

Graeco-Latina et Orientalia  
Studia in honorem Angeli Urbani heptagenarii

---



Edited by

Samir Khalil Samir & Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala



CNERU – CEDRAC

---

Oriens Academic

CNERU – CEDRAC

---

*Series Syro-Arabica*

2

Chief Editors

Samir Khalil Samir • Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala

Advisory Board

Sebastian Brock • Rifaat Ebied • Sidney H. Griffith  
Herman Teule • Dorothea Weltecke

Graeco-Latina et Orientalia  
Studia in honorem Angeli Urbani heptagenarii



Edited by

Samir Khalil Samir & Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala

Graeco-Latina et Orientalia : Studia in honorem Angeli Urbani heptagenarii. Edited by Samir Khalil Samir & Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala. – Cordoba : CNERU (Cordoba Near Eastern Research Unit) – Beirut : CEDRAC (Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Arabes Chrétiennes) – Oriens Academic, 2013

(Series Syro-Arabica ; vol. 2)

ISBN : 978-84-695-8428-6

Edit: Oriens Academic – CNERU – CEDRAC

Cordoba Near Eastern Research Unit	CEDRAC
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras	Université Saint-Joseph
Universidad de Córdoba	B.P. 16-6778 – Achrafieh
Plaza Cardenal Salazar, 3	Beyrouth – Liban
14071 – Córdoba, Spain	

<http://www.uco.es/cneru>  
[infocne@uco.es](mailto:infocne@uco.es)

Print: Imprintatecé, S.C.A.  
Ingeniero Torres Quevedo, s/n  
Córdoba (Spain)

Cover design by Manuel Marcos Aldón & Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala

ISBN: 978-84-695-8428-6

DL: CO-1337-2013

© Cordoba Near Eastern Research Unit

© CEDRAC

© The authors

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, translated, stored in any retrieval system, nor transmitted in any form without written permission from the Publisher*

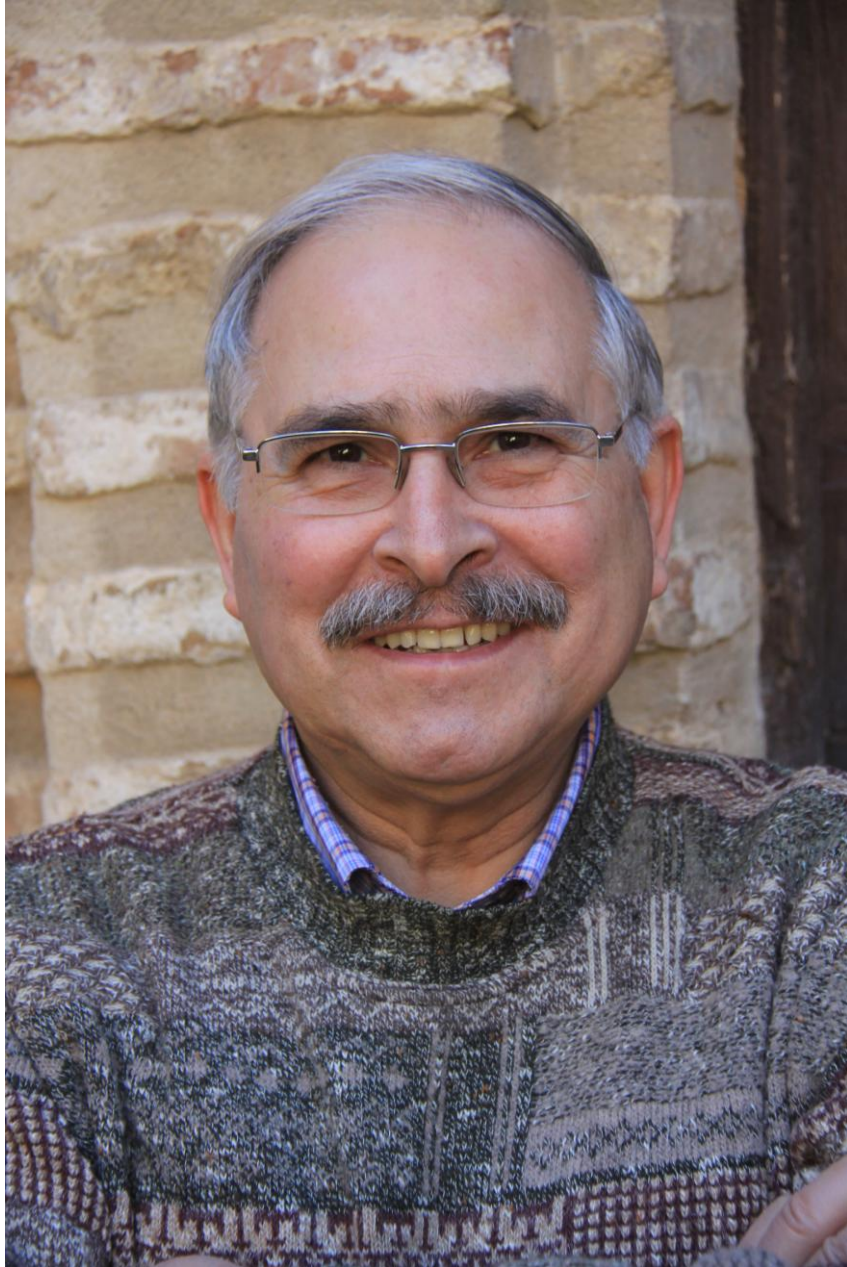
Printed in Spain

## CONTENTS

Preface .....	xi
Bibliography Professor Ángel Urbán .....	xiii
ARGÁRATE, Pablo	
A Survey of Different Liturgical Sources on the notion of “People of God” .....	1
BASSAL, Ibrahim	
An early copy of a Christian Arabic Pentateuch: Ms Sinai Arabic 2 and its affinity to the Peshīṭta .....	13
BONHOME, Lourdes	
An Arabic fragmentary epistle to the Galatians preserved in El Escorial <i>Cod. Ar. 1625</i> .....	35
BROCK, Sebastian P.	
The position of Job in Syriac biblical manuscripts: The survival of an ancient tradition .....	49
CHRISTIDES, Vassilios	
What went wrong in the long distance Roman naval power in the Red Sea and in the Indian Ocean in the late third century AD .....	63
CORRIENTE, Federico	
The names of the gems in the ephod as reflected in the <i>Leiden Glossary</i> and their reflexes in the Islamic mystical tradition .....	87
DI LUCCIO, Pino	
Pane, acqua e vestiti. Nella Bibbia ebraica, nella letteratura rabbinica e nel vangelo di Giovanni .....	101
EBIED, Rifaat	
The Syriac Version of the Treatise on the Origin and History of the Thirty Pieces of Silver which Judas received from the Jews .....	123

FERNÁNDEZ ARDANAZ, Santiago	
La teología política bajo los Severos: hacia una nueva fundamentación de la oicumene en el Imperio romano .....	133
GONZÁLEZ CASADO, Pilar	
Cristo, segundo Adán: la expresión en árabe de un tema de la literatura cristiana antigua .....	147
GRYPEOU, Emmanouela	
Ephraem Graecus, ‘Sermo In Adventum Domini’: A Contribution to the Study of the Transmission of Apocalyptic Motifs in Greek, Latin and Syriac Traditions in Late Antiquity .....	165
KIRAZ, George A.	
Textual Sources and Editorial Policies of the <i>Antioch Bible</i> .....	183
MARCOS ALDÓN, Manuel	
Notes sur les types d’écritures dans les marges des texts, à propos du Ms. 259-263 BNM .....	191
MARTÍNEZ DELGADO, José	
Cracks, the Almond, the Grasshopper and Desire: the ailments of old age (Ecclesiastes 12:5) in the exegesis of Andalusí Hebrew philologists (10 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> c.) .....	205
MONFERRER-SALA, Juan Pedro	
<i>Kēryssō</i> and its Arabic renditions in a bilingual Gospel of Luke (BnF ‘Supl. grec 911’, 1043 CE) .....	221
ÖNDER, Josef	
Metropolit Julius Yeshu Çiçek (1942-2005): „Meine Kirche, Dich liebe ich!“ Autobiographisches Gedicht: Text und Auslegung .....	237
PAZZINI, Massimo	
Gli Olivi del Getsemani ultimi «testimoni viventi» della Passione .....	253
PIERRI, Rosario	
Codex B e Nestle-Aland a confronto. Il Vangelo di Matteo .....	261

RIUS-CAMPS, Josep	
Lucas-Beza silencia o soslaya cualquier referencia a la Parusía y al Juicio Final .....	277
SAMIR, Samir Khalil	
Une adaptation arabe musulmane en prose rimée des evangiles (IX <sup>e</sup> s.) .....	295
SIDARUS, Adel	
Place et rôle de l'Antiquité gréco-romaine dans la littérature copto-arabe .....	327
SWANSON, Mark. N.	
The 'Urban Ministry' of Anbā Ruways .....	359
TEULE, Herman G.B.	
Ignatius Anṭūn Samḥūrī, a 19 <sup>th</sup> Century Syrian-Catholic Patriarch, and his Journey to the Low Countries .....	371
TORALLAS TOVAR, Sofía	
El orfebre del insulto: Filón y la lengua griega de Alejandría .....	383
VOLLANDT, Ronny	
Che portono al ritorno quì una Bibbia Arabica integra: A history of the Biblia Sacra Arabica (1671-73) .....	401
WILDE, Clare	
Q 33:35: <i>Echoes of the Bnāt Qyāmā's jihād fī sabīl allāh?</i> .....	419
YOUSSEF, Youhanna Nessim	
A Doxology of Saint Mark al-Anṭūnī .....	433



Professor Ángel Urbán Fernández



## Q 33:35: *Echoes of the Bnāt Qyāmā's jihād fī sabīl allāh?*

Clare Wilde  
University of Auckland, New Zealand

The Qur'ān presumes an intimate knowledge of Christians and some form(s) of Christianity on the part of its auditors. Q 10:94 exhorts: 'So if you are in doubt concerning that which We have revealed unto you, then ask those who are reading the Book before you' – commonly understood as the People of the Book (Jews and Christians); this qur'ānic verse is particularly well-suited to this *Festschrift*, given Prof Angel Urban's extensive research into both the New Testament and Patristic literature. Early Muslims heeded this exhortation, sifting through Jewish and Christian lore – particularly as they told and retold the stories of the Prophets to whom the Qur'ān alludes.

Following the exhortation of Q 10:94, in the following pages, Q 33:35 will be read with the aid of Syriac Christian authors.<sup>1</sup> While the Qur'ān is traditionally understood as denouncing *rahbāniyya* (Q 57:27) – commonly understood as celibate monasticism, it expresses a mixed opinion of monks (cf. Q 5:82 and 9:31-34). And, although later tradition would claim that there is 'no monasticism (*rahbāniyya*) in Islam', another prophetic hadith states that the '*rahbāniyya* of my community is *jihād*'.<sup>2</sup> The present paper argues that these allusions to 'monasticism' and *jihād* in both the Qur'ān and hadith may be nuanced by a reading of Q 33:35 in the light of a very specific aspect of Syriac Christianity: the *bnay* and *bnāt qyāmā*, (male and female) city-dwelling ascetics who had some

---

<sup>1</sup> On the asceticism of Syriac Christianity, see Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy women of the Syrian Orient*, Berkeley: UC Press, 2008, p. 9: "Nowhere else in Christendom does one find so profound a sense that religious behavior is equivalent to religious belief". On the link between Syriac Christianity and the Qur'ān, see Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur'ān in its historical context*, New York: Routledge, 2008, especially pp. 109-138 (chapter 5: Sidney Griffith, 'Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian tradition') and pp. 249-261 (chapter 12: Andrew Rippin, 'Syriac in the Qur'ān: Classical Muslim theories').

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion, see Sarah Sviri, '*Wa-rahbaniyyatan ibtada'uhā*: An analysis of traditions concerning the origin and evaluation of Christian monasticism', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), pp. 195-208.

liturgical function, at least up until the institution of cenobitic monasticism and the establishment of a firm bishopric by the fifth century.<sup>3</sup>

### I. *Who were the bnay qyāmā?*

From the earliest days of Christianity, there was the belief that the Christian community's ability to mimic the angelic – celibate – lifestyle would hasten the second coming of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 7; Gal 3:28). While there are biblical models (and a very few Jewish examples, such as Josephus' description of the Essenes)<sup>4</sup>, Christian celibates flourished in the monastic tradition, particularly after the period of persecution and martyrdom had abated. The new 'martyrs' were those who would die to this world in a figurative sense: i.e. through an ascetic lifestyle, they would do battle with the forces of evil that originated from man's desires. Although figures from the monastic communities that were 'withdrawn' or 'removed' from society figure prominently in the early church, not all Christian celibates have belonged to a religious 'order' – or lived *outside* of the cities. And, in the Syriac milieu, the *bnay qyāmā* were among these urban ascetics.<sup>5</sup>

The trilateral Semitic root *q-y-m* has a variety of glosses, and the phrase has been rendered “children of the covenant [of chastity?]”, “children of standing” or even “children of the resurrection”. Three other Syriac terms are integral to any discussion of the *bnay qyāmā*, namely *iḥīdāyā*, *baṭūlā*, and *qadīshā*. *Iḥīdāyā* is the term in the Syriac New Testament that denotes Christ as the “only” Son of God. The root meaning of the term is “single”: having promised to dedicate themselves to single-minded service to Christ, like the only Son of God, these celibates, too, were to be “single”. These “singles were not necessarily virgins. In addition to the virgins (sing. *baṭūlā*), there were those married persons who vowed lives of sexual abstinence upon entrance into the community of the

---

<sup>3</sup> On episcopal influence on ecclesiastical order, esp. in Syria, see Daniel Caner, *Wandering, begging monks: Spiritual authority and the promotion of monasticism in late antiquity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 211.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, *Jewish antiquities*, Bk. 18, chap. 1, § 5, describes the Essenes as being men who strive for righteousness, sharing all their possessions in common, taking no wives and having no servants. They take no wives in an effort to avoid domestic quarrels. For further discussion of Jewish-Christian encratism, see Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea: The theology of Jewish Christianity*. Vol. 1. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977, 369-75; the Hebrew term *yaḥīd* (lit. “single”) denotes the sometimes-celibate members of the community in Qumran; see Sidney Griffith, ‘Asceticism in the Church of Syria. The hermeneutics of early Syrian monasticism’, in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (eds), *Asceticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 220-245, esp. 227.

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion, see S. Griffith, ‘Asceticism in the Church of Syria’.

baptized. Such non-virgin celibates were termed “holy ones” (sing. *qadīshā*). After an initial period of observation, those who desired and were deemed worthy were granted a place among the “children of standing” within the Church.

I.a. When did they flourish?

The *bnay qyāmā* are believed to have had their strongest presence in the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.<sup>6</sup> While men and women could fulfill a variety of roles in the early Christian community (prophesy, teaching, etc.), as the religion became more established, hierarchical institutions demanded adherence to certain norms, particularly obedience.<sup>7</sup> The surviving Syriac literature on the *bnay qyāmā* reflects this trend: in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Ephraim (d. 373)<sup>8</sup> and Aphrahat<sup>9</sup> attest to the existence of male and female celibates living within the city walls, among both the laity and the clergy, and exhorting their righteous behavior. Rabbula, the fifth century bishop of Edessa, was concerned with the correct ordering of the various elements of his flock, as evidenced by two separate sets of rules, one for monks, and one for clergy and *bnay qyāmā*.<sup>10</sup> These two sets of rules demonstrate the continued existence of the *bnay qyāmā* after the introduction of Pachomian monasticism to Syria, as a body of the faithful distinct from the priests, monks and laity. The writings of Jacob, bishop of Serugh (d. 521), particularly his eulogy for a deceased female member of the *bnay qyāmā*,<sup>11</sup> furnish a number of insights on the institution in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Ashbrook Harvey, ‘Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4:1 (1996), pp. 27-56, esp. 35 and Mother Mary Maude (C.S.M.), ‘Who were the B'nai Q'yāmā?', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 36 (1935), pp. 13-21, esp. 15, for discussion of their duration.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the impact on women of the institutionalization of Greco-Roman norms in the Christian Church, see S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and society in crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the eastern saints*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, pp. 108 f.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Murray, ‘The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church’, *New Testament Studies* 21:1 (1974), pp. 59-80.

<sup>9</sup> R. Murray, Exhortation and Naomi Koltum-Fromm, ‘Yokes of the Holy-Ones: The Embodiment of a Christian Vocation’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 94:2 (2001), pp. 205-218. Aphrahat’s demonstrations are available online, at [http://cpart.byu.edu/files/Wright\\_The%20Homilies%20of%20Aphrahates.pdf](http://cpart.byu.edu/files/Wright_The%20Homilies%20of%20Aphrahates.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic documents regarding legislation relative to Syrian asceticism* (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 11), Stockholm: Etse, 1960, pp. 24-33 (on monks); pp. 34-50 (on clergy and *bnay qyāmā*).

<sup>11</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Memra q-s-a* (191). *On a chaste virgin brat qyāmā who left this world*, in P. Bedjan (ed.), *Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, tom. 5, Paris: Harrassowitz, 1910, pp.

I.b. Where did they flourish?

It has been argued that a Semitic, Syriac milieu was more hospitable to the *bnay qyāmā* than were the Greco-Roman institutions of the Byzantine empire:<sup>12</sup> indeed, as Pachomian monasticism was introduced to the Syrian milieu, and as Christianity transformed into a religion of (the Byzantine) empire, the *bnay qyāmā* did gradually fade from public life. As this was a gradual process, and as the Qur'ān's first auditors were on the outskirts of the Greco-Roman world, might its allusion to Christian 'innovation' of *rahbāniyya* indicate a particular form of Christian piety (e.g. the Greco-Roman Pachomian monasticism that was creeping throughout the Christian Orient), rather than a blanket condemnation of all asceticism (e.g. local urban ascetics)? For, *bnay qyāmā* existed in 6<sup>th</sup> century south Arabia, according to accounts of the martyrdom of the Christians of Najrān.<sup>13</sup> And, early exegetes understood the 'people of the ditch' of Q 85:4 to be a reference to this martyrdom (cf. e.g. the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century *tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān, ad loc.). Furthermore, Najrān sent a delegation of Christians to Muḥammad once he was established in Yathrib. If read in the light of this history, might Q 33:35 echo the paralleling of male and female *bnay qyāmā* in certain of their daily "religious" duties?

II. *The women of Q 33:35*

The Qur'ān mentions women in numerous contexts: their legal status in inheritance (i.e. Q 4:7, 11), marriage and divorce (Q 2:231; 4:4), their role in child-rearing (Q 28:7-12; 2:233, 4:23 and 65:6), as well as "appropriate" female behavior when traveling (i.e. Q 24:31) or conducting their daily lives: particularly with regard to the wives of the Prophet (cf. Q 33:32). Verse 35 of the 33<sup>rd</sup> sūra, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (The Clans; revealed late in Muḥammad's prophetic career – in Medina) is the most extensive and explicit of the qur'ānic passages that ascribe religious functions (or attitudes) to women, roles which are paralleled by identical exhortations to male believers. Although Arabic has distinct forms, in verbs and nouns, for the feminine singular and plural, the masculine plural can, in Arabic, include female as well as male actors; as the Qur'ān rarely uses the feminine plural forms for verbs or nouns, Q 33:35 is noteworthy for its paralleling of the masculine and feminine plural forms for each action. Due to its explicit

---

821-36; available online, at <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm /compoundobject/collection/ CUA/id/42751/show/38044>.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. S. A. Harvey, 'Sacred Bonding'.

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion of Eleanor A. Doumato, 'Hearing other voices: Christian women and the coming of Islam', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991), pp. 177-199, esp. 187.

designation of female actors, Q 33:35 figures prominently in feminist readings of the Qur'ān.<sup>14</sup>

## II.a. Translation

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَائِتِينَ وَالْقَائِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Yusuf Ali renders the passage as follows:

“For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in Charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise - for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward”.

Kassis' *Qur'ān Concordance*, coupled with Arabic and qur'ānic linguistic resources such as the *Lisān al-'arab*, Lane<sup>15</sup> and Jeffery's *Foreign vocabulary*,<sup>16</sup> nuance any reading of the Arabic passage (or, online: <http://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp> or <http://www.qurancomplex.org/IdIndex/default.asp?TabID=1&SubItemID=7&l=arb&SecOrder=1&SubSecOrder=7>).

## II.b. Exegesis of Q 33:35

Classical exegesis of the verse locates it in the context of the life of Muḥammad, as an indication of the gender-inclusiveness of the qur'ānic message. Al-Ṭabarī

---

<sup>14</sup> Two contemporary approaches to understanding women and the Qur'ān are those of Amina Wadud, *Qur'ān and Woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, and Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'ān, traditions and interpretation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> H. E. Kassis, *A concordance of the Qur'ān*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2009; E. Lane, *An Arabic-English lexicon*, 1 vol. in 8 parts, New York: Ungar, 1955-56.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. the discussion at p. 194 of *ṣ-d-q* and 201-2 of *ṣ-w-m* (A. Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, republished edition of G. Bowering and J. D. McAuliffe for Brill's *Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān* series). A review of this republished edition by Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala appears in *Oriens Christianus* 91 (2007), pp. 307-309.

(d. 310/923) preserves memories of the occasion of revelation as a response to the following pointed query from one of Muḥammad's wives, Umm Salama (related by Mujāhid): 'O messenger of God, men are mentioned [in the revelation], but we [women] are not'. Muqātil (d. 264/863) records a variant tradition of this query and notes God also sent Q 3:195 and 4:124 in response to Umm Salama (both these verses relate that God rewards the righteous, be they male or female). Although his *tafsīr* of Q 33:35 does not include the question that precipitated the revelation, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) explains that, in this verse, God lays out 10 injunctions for women. He goes on to enumerate and explain them as faith and good works, including 'commanding the good and forbidding the wrong' (his gloss of *ṣ-d-q*), not allowing earthly desires to interfere with the *'ibādāt* (worship duties owed to God), and being mindful of God in all they do (be it the obligations outlined in the verse, or mundane necessities, such as eating, walking, etc.).

A sampling of Q 33:35 in the works of these three classical exegetes reveals a range of glosses. By and large, the exegetical glossing of the verse is in the context of later, Islamic traditions (rather than earlier, Christian, traditions). For example, Muqātil and al-Ṭabarī read the fast of Ramadan into the exhortation to fast; and al-Ṭabarī delineates exceptions to those against whom one guards one's chastity: namely, spouses, slaves and masters.

If read in the light of Syriac Christianity, Q 33:35 takes on yet another significance, one possibly closer to the manner in which the first auditors heard the verse. Q 33:35's explicit exhortation to certain attitudes and behaviors in *both men and women* - fasting, almsgiving, chastity and the remembrance of God, to name but a few - brings to mind Christian asceticism, particularly aspects of the *bnay* and *bnāt qyāmā* as portrayed by Aphrahat, Rabbula and Jacob of Serugh. Just as the development of the various monastic and episcopal traditions in Christianity emerged over the course of centuries, the precise parameters of the five 'pillars' of Islamic praxis were not solidified during the period of qur'ānic revelation. On occasion, the Qur'ān does exhort a distinction between the 'believers' and 'muslims' from their Judeo-Christian forebears on communal matters, particularly doctrine (cf. Q 4:171) and worship (cf. Q 2:142-145). Elsewhere, however, Jews and Christians appear to be considered 'believers' - and the women and the food of the 'people of the book' are licit for the qur'ānic auditors (cf. Q 5:5).

### III. Q 33:35 and the *Bnāt Qyāmā*

The explicit paralleling of male and female in Q 33:35 and the promise of a (heavenly) reward for virtuous behaviour evoke Syriac literature on the *bnay*

*qyāmā*. Although the male *bnay qyāmā* have been studied in some detail, there is as yet no systematic study of the references to the daughters of the covenant (*bnāt qyāmā*) in Syriac literature. There are allusions to their duties: in addition to their religious functions, they appear to have been educated - at least in religious psalmody - and to have served as both nurses and administrators of aid to the poor; they were exhorted to modesty and wore a habit of sorts. These women appear to have lived either with their families, or in 'communities'. In keeping with the general silence about women in the early Christian milieu, the literature largely discusses them in reference to the male *bnay qyāmā*, and particularly in reference to their sexual relations - or lack thereof.

But, the maintenance of celibacy was not the only responsibility of the *bnay qyāmā*.<sup>17</sup> As set forth in the Rules attributed to Rabbula, they had dietary restrictions (canon 23) and limitations on their mobility (canon 18; 37; 38). They were also expected to maintain righteous behavior in other areas: priests, deacons and both the male and female children of the *qyāmā* were not to demand interest or usury (canon 9) - and the clergy are exhorted to aid the poor, particularly the *bnay qyāmā* (canon 12 and 19; a minor variant understanding of the Arabic *mutaṣaddiqīn* is "those who ask for alms" - not those who give alms: when Q 33:35 is read thus, might it reflect a practice of the *bnay qyāmā*?) While the various attributes to which Q 33:35 exhorts echo many of the ideals outlined for the *bnay qyāmā* (e.g. faith, obedience, uprightness, patience, humility, alms, fasting), the exhortation to both men and women in the 'remembrance of God' and 'preservation of chastity' hold the most significant parallels with the *bnay qyāmā*.

For, if *wa-l-dhākirīna Allāha kathīran wa-l-dhākirāti* exhorts an active 'remembrance' of God - as in the recitation of God's praises in a liturgy, this could echo the liturgical function of both male and female *bnay qyāmā*. And, if the exhortation to chastity encouraged celibacy, this, too, echoes the *bnay qyāmā*. These are two aspects of the *bnāt qyāmā* that excited a great deal of discussion, both past and present - not least because of their contradiction to biblical injunctions (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:11-15): *Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. For I do not allow a woman to teach, or to exercise authority over men; but she is to keep quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and was in sin. Yet women will be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with modesty.* If the first Qur'ānic auditors were aware of the practices of the *bnay qyāmā* (in Najrān or elsewhere), they would not have been ignorant of discussions of their celibacy and liturgical functions, particularly of the women. Might, therefore, the query that occasioned the

---

<sup>17</sup> See the revision of the classical arguments of Nedungatt and Murray/Vööbus, among others, in S. Griffith, 'Monks, 'singles', and the 'Sons of the Covenant', *Studia anselmiana* 110 (1993), pp. 141-60, esp. 153.

revelation of Q 33:35 have been informed by an awareness of the debates over the ‘proper’ role of women within Christian circles?

The sixth-century Jacob of Serugh devoted a *memre* of 160 stanzas to a deceased *bart qyāmā*, attesting to a continued interest in the *bart qyāmā* within a century of the Prophet Muḥammad’s life. Other themes found in Jacob’s works are also found in qur’ānic narratives (e.g. parallels with his ode to Alexander are found in Q 18, both in the account of Dhū l-Qarnayn and that of Moses).<sup>18</sup> Might other works of Jacob also have qur’ānic echoes?

### III.a. wa-l-dhākīrīna Allāha kathīran wa-l-dhākīrāti

Countering 1 Timothy 2:11-15, both male and female *bnay qyāmā* were educated and had ritual duties. Echoing Aphrahat, Rabbula reminds priests, deacons and both the male and female children of the *qyāmā* to be continually in the worship-service of the church (*teshmeshto d-’idto*) and not neglect the times of prayer and psalmody (*wa-lo nebtālūn ’edno d-ṣalūto wa-d-mazmūre*) night and day (canon 27). This last obligation reflects the regulations for their education: The *bnay qyāmā* should learn psalms and the *bnāt qyāmā madrāshe* also (canon 20), an exhortation echoed by Jacob of Serugh, in his metric homily praising Ephraim, which states that Ephraim composed *madrāshe* for women - and that women were called “teachers” in the assemblies. Although this female ‘voice’ may counter the aforementioned instruction of Timothy (and 1 Cor 14:34) that women remain silent (in churches or elsewhere), might it be in keeping with the exhortations of Q 33:35?

### III.b. wa-l-ḥāfīzīna furūjahum wa-l-ḥāfīzāti

Although later exegetes would qualify this phrase through reference to Islamic marital and sexual mores (as discussed above), the wording parallels Q 21:91’s discussion of Mary’s preservation of her chastity, and echoes the exhortations to chastity incumbent on *bnay* and *bnāt qyāmā*. While sexual continence does not necessitate complete abstinence (or virginity), the exhortation to celibacy was, from New Testament times, extended to women as well as men (cf. 1 Cor 7). The

---

<sup>18</sup> For more on this conjunction, see Brannon Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*. Richmond: Curzon, 2002; Jacob’s account of Alexander relates an episode of a fish: a very similar account (of an escaping fish) appears in the qur’ānic account, but in association with Moses, just a few āyas before the Dhū l-Qarnayn narrative (cf. E.A.W. Budge, *The history of Alexander the Great. Being the Syriac version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1889, pp. 172-174, lines 172-185 and Q 18:60-64).



importance of woman as the bearer of children – indeed, in Christian theology, her very salvation hinges on this (cf. 1 Tim 2:15) – and the Judeo-Christian interpretation of woman (and her sexuality) being the downfall of man nuanced discussions of the virtuous woman.

In his sixth *Demonstration*, Aphrahat addresses himself to the *bnay qyāmā*, perhaps even as their head. He gives scriptural-based reasons for the practices of the *bnay qyāmā* in fasting, prayer, almsgiving, but – above all else – sexual continence: they are not to allow their bodies to become weapons of injustice. Aphrahat's *Demonstration* reflects a multivalent reading of women: they are the “weapon of Satan” (in Section 3, there is an impressive list of biblical men whose downfall the Devil caused through woman), but there were times when the male could be at fault, both in succumbing to feminine wiles and in attempting to lead a virtuous woman astray. That Aphrahat did not view woman as merely a passive instrument of evil is exemplified by his reminders of female responsibility for their actions: the woman can – and should – say “no”. No longer a mere pawn in the cosmic battle of good and evil, the virtuous woman becomes an active participant. In this way, Mary becomes a *topos* – not for her virginity, but for her active assent to the will of God.

Instead of a mere ‘instrument of Satan’, a female *bnay qyāmā* could be tempted by a male to break her vow. Although weak by nature, woman could still triumph over Satan. In the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, the Christological controversies were raging. In the Syriac milieu, the question of whether Mary was the bearer of Christ or of God was being debated. Her virginity was not. In a milieu in which women were valued for their offspring, none was more noteworthy in this respect than was Mary, through whom the salvation of the world became possible. The Qur’ān, which never terms Mary a ‘virgin’, echoes this estimation of her active virtue: while she suffers the pangs of childbirth (cf. Q 19:23), she also preserved her chastity (cf. Q 19:20)<sup>19</sup> and is purified, chosen above the women of the world, and is among the obedient (Q 3:42-43 – the same term used in Q 33:35 for ‘obedience’).

Jacob’s praise of the virginity of the deceased *bart qyāmā* echoes Aphrahat’s understanding of woman as an active participant in the constant preservation of her chastity:

- (60) She made *qyāmā* to the *iḥīdāyā* who died for her  
That unless with him she would not cleave with another
- (61) She made fast her *qyāmā* and from her promise did not turn aside  
She loved her betrothed and because he was killed she grasped pain

---

<sup>19</sup> Although the Qur’ān denies Jesus’ divine sonship (cf. Q 19:35), among the deeds for which the Jews are chastised are their slander of Mary (Q 4:156) and their claiming to have killed the Messiah, Son of Mary, messenger of God (Q 4:157).

- (62) Around her eyes the *ātā* of mourning she bound every day  
A tatter of pain in place of a *sudore* of luxury

In Christian tradition, women who took vows of virginity could never hope to mimic the generative action of this Mother. But, these virgins *could* hope to marry her son. Like every other virgin, they were saving themselves for their bridegroom. In addition to sexual continence, the virtuous life here on earth comprises good deeds and the performance of religious duties, which both men and women were expected to accomplish. Their successful accomplishment would earn them a place in heaven - among the angels, where there is no 'gender'. The eschatological dimension of the individual believer's reward combined with a very clear way to earn that reward is echoed in Q 33:35.

III.c. a-‘adda Allāhu lahum maghfiratan wa-ajran ‘azīman

Like a pearl within the sea, in Jacob’s *memrē*, the virgin’s beauty is not realized until she is taken out of the environment in which she originates:

- (155) In our evil world the beauty of the virgin is hidden  
But among the angels her light is known and they rejoice in it  
(156) Likewise, this virgin was full of beauties on the day of her departure  
Like a pearl raised and brought forth from the sea  
(157) For death descended after her and raised her to the region on high  
Like a diver who drew out and brought up a pearl  
(159) From the tempests and depths he raised her to God  
That she might come to the ruler, the king of the worlds, in the light of glory

This pious and devout virgin, who conquered Satan through her maintenance of a celibate lifestyle, attains her ultimate reward: the heavenly marriage. In the course of the 160 stanzas that Jacob devoted to this woman, certain themes found in Aphrahat’s exhortations are repeated, most noticeably the virgins and their lamps, and the ‘good name’ earned by the *bnāt qyāmā*. Through the constant allusions to the “good name”, it is understood that it is the good name of Christ that is given in baptism, as well as the name that is better than children that God promises to celibates, that guarantees her salvation. The oil of baptism is nothing compared to the good name [of Christ] that is received. And the oil of good works is nothing compared to the good name that God will bestow on the virgin. And, just as the baptismal chrism is ephemeral, in death, all that remains of a person's good deeds is the good reputation he or she has in the hearts of kin and neighbor (cf. Q 18:46). As with the deceased *bart qyāmā*, in Q 33:35, those men and women

who are obedient, who fast and pray, and who preserve their chastity are promised forgiveness and a great reward.

Like all hagiographic literature on Christian celibates, the *bart qyāmā* is portrayed as a virgin who is betrothed to a heavenly bridegroom; her marriage in the next world is described as containing all the accoutrements of a glorious wedding - the ring, the banquet, the garments. And, as in Latin and Greek hagiography,<sup>20</sup> Jacob's *bart qyāmā*, although female, is likened to a victorious athlete doing battle in this world. Although the Watchers in heaven are surprised that a soft -or weak -woman could have been victorious, this *bart qyāmā* is described as having engaged in battle, and winning the battle that was about virginity.

#### IV. Holy wars and holy warriors?

A portion of Aphrahat's discursus on celibacy is an exegesis of Deuteronomy 20:1-9.<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew Bible speaks in very pragmatic terms, exhorting only those who will be able to fight single-mindedly (i.e. without distracting thoughts of business left unfinished at home) to join the ranks of those going to battle. Aphrahat picks up on this theme and discourages the fainthearted from joining the ranks of the warriors, lest they make others fainthearted, as well, but he is speaking of those who will not be able to keep their vows of celibacy. And, while the Hebrew Bible describes God fighting the wicked (Deut. 20:4), and states explicitly that God is not fighting for the Israelites because of their virtue, but rather because of the evil of the other nations (Deut. 9:4-6), Aphrahat describes the virtuous as fighting for God. In much of the literature on celibacy, the warrior of Christ is portrayed as being tempted by Satan, but as being victorious in the arena. And, although the warrior/athlete is victorious through his own merit, there is also the element of Christ's preservation of the virtuous. And, the virtuous warrior of Christ is rewarded with eternal life.

Today, *jihād fī sabīl allāh* is commonly referenced in works of political theory as the Islamic equivalent of 'just war' theory. While a number of qur'ānic passages and later Islamic tradition do extend the image of the spiritual warrior to that of an actual warrior, one whom God will assist when he is virtuous and fighting in the way of God, the qur'ānic 'path' of God is not exclusively the military battle field. Q 16:123-125 (cf. Q 2:215-218) and larger Islamic tradition indicate that this 'sabīl' may be defined far more broadly - as the monotheistic religion of Abraham, with God as the judge of who is correctly following this path. Read thus, the

---

<sup>20</sup> Robert Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995, p. 140.

<sup>21</sup> See R. Murray, "Exhortation".

prophetic *ḥadīth* ‘the monasticism of my community is *jihād*’<sup>22</sup> resonates with the ethos of Christian ascetics. And, the specific exhortations to men and women in Q 33:35 brings to mind the institution of the *bnay qyāmā* – particularly the heavenly reward promised for their celibacy.

### Conclusions

Parallels between elements of Syriac Christianity in general and the Qur’ān have been examined elsewhere<sup>23</sup> (see note 1, above) – eschatological themes, as well as those relating to the pious practices of believers in this world. There are echoes of Syriac diction in Q 33:35 (*ṣā’imīn* and *mutaṣaddiqīn* – those who fast and those who give alms; *dhākirīn*: remembrance of God). But, besides these semantic parallels, there are conceptual parallels: humility, obedience, exhortations to male and female chastity, patience, belief and honesty (faithfulness?). As demonstrated by the sixth demonstration of Aphrahat – particularly in sections 2, 8 and possibly 10, all of these were the province of the *bnay qyāmā* – both men and women. Although Aphrahat uses different vocabulary, the concepts that he employs are very close to those of Q 33:35.

The Christianity known to the Qur’ān and seventh century Arabia has increasingly been the subject of scholarly attention, particularly its ecclesiastical structures (monastic or diocesan) and denominations (e.g. Monophysite or Nestorian).<sup>24</sup> Islamic tradition has largely understood the paralleling of male and female functions as holding the key to the interpretation of Q 33:35 – as an indication of the obligations incumbent on both men and women as upright participants in the life of the community; the exhortations to men and women in this verse contain lexical and conceptual parallels with Syriac Christian literature on the *bnay qyāmā*, both in their earthly actions and their heavenly rewards. Mary is a *topos* for the virtuous woman in Syriac Christian literature – for her active obedience, rather than passive virginity. Q 33:35’s exhortation to male and female obedience employs the same root used in Q 3:41-42 for Mary’s obedience; similarly, Q 33:35’s exhortation to chastity parallels the commendation of Mary’s

---

<sup>22</sup> Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most well-known discussion in recent years is that of C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*, Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> For a general overview, see the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* article by Sidney Griffith on ‘Christians and Christianity’. Irfan Shahîds’s *Byzantium and the Arabs* series covers the fourth-sixth centuries (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984-2010); Robert Hoyland’s *Seeing Islam as others saw it: A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997, provides an overview of some of the earliest non-Muslim estimations of Islam; cf. also J. S. Trimingham’s *Christianity among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times*, London: Longman, 1979.

virtue at Q 21:91. Q 33:35's exhortation to male and female chastity echoes the emphasis of Aphrahat and other Syriac writers on the *bnay qyāmā*: both men and women who (actively) "guard their private parts" are promised heavenly reward.

While Latin Christian tradition would, arguably, develop a strongly misogynistic theology (cf. e.g. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologica*, Part I, question 92), the Qur'ān and earlier Syriac literature exhort both men and women to a life of active virtue as they exert themselves in the path of God. This echoes the Qur'ānic and Syriac Christian commendation of Mary, not for her 'fiat' (passive acceptance of God's will), but for her active role in the preservation of her virtue. It also implies a gender parity not frequently highlighted in discussions of the ancient Semitic orient,<sup>25</sup> nor, for that matter, in those of the contemporary 'Middle East'. Similarly, when read in the light of earlier Syriac literature, the Qur'ānic 'struggle' in the 'cause/path of God' (*jihād fī sabīl Allāh*) contains a myriad of glosses, many of which resonate with what later Islamic tradition would consider the 'greater' (and individual) obligation: the struggle against one's personal 'demons' in the effort to be a 'better' Muslim. Over the centuries, and in numerous cultural contexts, the Qur'ān has had numerous interpreters. And, Islamic tradition recognizes that the Qur'ān should be read in conjunction with the *sunna* of the Prophet and within the parameters set by authoritative interpretive traditions. But, as the Qur'ān's first auditors were the heirs to Late Antiquity rather than later Islamicate cultures, might knowledge of Late Antique cultural and religious traditions help us hear the Qur'ān as its first auditors did? The preceding has attempted to outline one way in which, following Q 10:94's exhortation, knowledge of Syriac Christian tradition might enable an understanding of Q 33:35 that approximates that of its first auditors.

---

<sup>25</sup> For a more pessimistic view of the situation of women, see the references cited by S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, *Holy women of the Syrian Orient*, p. 19, n. 39: "As was the case throughout the Greco-Roman world of Late Antiquity, women in the Syrian Orient were very much a subservient group. Wealthy women had some mobility and social stature, as was true for the wealthy matrons of the Roman nobility, but real influence in the political and economic sphere was rarely possible unless exerted through a man".