Lisān* XIV 377b: السرو : المروءة والشرف (as-sarwa: al-murūʾa wa-š-šaraf – "manfulness, noblemindedness"); 378a: additional remarks on سريّ (sarī) in the meaning of شريف (šarīf) (noble, nobleminded).

60 The compiler of the *Lisān* nevertheless saw no reason not to include the unrecognized Syro-Aramaic expression سري (sarī) in the supposed meaning of نهر (nahr) (river) and جدول (ǧadwal) (brook) and to cite in connection with it the corresponding misinterpretation by the Qurʾān commentators: النهر الصغير كالجدول يجري إلى النخل ("a small or a stream-like river that flows to the palms") (*Lisān* XIV 380a). As we shall see, this is not an isolated case of misread and misunderstood Qurʾānic expressions that have been accepted into the Arabic lexicography without being contested up to the present day. But also other expressions cited by the *Lisān* under the root شري (šariya) and سري (sariya) and explained by means of folk etymology provide ample proof of their Aramaic origins. To point these out here, however, would be to exceed the scope of this study. It would therefore be of eminent importance not only from the standpoint of cultural history, but also from that of philology, to scrutinize the Arabic lexicon for the countless Aramaisms that have until now been overlooked or falsely taken to be "Old Arabic."

61 Blachère, loc. cit. 331, notes 23–32.

62 Bell, loc. cit. I 286, note 2.

63 Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* [The Dependence of the Qurʾān on Judaism and Christianity] (Stuttgart, 1922) 79.

64 Blachère 331, notes 23–32.

65 Ṭabarī XVI 63.

66 Cf. C. Brockelmann, *Syrische Grammatik* [Syriac Grammar] § 167.

67 The Qurʾānic spelling سرقيا is to be read *sarqīyā* according to Syro-Aramaic

/*sarqāyā* (empty = waste) and not as Arabic شرقيا / *šarqīyā* (to a place,) "eastward" (Bell). The Syro-Aramaic reading is logically confirmed by the parallel verse 22, where it is said that Mary, after having become pregnant, was expelled with her child to a place "far away " (*makānan qaṣīyā*): فحملته فانتبذت به مكانا قصيا

68 Cf., e.g., Lk. 2:18: ܘܟܠܗܘܢ ܕܫܡܥܘ ܐܬܕܡܪܘ ܥܠ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܐܬܡܠܠ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܪܥܘܬܐ (w-kullhōn da-šmaʿ⁽ᵘ⁾ eddammar⁽ᵘ⁾ ʿal aylēn d-etmallal⁽ⁱ⁾ l-hōn men rāʿawwāṭā) "And all they that heard (it) wondered at those (things) which were told them by the shepherds" (from the Syriac Bible 63DC, United Bible Societies [London, 1979] 77a). The Qurʾān, moreover, has the same passive construction in Sura 21:43, where it is said of the idols: لا يستطيعون نصر انفسهم ولا هم منا يصحبون   "they are not (even) capable of helping themselves nor are they (as idols) accompanied by us (as helpers)" (i.e., nor are we put with them as god).

   This construction, which is indefensible from the point of view of Arabic syntax, also confuses our Qurʾān translators. Paret, for instance, translates (265): "(– Götter) die weder sich selber Hilfe zu leisten vermögen noch (irgendwo) gegen uns Beistand finden [(– gods) who neither are capable of rendering themselves assistance nor find assistance against us (anywhere)] (?*wa-lā hum minnā yuṣḥabūna*)." Similarly Blachère (351): "et il ne leur est pas donné de compagnon contre nous [and they are not given a companion against us]" Only Bell translates correctly in terms of the meaning (I 308b 44): "and from Us they will have no company."

69 Cf. C. Brockelmann, *Arabische Grammatik* [Arabic Grammar] § 96.

70 See Thes. II 4308: ܫܪܐ (*šārā*) absolvens; solvit, liberavit. Further, Mannā 816b (among the 27 different meanings of ܫܪܐ šrā) (21): اذن . حلّل . ضد حرّم (to allow, to declare legitimate; opposite of to forbid, to declare illegitimate), and under ܫܪܐ šaryā (7): حلال. مباح. خلاف ممنوع ومحرّم (legitimate, allowed, opposite of forbidden and illegitimate). C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* [Syriac Lexicon] 804a: 6. ܫܪܐ (*šaryā*): licet (it is allowed, legitimate).

71 For the Qurʾānic expression وقرّي عينا (*wa-qarrī =aynaⁿ*), Mannā gives (698a) as the Syro-Aramaic equivalent ܩܘܪܬ ܥܝܢܐ *qurraṭ ʿaynā*, ܩܘܪܬ ܠܒܐ *qurraṭ lebbā, rūḥā*): قرّة العين . فرح . تعزية (*qurratᵘ l-ʿayn, faraḥ, taʿziya*) (cheerfulness, joy, consolation); see also Thes. II 3711: ܩܘܪܬ ܪܘܚܐ (*qurraṭ rūḥā*): consolatio (consolation).