

Condemnation in the Qur'ān and the Syriac Gospel of Matthew

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Introduction¹

One could say that a comparative approach towards the Qur'ānic text and earlier scriptures and sacred traditions first emerges within the Qur'ān itself.² In addition, the scarcity of documentary evidence, and the problematic nature of the traditional Islamic literary sources,³ which render complicated the study of the Qur'ān, makes a comparative approach a scholarly obligation. The Biblical, Midrashic and Apocryphal background of the Qur'ān,⁴ has been a matter of critical scholarly examination for the better part of two centuries. However, to my knowledge no direct comparative examination between the Qur'ān and Syriac Gospels

¹ The research undertaken to write this paper also informs a chapter of my dissertation entitled, "Sectarian scripture: The Qur'ān's dogmatic re-articulation of the Aramaic Gospel Traditions in the context of the Late Antique Near East."

² "If you are in doubt as to what we have revealed, ask those who have read the scripture (*kitāb*) before [you]" (Q 10:94). Note, unless otherwise indicated, translations of Qur'ānic verses are my own.

³ F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin: the Beginnings of Islamic historical Writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998, 4-5, especially points out that many of the Islamic sources "reveal internal complexities, ... chronological discrepancies, ... absurdities, ... contradictions in the meaning of events, ... information that seems clearly anachronistic, ... evidence of embellishment or outright invention to serve the purpose of political or religious apologetic." Donner (*ibid.*, 49, 60-61) also holds that the Qur'ān as a closed canon was likely an early text dated ca. 13/610-35/656 CE.

⁴ S. Griffith, "The Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the presentation of Jesus in al-Ya'qubi's *Tarikh*," in J. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003, (133-160) 135.

has been undertaken. This absence is peculiar given the contact between Arabian communities and the sacred literature and theological expression of Syriac Christian speaking groups in the Late Antique Arabian milieu in which the Qurʾān. The lives of Arabic speaking Christians were diglossic, as they used Arabic for common everyday matters and Syriac for liturgical, religious purposes.⁵ To appreciate the need for a study on the Qurʾān and the Syriac Gospels, it is first necessary to outline briefly the place of Syriac in earlier Qurʾānic Studies.

With his 1833 landmark work, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*,⁶ Abraham Geiger brought attention to the large role that Hebrew Scripture and rabbinical sources played in shaping the Qurʾān's religious worldview. The important role that language played in Qurʾānic revelation obtained greater value with Theodor Nöldeke and Karl Vollers. Following the traditional theory, Nöldeke argued that classical Arabic or *fuṣṣḥā* existed as a spoken language among Arab tribes even prior to the rise of Islam.⁷ Vollers refuted this claim by arguing that before the rise of Islam, Arab tribes spoke various dialects

⁵ J. Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, Beirut: Longman, 1979, 19; S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 8-9, 12.

⁶ A. Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, Bonn: Baaden, 1833.

⁷ T. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Strassburg: 1904; see also *Geschichte des Qorans*, Göttingen, 1860.

of Arabic *koiné* and that *fushā* developed with later Islamic civilization.⁸ Broader comparative studies with Judaism and Christianity gave rise to Wilhelm Rudolph's *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, published in 1922,⁹ and the investigative approach to extracting the sources of the Qur'ān were fully underway by 1926 when Joseph Horovitz wrote his *Koranische Untersuchungen*.¹⁰ In that same year Richard Bell's *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* was published. In it Bell describes the general influence of the Syrian, Mesopotamian and especially Abyssinian church on Late Antique Arabia, emphasizing in particular the remnants of such influences found in the Qur'ān. Bell also acknowledged that some Qur'ānic terms "indicate penetration of Aramaic culture into Arabia."¹¹ The linguistic inquiry into Qur'ānic origins eventually expanded into a discourse that integrated a diversity of Late Antique languages. Arthur Jeffery's *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* underscores the vital theological and literary function of Qur'ānic terms originating from other languages such as Aramaic (especially Syriac), Hebrew, Ethiopic, Greek, and Persian.¹² Jeffery followed this book with other works on the Qur'ān like

⁸ K. Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien*, Strassburg: K.J. Trübner, 1906, 185-95.

⁹ W. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922.

¹⁰ J. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Walter De Gruyter: Berlin & Leipzig, 1926.

¹¹ R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, London: Macmillan, 1926, 18-39, 43. See also his discussion therein on Q 105.

¹² A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Baroda, India: Oriental Institute, 1938. See also A. Rippin, *EQ*, "Foreign Vocabulary," 2:226.

The Qur'ān as Scripture, which situates the Qur'ān within the diverse genre of scripture in the continuously intermingling religious context of the ancient (before ca. 300 CE) and Late Antique (ca. 300 – 700 CE) Near East (Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt and Arabia).¹³

The study of the Qur'ān in relation to Syriac came into being, albeit under the radar, in 1926 with Tor Andrae's *Der Ursprung der Islams und das Christentum*.¹⁴ After portraying an image of Late Antique Arabia similar to that of Bell's, in which the Persian Nestorian and Abyssinian Monophysite churches exercised much influence along Arabian trade routes, Andrae's insightful analysis compares verses of the Qur'ān with various Syriac works, most notably the hymns of Ephrem (d. 373).¹⁵ However, it was the following year that Alphonse Mingana set the foundation for research on the Qur'ān within the context of Syriac in an article entitled, "Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur'ān," in which he provides a brief typology and some examples of Syriac words used in the Qur'ān, while asserting that 70% of the Qur'ān's foreign vocabulary was Syriac in origin.¹⁶ Still, Mingana's article did not have a profound impact on Qur'ānic Studies—and with the exception of Andrae and Mingana's

¹³ A. Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, New York: R.F. Moore, 1952.

¹⁴ Andrae's work was originally published in a little known journal in Uppsala Sweden called *Kyrkshistorisk årsskrift* between the years 1923-25; furthermore the book's title made no direct claim to be a comparative work of Qur'ān and Syriac literature. See T. Andrae, *Der Ursprung der Islams und das Christentum*, Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1926; Fr. trans. *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955.

¹⁵ Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, 151-61.

¹⁶ A. Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 2, 1927, 80.

works, which still do not address the Syriac Gospels directly but rather Syriac literature generally, the study of the Qurʾān within the context of Syriac was relatively uncommon.

Subsequent studies on the Qurʾān include Karl Ahrens' "Christliches im Qoran,"¹⁷ Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* which frequently cites Syriac sources, and on occasion the Syriac Gospels,¹⁸ Denise Masson's *Le Coran et la révélation judéo-chrétienne*,¹⁹ Johann-Dietrich Thyen's *Bibel und Koran*,²⁰ Ugo Bonanate's *Bibbia e Corano*,²¹ and similar works. During this time, scholars of Qurʾānic Studies continued to overlook the impact of the Syriac context, even if they focused with renewed attention on Christian influences. Günter Lüling's *Über den Ur-Qurʾān*, published in 1971, perceived the Qurʾān as part of a strictly pre-Islamic Arabian Christian discourse. Lüling argues that the Qurʾān was originally composed of ancient Arabian Christian strophic hymns that went through progressive stages of Islamization by the exegetes. He does not discuss the role of Syriac language or literature.²²

¹⁷ K. Ahrens, "Christliches im Qoran," *ZDMG* 84, 1930, 148-90.

¹⁸ H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Gräfenhainichen: Schulze, 1931. Republished, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961.

¹⁹ Denise Masson, *Le Coran et la révélation judéo-chrétienne*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1958.

²⁰ J.-D. Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, Köln: Böhlau, 1989.

²¹ U. Bonanate, *Bibbia e Corano*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995.

²² G. Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾān*, Erlangen, 1971. Eng. trans. *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003, 423.

Other scholars re-situated the Qurʾān amidst Jewish literary influences.²³ John Wansbrough's investigated the Qurʾān in the context of earlier *topoi* and through the lens of the rabbinical principles of exegesis.²⁴ The attention of Qurʾānic Studies experts was finally reawakened to the importance of Syriac in 2000 with the publication of Christoph Luxenberg's, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*. Seeing the Qurʾān as an originally Syriac Christian lectionary (Syriac *qeryānā*, Arabic *Qurʾān*) that was misinterpreted by classical Muslim exegetes, Luxenberg emends the meaning and orthography of dozens of Qurʾānic verses to fit what he deems to be a suitable Syro-Aramaic reading.²⁵ Oddly enough, Luxenberg does not identify any specific genre or corpus of Syriac literature to compare with the Qurʾān -- Gospels or otherwise. In fact, while Luxenberg's book provides some solutions to previously problematic passages, his work is methodologically problematic as it maintains an exclusive focus on philology, with little regard for the Qurʾān "as a literary text...that has to be de-coded and evaluated historically."²⁶

²³ Among other scholars, see A. Katsh, *Judaism in Islam: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and its Commentaries*, New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1980; G. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to their Eclipse under Islam*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

²⁴ J. Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Republished, *Qurʾānic Studies*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004.

²⁵ C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, Berlin, Das Arabische Book, 2000.

²⁶ A. Neuwirth. "Qurʾān and history - a disputed relationship. Some reflections on Qurʾānic history and history in the Qurʾān," *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies/Majallat al-dirāsāt al-qurʾāniyya* 5.1, 2003, (1-18) 8-9.

Recently, a number of insightful publications concerning the relationship of certain Qur'ānic passages to their earlier Syriac antecedents has appeared,²⁷ but a direct comparative study between the Arabic text of the Qur'ān and the Syriac text of the Gospels remains much needed. The Qur'ān echoes passages common to all four canonical Gospels, but it is most in harmony with the theological understanding and religious phrasing present in the Syriac Gospel of Matthew, as will become evident throughout our examination. At other times the Qur'ān replicates the striking language and imagery exclusive to Matthew's Gospel. This paper will argue that integral passages and scenes of condemnation present in the Qur'ān were informed, likely via the oral tradition of the Qur'ān's milieu, by a familiarity with the Syriac Gospel of Matthew. For the purposes of this examination, we shall avoid the use of classical Muslim exegeses and limit the use of our sources to the Qur'ān and the Syriac Gospels, which we contextualize next.

Sources

²⁷ E.g., S. Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The 'companions of the cave' in al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition," in G.S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, 109-38; S. Griffith, "Syriacisms in the Arabic Qur'ān: Who were those who said 'Allāh is third of three'," in M. Bar-Asher, S. Hopkins, S. Stroumsa, and B. Chiesa (eds.), *A Word Fittingly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegeses of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān*, Jerusalem: The Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007, 83-110.

The earliest extant canonical Gospels are not in Syriac, but rather in Greek. How the Gospels were translated into Syriac is a matter about which Syriacists and Biblical scholars are yet to reach a consensus. Scholars do, nonetheless, agree on one key point. It is generally accepted that the earliest official Syriac Gospel, used for liturgy and worship by the early Syriac church, was the *Diatesseron* of Tatian (d. 185).²⁸ The existence of a Syriac Gospel text earlier than this is a matter of debate, which principally revolves around the issue of whether the Syriac Gospels in general reflect a Palestinian Aramaic substratum or not.²⁹

Most scholars agree that the *Old Syriac Gospels*, the subsequent official Gospel texts of the Syriac church, were heavily influenced by the *Diatesseron*.³⁰ The two extant *Old Syriac Gospel* manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Curetonius, are translations of the Greek, albeit highly

²⁸ S. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006, 31. Nevertheless, the *Diatesseron* is a Gospel-harmony; it combines the four canonical Gospels into a single narrative. And whilst it is a faithful rendition of the four Gospels, it omits major problem passages and harmonizes conflicting statements. The *Diatesseron* in its Syriac form is unfortunately lost, leaving us with the Arabic translation of Abū I-Faraj 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 434/1043), *The Earliest Life of Christ Ever Compiled from the Four Gospels, Being the Diatessaron of Tatian*, trans. J.H. Hill, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910. Other parts of the *Diatesseron* can be reconstructed from sections of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, ed. W. Wright, London: Williams and Norgate, 1869, and Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatesseron: *Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant*. Ed. and trans. L. Leloir. Dublin: Figgis, 1963.

²⁹ Despite the assertions of some Greek church fathers such as Hegesippus (d. 180), Irenaeus (d. ca. 202), Origen (d. 254), Eusebius of Caesaria (d. 399), Epiphaneus of Salamis (d. 403), and Jerome (d. 420) regarding the alleged existence of the *Hebrew* (i.e. Aramaic) *Gospel of Matthew* (See W. Schoemaker, "The Gospel according to the Hebrews," *The Biblical World* 20.3, 1902, 196-203), no extant original Palestinian Aramaic Gospel text exists that emerged from the milieu of Jesus. On this see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1975, esp. 193-94; Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 34, 108.

³⁰ Black, *An Aramaic approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 265-66; Joosten, *The Syriac language of Peshitta and old Syriac versions of Matthew*, 16-17.

Syriac in style. In due course, this text was supplanted in the 5th century by the *Peshitta* (Syriac *pšittā*, “simple, vulgar”), which is an edited and revised version of the *Old Syriac Gospels* that mimicks the Greek style and syntax more closely.³¹ Furthermore, the *Peshitta* is comprised of the entire Biblical canon of both Old and New Testament books. It was the basis of Syriac religious life³² and remains to this day the standard Syriac Bible text. In 616, a final revision of the Syriac Bible called the Harklean version was commissioned under the auspices of Thomas of Harkel (d. 627), which endeavored to follow the Greek text still more closely.³³

Irrespective of the scholarly debates over the origins of the Syriac Gospels and over the existence, or non-existence, of philological evidence for a Palestinian Aramaic substratum underlying the Syriac Gospels, Syriacists can recognize various linguistic, phonological word plays, or rhyme schemes in the Syriac Gospels which suggest some level of integrity and antiquity and not mere translation. These features are altogether absent in the corresponding Greek verses. It is also taken for granted that the Late Antique Christian

³¹ Joosten, *The Syriac language of Peshitta*, 21.

³² Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 99-102.

³³ For a comparative study of the four Syriac Gospel translations Sinaiticus, Curetonius, *Peshitta* and Harklean, See G.A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshîṭā and Harklean Versions*, 1, Leiden: Brill, 1996.

discourse of the Near East and the contact of the Arabian peoples with Christianity, principally involved the Syriac traditions—not Greek.³⁴

Of all the Gospels Matthew's is unique, because as Bart Ehrman notes, "Matthew used [his] sources to create a distinctive portrayal of Jesus as a new Moses who provides the authoritative interpretation of the Jewish Law."³⁵ The author's Mosaic, Jewish-Christian worldview is discernable in various parts of his Gospel. This includes the opening of his account with an Old Testament-like genealogy of Jesus, his restraint from stating "God" and substituting it with "Lord," placing Jesus' sermon on a "mount" analogous to that of Moses, his insistence that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, and his emphasis on divine judgment (Matthew 1; 5-7; 10-12).³⁶ Matthew's Gospel was also likely the most widely read Gospel in the Late Antique Near East. So widespread was the Syriac Gospel of Matthew (hereafter called "Matthew") that much of its Mosaic, Jewish-Christian expression was echoed later on in the Arabic idiom of the next major scripture—the Qur'ān.

³⁴ The Qur'ān's milieu had been connected to the Syriac Christian sphere of influence which was diffuse and popular among Arabs. The Greek sphere of influence in the Near East and Arabia was limited to select classes of urban centers like Antioch, Jerusalem and coastal cities of Palestine. For more see D. Cook, "The beginnings of Islam in Syria during the Umayyad Period," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2002; W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971.

³⁵ B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: Other Early Writings*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 92.

³⁶ Except for specific instances where I have translated Syriac Biblical words or phrases into English, general English Bible quotations are from the NRSV.

The origins of the Qurʾān, and its relationship to Islam and classical Arabic, are not entirely clear as well. While there are early non-Muslim sources from nearby lands that mention Islam in some respect,³⁷ the earliest known documentary evidence of the Qurʾān dates to ca. 72/692.³⁸ The earliest extant classical Muslim literary source on Muḥammad's life (d. 10/632) and the revelation of the Qurʾān is Ibn Ishāq's (d. ca. 151/768) *Sīra*, as preserved by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833). Furthermore the manner and extent to which the Qurʾān was part of a diverse religious discourse involving *kuffār*, *ḥunafā'*, Jews, Christians, Sabaeans, and other groups, is a matter of ongoing research and continual discovery. The sheer dearth of factual knowledge on the Qurʾān's origins and the multiplicity of its contexts is a problem scholars will likely continue to grapple with for some time.

However, that the textual history of Muslim scripture is problematic is common to the phenomenon of scripture and revelation rather than an aberration.³⁹ Likewise, that scriptures of the ancient and Late Antique Near East (including the Hebrew Bible and New Testament) should allude to, reference, quotation or in some way incorporate the sacred language and religious expression of earlier confessional traditions or civilizations is also common to the phenomenon of scripture. Furthermore, the complexity of studying Qurʾānic origins has at

³⁷ See R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997.

³⁸ C. Kessler, "Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A reconsideration," *JRAS*, 1970, 2-14.

³⁹ Jeffery, *The Qurʾān as Scripture*, 89.

times been compounded as a result of reductionist tendencies in studying the Qur'ān.⁴⁰ The Qur'ān is part of several contexts and is not reducible to any one of them.⁴¹ Yet, some scholars have searched for an ancient Qur'ānic *ur-text*, i.e., preceding the 1st/7th century milieu of Muḥammad; while others argue for a later context. The resulting controversies and “chaos”⁴² cannot sufficiently serve as a foundation for our inquiry. Instead, concerning ourselves with the Arabic text of the Qur'ān as it has come to us, separating it from later traditional Islamic literature, and respecting the Qur'ān's integrity as a unique scripture in the diverse context of Late Antique Near Eastern revelation generally and 7th-century Arabia specifically, will prove a more fruitful foundation with which to begin our investigation. The premise of this paper follows that of Griffith as he states,

⁴⁰ One may explain the periodical re-emergence of reductionist Qur'ānic studies in modern times as the continued legacy of Geiger's scientific and reductionist methodology. See V. Robbins and G. Newby, “A prolegomenon to the relation of the Qur'ān and the Bible,” in idem (ed.), *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, 24-25. Though empowered with an encyclopedic knowledge of Hebrew Scripture and Jewish commentary, Geiger's study does not take into account the complexity of interaction between Jewish and Arabian elements but is concerned rather with “tracing origins,” and infers a direct Jewish influence upon the Qur'ān. Jeffery notes this problem in western scholarship. Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 69.

⁴¹ Griffith, “Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'ān,” 116.

⁴² Reynolds, “Qur'ānic studies and its controversies,” in idem (ed.), *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, 18, quotations Neuwirth.

The Qurʾān [is] a scripture in its own right, in dialogue with previous scriptures through the oral reports of them that circulated among the Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians in the Qurʾān's own milieu.⁴³

Keeping Griffith's words in mind, along with a basic understanding that the religious, cultural and linguistic landscape of 7th-century Arabia was for centuries inextricably tied to communities in greater Syria, Mesopotamia, Abyssinia, and other locales not only compels one to avoid simplistic, reductionist theories of direct or linear "influences" but reveals the reality of complex, diffuse, diverse, and organic free-flowing ideas present in the Qurʾān's "thematic context."⁴⁴ Centuries of Aramaean-Arabian intermingling⁴⁵ evolved into the intimate relationship between Syriac speaking Christian groups and the urban and nomadic spheres of Arabia, like the Hijaz. This interaction allowed early on for the adoption of pagan Arab cults by Syro-Aramaean,⁴⁶ the introduction of Judaism into Arabia,⁴⁷ and later the adoption of

⁴³ Griffith, "Syriacisms in the Arabic Qurʾān," 89.

⁴⁴ Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qurʾān," 111.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 116. For more on the ancient Aramaean-Arabian relationship see Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 7-20, 41; J. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, Leiden: Brill, 1979, 13-14, 40, 82; J. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001, 32; J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*, London; New York: Routledge, 2003, 129-32, 174-77, 218, 286. See also Q 106:2.

⁴⁶ Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, 17-24, 64; H. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, Leiden: Brill, 1980, 146-76.

⁴⁷ Katsh, *Judaism in Islam*, xxi-xxii.

Christianity by some Arabs.⁴⁸ Educated in the liturgical and confessional Syriac literature of their churches, early Arab Christians would have integrated such wisdom, as that of the Syriac Gospels, into the longstanding Arabian custom of oral tradition. The Qur'ān, functioning as the scriptural and cultural repository of the Arabs was the next step in development beyond oral tradition. Nonetheless, the Qur'ān's own self image makes explicit the claim that it is the first Arabic book. While seeing itself as the scriptural continuation of Hebrew and Christian Scripture,⁴⁹ it implies that it is a unique, linguistic, Arabic novelty (Q 16:103; 42:7).⁵⁰ Mingana notes, therefore, that "the author" of the first Arabic book did not risk coining new terminology:

The best policy was to use for [its] new idea of Islam the words which were understood by his hearers and found in a language akin to his that had become an ecclesiastical and religious language centuries before his birth and the adherents of which were surrounding him in all directions in highly organized communities, bishoprics, and monasteries.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 243-55. See also Galatians 1:17.

⁴⁹ Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 67-68; Q 3:3.

⁵⁰ Furthermore, Q 42:12 states, "and before it [i.e. the Qur'ān] was the book of Moses as a guide and mercy, however this is a book confirming [it] in an Arabic language, to warn those oppressive ones and to give good tidings to the doers of good." See also Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 221; C. Gilliot and P. Larcher, *EQ*, "Language and style of the Qur'ān," 3:109.

⁵¹ Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān," 78

The language to which Mingana is referring to, of course, is Syriac. It is not beyond our expectation, therefore, that the Qurʾān should reflect various thematic and linguistic features from the Syriac Gospels. One such feature is the language of condemnation, which we turn to next.

The Context of Condemnation

The shared self-image of the Qurʾān and Matthew as champion of the spirit of the Jewish law and critic of Jewish authority, which is perceived as knowing only the letter of the law and its abuse of authority, is the context in which their common language of condemnation is manifested. This language can take a direct form, as in curses, warnings of impending doom, or an indirect form, as in hostile, critical, or unflattering portrayals of certain persons or groups. By reproaching Jewish groups, the Qurʾān merely participated in the larger sectarian polemical discourse of its day. Such is evident in Syriac homiletic works like Aphrahat's (d. ca. 345) *Demonstration against the Sabbath* and various homilies against the Jews by Isaac of Antioch (d. ca. 460) and Jacob of Sarugh (d. 521).⁵²

⁵² Aphrahat, *Demonstration* no. 13; On Isaac of Antioch, see S. Kazan, "Isaac of Antioch's *Homily against the Jews*," *Oriens Christianus* 45, 1961, 30-53; Jacob of Serūgh, *Homélie contre les juifs*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 174, ed. and trans. M. Albert, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1976..

The Qur'ān accuses the Jews and especially figures of Jewish authority of various offenses. This may also be the result of the tendentious relationship that developed between Muḥammad and the Jewish groups during his lifetime. Thus, where some passages acknowledge the legacy of the Israelites (*banū isrā'īl*) or Jews (*al-ladhīna hādū*) for being God's chosen nation or being blessed with scripture (Q 2:47, 62),⁵³ others exhibit expressions of condemnation directed towards them, sometimes along with Christians (*al-nasārā*) (Q 2:120; 5:18, 31, 64, 82; etc).

The Qur'ān frequently illustrates the insubordination and rebelliousness of the Israelites in association with the prophet Moses (Q 2:54, 61, 71, 92; 5:20; etc). However, one verse in *al-Mā'ida* exhibits an intriguing, uncharacteristic break from this pattern: "Cursed (*lu'ina*) were those who rebelled (*kafarū*) from *banū isrā'īl* on the tongue of David and Jesus the son of Mary, because they disobeyed and continued to cause offense" (Q 5:78).⁵⁴ Aside from oblique parallels with Psalm 10:3, 7, this verse is very much in the spirit of the Gospels, where Jesus is identified so closely with David and provides scathing invectives against the

⁵³ It is worthy of mention that *al-yahūd* in the Qur'ān is never used in a positive light. See Q 2:113, 120; 5:18, 51, 64, 82; 9:30.

⁵⁴ For more on Qur'ānic curses with *la'ana* and earlier uses in Nabataean Aramaic see J. Healey, "The realities behind tomb inscriptions: Imagining Nabataean law," in Z. al-Salameen (ed.), *Proceedings of the First Nabataean Symposium*, forthcoming; idem, "Fines and curses: Law and religion among the Nabataeans and their neighbours," in R.G. Kratz and A. Hagedorn (eds.), *Law and Religion in the Eastern Mediterranean*, forthcoming.

Jewish authorities—namely the Pharisees and Sadducees.⁵⁵ Jesus the Messiah is descended of David (Luke 1; John 7:41; etc); he is born in the village of David (Luke 2); he is called “son of David;” and he refers to parables citing the authority of David (Matthew 9:27; Mark 2:25; Luke 6:3). Matthew finds the relationship between Jesus and David so significant that it opens with “an account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1).

The place of David is magnified by Syriac Christians of Late Antiquity. The role of David as a symbol of great prophecy and humble repentance in the Syriac-speaking churches probably had an active role in keeping his symbolic potency alive in the Qur’ānic milieu. Not only do Syriac lectionaries begin with a reading from the Psalms (i.e. David’s book), some Syriac authors like Jacob of Sarugh held David in exceptionally high regard.⁵⁶ It is likely that the mention of Jesus’ Davidic lineage, which is frequently mentioned in the Gospels, was kept alive among Syriac speaking Christian communities, reached Arabia, and was in turn afforded a terse literary reference in *al-Mā’ida* in connection with condemning *banū isrā’īl*.

⁵⁵ We even find elsewhere in the Qur’ān a clear perception of Jewish sectarianism in Jesus’ day: “When Jesus came with the proofs, he said, ‘I have come with wisdom and to clarify some of that which you are disputing over. So fear God and obey me.’” (Q 43:63)

⁵⁶ See the meaning and context of epithets like *dawīd gābyā*, “David the chosen one,” in Jacob of Sarugh, “Homélie contre les Juifs,” 136-81. Such a usage probably stemmed from the Syriac Gospels, as in Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 27. This also parallels the Arabic usage of words derived from the root *jbā* in Q 3:179; 6:87; 68:50; etc.

Against Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is the salient crime of the Pharisees in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew, their hypocrisy is manifested most sharply in the public performance of charitable acts. The Syriac text of Matthew states about the Pharisees, *wa kulhûn 'abdayhûn 'âbdîn dnêthazûn labnay anâšâ*, “and all of their deeds they do so that they might be seen by people” (Matthew 23:5).⁵⁷ As a result Jesus warns his followers, *hûrû dêyn bzedqâtkûn dlâ tê'bdûnêh qdâm bnay anâšâ ak dtithazûn lhûn*, “therefore, be wary concerning your acts of piety, that you do not perform them before people in order that you be seen by them” (Matthew 6:1). The Syriac word *'abdayhûn* from the first quotation is from *'bâdê* meaning “deeds.”⁵⁸ It is a cognate with the Arabic *'ibādāt*, which is the normative word for “religious deeds” or “acts of worship” in the Qurʾān and subsequent Islamic tradition (Q 7:206; 10:29; etc). One of such deed is mentioned in the second quotation, *zêdqâtkûn*, which is from *zêdqâtâ*, “righteous acts;” and like the Qurʾānic phrase *ṣadaqa* or *ṣadaqāt* (Q 2:263, 276, etc.) it can mean “alms.”⁵⁹ In Matthew, religious deeds, acts of piety, and charitable works like giving alms or even prayer should be done sincerely, i.e., in private.⁶⁰ Could the Qurʾānic

⁵⁷ All Syriac translations are my own.

⁵⁸ J. Payne-Smith, *A Compendius Syriac Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, 397.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁰ Khouri, “Selected ethical themes,” 108, 212-15.

reference that the doctors of law and monks “do not spend in the way of God” (Q 9:31, 34) reflect the knowledge that the Pharisees gave alms publicly, not in the way of God, but out of pretentiousness and hypocrisy? This prospect is made more likely given the verse from the Qur’ān in *al-Nisā’* which states, *wa-lladhīna yunfiqūn amwālahum ri’ā’ al-nās wa-lā yu’minūn bi-llāh wa-lā bi-l-yawm al-ākhir...*, “and those who give out their riches to show-off to people and who do not believe in God nor the last day.... (Q 4:38)” The phrase *ri’ā’ al-nās*, “to show-off to people,” is a calque of *dnêṭhazûn labnay anâšâ*, “in order to be seen by people,” where the accusative case of *ri’ā’(a)* communicates the subjunctive sense of purpose in the *d* of *dnêṭhazûn*. Furthermore, Rudolph rightly sees an echo of Matthew 6’s opening words in Q 107:4-7:

Have you seen the one who denies judgment (*al-dīn*)? For he is the one who forsakes the orphan, and does not encourage the feeding of the poor. So, woe unto the worshipper (*al-muṣallīn*); those who are mindless (*sāhūn*) of their prayers. Those who show off (*yurā’ūn*), and withhold kindness.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans*, 13. See also Ahrens, “Christliches im Qoran,” 162; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 450-51, 458; Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 193.

Despite the difference in sentence structure and vocabulary, these Qur'ānic verses reflect a keen awareness of Jesus' advice in Matthew.

Against Scribes

In the Gospels, hypocrisy also unites Pharisees and scribes, who are a pair worthy of repeated condemnation. Jesus curses them, *wāy lkûn sâfrê waprîšê nâsbay bapê*, "woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (see Matthew 23; Luke 6; 11).⁶² Although the Syriac word *sâfrê*, "scribes," does not occur in the Qur'ān, the Jews are mentioned therein and likened to "a donkey carrying books (*asfār*) (Q 62:5)." Two matters are of concern here. One is that this appears to be a polemic against Jewish scribes, as they are the ones who would be carrying books. The second concern is that although Jeffrey does not mention it, the two words *sâfre* and *asfār* are of Syriac origin; the latter was Arabized early on, since by the time it appears in the Qur'ān it occurs in the Arabic broken plural form. Thus, Matthew's condemnation of scribes (*sâfrê*), who were ostensibly of Jewish Pharisaic background, and the Qur'ān's association of books (*asfār*) with polemicizing the Jewish scribes, are part of a single discourse of condemnation.

⁶² Cf. Mark 12:38-40.

What supports this claim further is the Qur'ān's derisive attitude towards scribes. It states about the Jews,

fa wayl li-lladhīn yaktubūn alkitāb bi-aydīhim thumma yaqūlūn hādihā min 'ind illāh li-yashtarū bih thamanan qalīlan, fa wayl lahum min mā katabat aydīhim, wa wayl lahum min mā yaksibūn! (Q 2:79).

Thus, woe unto those who write the scripture with their hands and then say, "This is from God," in order to earn by it a meager gain. Thus, woe unto them for what their hands have written, and woe unto them for what they earn!

The Qur'ān's disapproval of those who "write the scripture with their hands" not only reflects the awareness of emendation, translation, redaction, and editing of earlier Hebrew and Christian Scripture, but is more directly a condemnation of Jewish scribes.⁶³ In addition, the Qur'ānic condemnation formula, *wayl li* + pronoun, "woe unto," reflects the Syriac of Matthew, *wāy li* + pronoun, "woe unto."⁶⁴

⁶³ Other verses show that the Qur'ān's distrust for scribes and Jewish men of letters is a clear motif. Qur'ān 4:46 explains, "of those who professed Judaism (*al-ladhīna hādū*) are those who change words from their places, and say, 'we heard and disobeyed,' and 'hear that which is not heard,' and 'look after us (*rā'ina*)' as a twist of their tongues and a slander to religion." For more on the use of *rā'ina* see Jeffery, *FV*, 136.

⁶⁴ Smith, *A Compendius Syriac Dictionary*, 107. Arabic possesses *way* as a rarer alternative to *wayl*. While suspecting a possible origin from Syriac-Aramaic, Zammit proposes that this form is an

Another relationship can be drawn between the distinctive, intentional, repetitive use of this condemnation formula. Jesus' curse against the Pharisees, *wây lkûn sâfrê waprîšê nâsbay bapê* is repeated seven times almost consecutively in Matthew 23 alone (see above). Similarly, the Qur'ân repeats the following curse ten times in *al-Mursalât* alone, *wayl yawma'idh li-l-mukadhdhibîn*, "woe unto the rejecters on that day (Q 77)!" Irrespective of this verse's interpretation or who *al-mukadhdhibîn* were, such a cursing formula was probably well understood in the Qur'ân's sectarian milieu. Based on content, i.e., condemning scribes of a Pharisaic rabbinical or even masoretic background, on style, i.e., the identical usage of *wayl li* and its almost rhythmic repetition, the common language of condemnation between both texts is again demonstrated.

Against Killing the Prophets

Jesus' outburst against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 brings about another reason why they are condemned. It states,

abbreviation. M. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, 443, 616. The Matthean-Qur'ānic context of the phrase's usage suggests that the Syriac phrase *wây li* over an extended period of oral transmission merged into the Arabic *wayl*, leaving traces of the original Syriac *wây* in *way*.

Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets (*mashdīn antūn 'al nafškūn dabnayâ antūn daqḏalū lanbiyê*) ...How can you escape being sentenced to hell (Matthew 23:31)?⁶⁵

The Sinaiticus manuscript has *mawdīn antūn 'al nafškūn*, “you confess against yourselves.”⁶⁶

Moreover, Matthew 23:34-37 is a passage unique to Matthew’s Gospel, with only oblique references in Mark and Luke.⁶⁷ The killing of prophets and rejection of their message is a frequent lament and indictment in the Qur’ān of which scholars have taken notice for some time⁶⁸ and which Speyer generally traces back to Matthew.⁶⁹ More specifically, two phrases in the Qur’ān appear to reflect the language of condemnation against those who killed the prophets in the manner of Matthew. One of these occurs as follows, “and so they testified against themselves (*shahidū 'alā 'anfusiḥim*) that they were rejecters (*kāfirūn*)” (Q 6:130; 7:37). The other phrase occurs in the following verse:

⁶⁵ See in relation the reference in Luke 11:47-48 which does not match the Qur’ānic text as closely.

⁶⁶ Kiraz, *Comparative edition of the Syriac Gospels*, 1:361.

⁶⁷ See also Mark 12:1-5, and especially Luke 11:49, which states, “Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute”; and 13:34, which states, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” See also Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 123.

⁶⁸ The condemnation in Q 4:155 is multi-faceted and ultimately goes back to Leviticus 26: 41.

Concerning this see Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* 186. See also Q 2:98; 3:184; 36:18; etc.

⁶⁹ On Q 3:112 See Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 365, 417-19.

Verily, as for those who deny the signs of God, and kill the prophets (*yaqtulūn al-nabiyyīn*) without just cause, and kill those who command good, announce unto them an excruciating punishment (Q 3:21).⁷⁰

Although, it is from Hebrew Scripture that “testifying against oneself” and “killing the prophets” first arises,⁷¹ there is reason to argue for a close relationship between the language of the Qur’ān and Matthew here. The Arabic phrase *shahidū ‘alā anfusihim* together with *yaqtulūn al-nabiyyīn* closely reflects the Syriac *mashdīn antūn ‘al nafškūn dabnayā antūn daqṭalū lanbīyē*. Another attribute that indicates some sort of Qur’ānic dependence on traditions going back to Matthew is the parallel between the Qur’ān’s “announce unto them an excruciating punishment [i.e. in hell]” and Matthew’s “How can you escape being sentenced to hell?”

Against the Deaf, Blind and Hard-hearted

The Qur’ān describes the inhabitants of hell more than once, for example, in al-a’rāf: “And We have condemned to hell many spirits (jinn) and people. They have hearts by which they

⁷⁰ See also Q 3:181; 4:155.

⁷¹ Deuteronomy 31:19; Nehemiah 9:26; Amos 2:12; 7:12-16. Jeremiah 2:26-35, however, provides the full context and narrative of condemning those who killed the prophets. See also the discussion in Jeffery, *The Qur’ān as Scripture*, 26.

do not understand. And they have eyes by which they do not see. And they have ears by which they do not hear... (Q 7:179).” The failing eyes and ears of those condemned is also a motif repeated in fuṣṣilat: “...and for those who do not believe, there is deafness in their ears and it is a blindness over them (*fī ādhānihim waqr wa-huwa ‘alayhim ‘amā*)” (Q 41:44).

Similarly, in Matthew we read:

For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing and they have shut their eyes (*ēt’bay lēh gēr lbēh d’ammē hânā wa bidnayhûn yaqîrâyît šam’û wa ‘aynayhûn ‘amšû*); so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them (Matthew 13:15).

This verse is ultimately a quotation from Isaiah,⁷² which would leave the possibility open that the Qur’ānic verse could reflect the Syriac language of Matthew or the Hebrew of Isaiah.

However, the similarity in vocabulary and syntax is much stronger between the Syriac and Arabic text, making a Hebrew antecedent unlikely.⁷³ The Qur’ānic phrase *fī ādhānihim waqr*,

⁷² Compare Isaiah 6:10 with Q 10:88.

⁷³ The Hebrew language of Isaiah 6:10 is quite different from that of Matthew and the Qur’ān. It states, “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy (*hakbed*), and shut (*hāše*) their eyes;

“there is deafness in their ears” is a calque of Syriac *bidnayhûn yaqîrâyîṭ šam’û*, lit., “their ears hear heavily.” The word *waqr*, “heaviness,” is an Arabic noun that reflects the Syriac adverb *yaqîrâyîṭ*, “heavily.” Similarly, the Arabic noun *‘amā*, “blindness,” approximates the verbal use of Syriac *‘maṣ*, “to shut the eyes.”⁷⁴

Both Matthew and the Qur’ān also inherit from Hebrew Scripture the frequently occurring motif of hardened hearts, which is originally an attribute of the stubborn Pharaoh who will not let Moses’ people go. Jesus attacks the Pharisees with this motif as well: “it was because of the hardness of your hearts (*qašyût labkûn*) that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives...” (Matthew 19:8). Similarly, after recounting an old episode in which the Israelites were rebellious, in *al-baqara* the Qur’ān narrates, “then your hearts were hardened (*qasat/qasā⁷⁵ qulūbukum*) after that; so it is as stone or even harder...”⁷⁶ Despite the sheer frequency of this motif in the Hebrew Bible, once again, it is the Syriac language of Matthew that is reflected in the Qur’ān, and not the Hebrew.⁷⁷ Thus, notwithstanding the Syriac

lest they, seeing with their eyes, and hearing with their ears, and understanding with their heart, return, and be healed” (JPS 1917 edition).

⁷⁴ Smith, *A Compendius Syriac Dictionary*, 418.

⁷⁵ Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’ān*, 27, 118, offers the second spelling from a different *muṣḥaf*.

⁷⁶ Q 2:74. See in relation to it Q 4:155, where *qulūbunā ghulf*, “our hearts are enveloped,” is used, which is a phrase reproducing Jeremiah 9:25’s imagery of the “uncircumcised heart.” See discussion in Geiger, *Was hat Muhammed*, 8; Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 203.

⁷⁷ Exodus 4:21 has *aḥazeq et-leboy*, “I will harden his heart.” See also Joshua 11:20; 1 Samuel 6:6; etc. and further Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’ānic Arabic*, 339.

nominal *qašyūt*, “hardness,” and the Arabic verbal *qasat*, “hardened,” the virtually identical phrasing once again demonstrates the shared language of condemnation between both Matthew and the Qur’ān.

Condemnation in the Final Judgment

The final arena in which the language of condemnation is manifested in both scriptures is the final judgment. Much like other religious motifs, that of final judgment is inherited from Hebrew scripture (Psalms 81:4-5; Isaiah 66:15-17; Malachi 4:1-2). Certain distinct images of the final judgment are unique to Matthew’s Gospel. The scene depicting the final judgment in Matthew 25 typifies the importance of perfect divine justice, which Andrae maintains was a critical doctrine of the early Syriac Church.⁷⁸ As Qur’ān specialists have recognized, this passage is echoed in the Qur’ān’s vivid eschatological imagery.⁷⁹

The passage in Matthew begins: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory” (Matthew 25:31).⁸⁰ The place

⁷⁸ Andrae, *Les origines de l’islam et le christianisme*, 105-6.

⁷⁹ Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans* 15, 17; R. Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur’ān*, ed. C.E. Bosworth and M.E.J. Richardson, Manchester: University of Manchester, 1991, 2:539; R. Paret, “Sure 107,” in R. Paret (ed.), *Der Koran*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975, 192-96.

⁸⁰ Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 197, thinks this verse influenced Q 3:55: “Behold! God said: ‘O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.’” (translated by Yusuf Ali)

of the Son of Man, a reference to Jesus as judge, is filled in the Qur'ān by God himself. Thus, it states, "The angels will be at the ends [of the heavens], and on that day eight [angels] will bear above them the throne of your Lord" (Q 69:17). Matthew adds, "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). Similarly the Qur'ān states, "and on the day when We shall demolish the mountains and you shall see the earth open, and We would have gathered them and not forgotten anyone of them..." (Q 18:47).⁸¹ Elsewhere the Qur'ān relates adds, "God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning that which you disputed" (Q 22:69). Matthew continues, "and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left" (Matthew 25:33).⁸² In *al-wāqī'a* the Qur'ān has God group people into camps of good (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) and evil (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*), analogous to Matthew's sheep and goats respectively, takes place. Qur'ān specialists generally associate this verse along with the Qur'ān's mention in al-Balad 90:18 of *aṣḥāb al-maymana* and *aṣḥāb al-mash'ama* to Matthew 25.⁸³ where it explains, "Then the king (Syr. *malkā*) will say to those at his right hand (Syr. *ymīnēh*), 'come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom (Syr. *malkūtā*)

⁸¹ See also Q 17:71: "On the day when we summon every people with their *imām*..."

⁸² This scene is not to be confused with references to the son of man sitting at the right hand of the Lord in Mark 12:36, Luke 22:69, which depicts Jesus' divine authority, rather than the separation of people on the Day of Judgment.

⁸³ Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans*, 17; Horovitz, "Das Koranische Paradies," in idem (ed.) *Der Koran*, 62-63; Ahrens, "Christliches im Qoran," 55, 165; Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 240-43.

prepared for you from the foundation of the world (*'ālmā*) (Syr. Matthew 25:34).⁸⁴ In the Qur'ān, God too is called the king (*al-malik*) (Q 20:114; 23:116), and He similarly invites the righteous to “enter paradise” (Q 43:70).

Matthew's Gospel goes on to enumerate the good actions for which the righteous are rewarded, namely for giving the poor to eat and drink, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting those in prison (Matthew 25:35-39). To Jesus, these actions embody true sacrifice, as the physical recipient of such charitable acts is human, but the true recipient is God (Matthew 25:40).

This is not so for evildoers. Matthew states, “Then he will say to those at his left hand (Syr. *sēmālēh*), ‘you that are cursed, depart from me into the eternal fire (Syr. *nūhrā d'ālmā*) that is prepared (Syr. *hāy damṭībā*) for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). The different elements of this verse, namely the “left hand,” “eternal fire,” and the fact that it is “prepared” are expressed in different passages of the Qur'ān. In *al-wāqī'a*, the companions of the left hand (*aṣḥāb al-shimā*) are condemned to a scorching doom (Q 56:42). Elsewhere in the Qur'ān we read about the evil doer, “...verily he will have in the fire (*nār*) of *jahannam* to dwell in for eternity (*khālidan fīh*)...” (Q 4:14; 9:63). Additionally, in al-Baqara, the fire (*nār*) is “prepared for the rejecters” (*u'iddat li-l-kāfirīn*) (Q 2:24). In addition to the parallels in content,

⁸⁴ Furthermore this scene from Matthew should not be confused with the general imagery and narrative of that of Mark 10:37-40; 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42; or 22:69, which is quite different.

sēmâlêh and *aṣḥāb al-shimāl*, *nūhrâ d'âlmâ* and *nār... khālidan fīhi*, and *hây damḥibâ* and *u'iddat li...* are calques, which further establishes the connection between the Syriac of Matthew to the Arabic of the Qur'ān.

Matthew then enumerates the crimes of the evildoers in the same way as the good actions of the righteous:

“I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, I was naked and you did not give me clothing, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me” (Matthew 25:42-43).⁸⁵

Similarly, in the Qur'ān those condemned to hell enumerate their misdeeds to the righteous: “We were not from those who prayed; nor did we feed the needy; and we used to sin with the sinners; and we used to disbelieve in the Day of Judgment” (Q 74:43-46).

Although the list of misdeeds between both texts are not the same, save for not feeding the needy, a relationship is likely given the common sequence of parallels on final judgment and

⁸⁵ This passage resurfaces within later Islamic tradition in the form of a *ḥadīth qudsī* in Muslim 32:6232.

the occurrence of the Qur'ānic list of misdeeds in the same place (i.e., after being cast into hell fire) and style (i.e., the evil doers “did not do” X) as in Matthew.

Matthew 25:46 concludes, “they will enter into eternal punishment (*tašnîqâ dal'âlmâ*) and the righteous into eternal life.” In a similar fashion, the Qur'ān states, “he who set up another god besides *Allah*, cast him into the severe punishment (*al-'adhâb al-shadîd*)” (Q 50:26). Their torment is elsewhere described, “they will dwell in it for eternity (*khâlidîn fihâ*); their punishment will not be lessened; nor will they rest” (Q 2:162). Again in this passage we notice calques of Syriac terms: *'adhâb* for *tašnîqâ*, and *khâlidîn fihâ* for *dal'âlmâ*.

The Qur'ān's many elaborate accounts of the final judgment and the apocalyptic events surrounding it, many of which especially reference the language of Matthew or the Hebrew Bible more,⁸⁶ are too numerous to examine herein exhaustively. Some of these verses emphasize the common scene of God gathering the people, personally conversing with the evil doers and condemning them to hell fire (Q 6:128), much as the Son of Man does in Matthew (see above). Others reinforce common Matthean-Qur'ānic themes, most of which Khouri mentions in his study,⁸⁷ like the strong relationship of prophetology to divine majesty, judgment and condemnation (Q 39:56-61, 67-75). However, the examples cited should be

⁸⁶ For more on this see I. Hasson, *EQ*, “Last Judgment,” 3, 136.

⁸⁷ Khouri, “Selected ethical themes,” 13-43.

sufficient to suggest a relationship between the language of condemnation in the Syriac

Gospel of Matthew and the Arabic text of the Qur'ān.

Conclusion

The rejection of Jesus' renewed interpretation of the law by Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribal class was recorded in Matthew's Gospel in a distinct language of condemnation, modeled after the Hebrew Bible. As a consequence of similar experiences, like Muḥammad's rejection by the Jews of Medina, Khaybar, other Hijazi locales, and even by the Qurayshis of Mecca, this language manifested itself in the Qur'ān. Sharing the Gospels' image of Jesus as the son of David, preserver and reviser of Mosaic law, the Qur'ān's condemnation of rabbinical and ecclesiastical authority for various abuses often replicates the caustic language of Jesus against the religious authorities of his day. Aside from several thematic parallels which likely come from Syriac Matthew and which ultimately evoke the spirit of Hebrew Scripture, like the loosening of dietary laws, and the emphasis of internal sacrifice, close linguistic relationships exist as well. These include: general Arabic calques for the Syriac text, *ri'ā' al-nās* for *dnêṭḥazûn labnay anâšâ*, nominal *'amā* for verbal *'maṣ, aṣḥāb al-yamīn* for *ymīnêh*, *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* for *sêmâlêh*, *nār khālidan fīhi* for *nûhrâ d'âlmâ*, *u'iddat li-l-kāfirīn* for *hây damṭībâ*, *'adhāb* for *tašnîqâ*, general cognates like *'ibādāt* for *'bādê*, *zêdqâtâ* for *ṣadaqât*, cognate phrases like *wayl li* for *wây li*, *shahidū 'alā 'anfusihi* (3rd person

plural) for *mashdîn antûn 'al nafškûn* (2nd person plural), *yaqtulûn al-nabiyîn* (present tense) for *daqṭalû lanbiyê* (perfect tense), *fī ādhānihim waqr for bidnayhûn yaqîrâyît sham'û*, verbal *qasat qulûbukum* for nominal *qašyût labkûn*, and the use of etymologically related words in an identical context of condemnation like *asfār* and *safre* (against scribes).

The disjointed presentation of occasionally unconnected Qur'ānic verses has been less than ideal. But this too is telling. The distribution of Syriac Matthean phrases throughout the different *sūras* of the Qur'ān proves that such material was diffuse in the Arabian oral tradition of the Qur'ān's milieu and not acquired via a single piece of text. This is because Syriac wisdom was disseminated into the pre-Islamic Arabian milieu of the Qur'ān by Syriac-speaking Christian groups like Christian Arabs, perhaps even *jāhilī* poets such as 'Adī b. Zayd (6th-7th century), al-A'shā (d. ca. 625), and others. However, what course did the actual imagery and words of Matthew's Gospel in Syriac take in order to get there? One should generally note, as Mingana and Griffith have, that the majority of Syriac scripture, lore, or "Syriacisms" (or collectively "Syriac wisdom") that became replicated in the Qur'ān are *not* verbatim, but rather an elaboration, response to, or paraphrasing of the original text.⁸⁸ This has been evident throughout our present investigation. A word or phrase is scarcely reproduced in the Qur'ān precisely as it is in Syriac Matthew, but has rather gone through a

⁸⁸ Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān," 80; Griffith, "The Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the presentation of Jesus in al-Ya'qubi's Tarikh," 136-37.

process of “morphological change” which suggests a long period of transmission and linguistic development.

Furthermore, the staunch monotheistic and iconoclastic language of the Qur’ān and its vivid imagery does not allow for Jesus to play the role of savior and divine being as he does in the Gospels. Instead, where the Qur’ān saw fit it replaced “the son of man” with the “Lord” (*rabb*) as a theological corrective measure. This suggests a level of intense sectarianism and “theological debate” ambient in the milieu of the Qur’ān.

This exposes another phenomenon at play. It is likely that certain bodies of Syriac Christian wisdom that impacted the theological outlook of the Qur’ān, like verses from the Hebrew Bible or Gospels,⁸⁹ became popularly consumed by Christian Arabs and later Arab oral tradition via intermediary channels. Such intermediaries include religious poetry, Biblical commentaries, and Syriac homiletic works by famous authors like Aphrahat, Ephrem, Isaac of Antioch, Jacob of Sarugh, and others.⁹⁰ It is plausible that the Syriac language of Matthew gradually entered into the Qur’ān’s milieu through the agency of the liturgical chants, prayers, and preaching based on popular Syriac Christian literature.

⁸⁹ S.K. Samir, “A reconsideration of the Qur’ān and its relationship to Christianity,” in idem (ed.), *The Qur’ān in its Historical Context*, 145-61.

⁹⁰ Andrae, *Les origines de l’islam et le christianisme*, 132-89, lists numerous Syriac authors; Griffith, “Syriacisms in the Arabic Qur’ān,” 104-5.

It seems, therefore, that the incorporation of Syriac Gospel wisdom into the milieu of the Qurʾān took place long before the existence of Muḥammad or his revelation—through centuries of oral exchange, transformations in language, and confessional discussion. And out of this milieu, the Qurʾān proved to be a potent force of both preservation and innovation.

In the present study I focused on Syriac Matthew, but in future studies I hope to extend my research to the remaining Syriac Gospels. I also plan to examine the shared language of the Qurʾān and the Syriac Gospels on topics other than condemnation, such as spiritual and ritual matters. For its part the present study suggests that an appreciation of the Syriac Gospels might help bring the murky origins of the Qurʾān to light.