“THESE STONES SHALL BE FOR A MEMORIAL”: A DISCUSSION OF THE ABOLITION OF CIRCUMCISION IN THE KITĀB AL-MAḠDAL

The question of Christian freedom from Old Testament law became especially controversial since it concerned the practice of circumcision. The obvious practical considerations for excusing Christianized Gentiles from the demands of the Jewish tradition were not the only reason to discuss the custom. When Paul told the church in Rome that circumcision was rather a matter of the heart (Rom 2:29), he undoubtedly referred to the words of the prophets who preached circumcision of “the foreskin of the hearts” (Deut 10:16–17; Jer 4:3–4). Bodily circumcision, including that of Christ Himself, remained a subject of debate during subsequent Christian history, though the problem of fulfilling the stipulations of Old Testament law was generally no longer actually present in historical reality.1 The present study will provide an interesting example of how a similar discussion of the same subject regained and retained its actuality in the context of Christian-Muslim relations in the medieval Middle East. The example in question is a chapter on the abolition of circumcision in the comprehensive ‘Nestorian’ encyclopedic work of the mid-10th–early 11th century entitled Kitāb al-Maḡdal.2


The original table of contents of the work was included in the Catalogue of the Arabic-speaking prominent Coptic author Abū 'l-Barakāt ibn Kabar (d. 1324). J. S. Assemani reproduced it with a Latin translation in the chapter on ‘Amr ibn Mattā (Cap. LVII: Amrus Matthæi) in his Bibliotheca Orientalis. Mark N. Swanson gives a brief survey of the contents of the book based on its original list of sections and chapters in his recent article on the Kitāb al-Maṣḥad. He observes that “the author fully exploits the metaphor of a tower (or castle), naming the work’s seven chapters (abwāb, major sections, covering a wide range of topics) after features of architecture or landscaping” and that “the extended title, Kitāb al-majdal li-l-istibšār wa-l-jadal, ‘The tower, for reflection and discussion’, points to another significant feature of the work: both the metaphor of a (defensive) tower and the notion of jadal, ‘discussion’ or ‘argument’, indicate the apologetic utility that the work is intended to have.”

The book begins with a series of dense theological investigations: on the existence of God (al-bayān, ‘the exposition’), His unity, the Incarnation of the Word of God in Christ, the Trinity (the section al-bunyān, ‘the edifice’, is divided in three chapters: ʿad-ḏurwā, ‘the summit’, al-asās, ‘the foundation’, and at-ṭašyīd, ‘the construction’). There follow a number of chapters on the Christian sacraments and symbols: Baptism, the Eucharist, the Gospel’s testimonies to Christ’s divinity and humanity, and the Cross (al-arkān, ‘the supports’); virtues and practices (al-maṣābīḥ, ‘the lamps’); the creation, the typological


(6) Ibid., pp. 629–630.
salvific events and Church history, mainly that of the Church of the East, the concordance between the Old and the New Testaments in their interpretation by the Church (al-'amad, ‘the buttresses’); on the prayer towards the East, the observance of the Lord’s day, and penitence (al-ğadāwil, ‘the watercourses’). The concluding section (al-ḥadāʾiq, ‘the gardens’) deals with the Christian attitude towards Old Testament law.

The section al-ḥadāʾiq is subdivided into four chapters: (1) Ṭark isti’al al-ḥitāna wa-l-istiğnā ʾanhā bi-ṭihāt ad-diyyāna (Abandoning the practice of circumcision and dispensing with it in virtue of rightness of the faith); (2) Hall al-ḥaddīya li-ʿan al-yawm as-sabt wa-mūğib ʿimsākihi ṣālā mutaqaddim al-waqt (Resolution of the New [Testament] that concerns working on the Sabbath day and the previous obligation to abstain from work [on it]); (3) Ḥadāʾiq ma ḥuzira min al-maʾākil wa-wuğib ħallihā li-kull ṣākīl (Permission of the food [formerly] prohibited, and the necessity to allow everyone to eat it); (4) Ṭawbīḥ al-yahūd ʿalā mā yabtadiʿūnahu wa-izhār buhtihim fi-mā yadda ʿūnahu (Reproof of the Jews for what they invent and demonstrating their delusion in what they pretend). The first chapter of the section is the subject of the present publication.

The main argument with which the author starts his treatise is that circumcision long remained unknown to human generations after the creation of man. “When God created Adam and taught him the wisdom of all things,” the author says, “He did not command him [to practice] circumcision, nor did He explain its meaning to him. Instead, many of his descendants enjoyed God’s favor through showing obedience, having the right faith, assurance of reliable knowledge, and devotion… Since … [Adam] was created in the image of God and according to His likeness, taking anything away from him is shameful and sinful, and one should rather take pride in letting him be in his [original] state. When God commanded Moses to build an altar for the Lord, He commanded him to choose whole stones, unhewn and having no defects…” Abraham, the father of the blessed nations, who introduced circumcision, “received many blessings before he got circumcised.” Some biblical material, including apocryphal traditions, are here used to buttress the argument.

(7) This part of the Kitāb al-Maqdal was edited by H. Gismondi: Maris, Amri et Sibae de patriarchis Nestorianorum commentaria, ex codicibus Vaticanis edidit ac latine reddidit Henricus GISMONDI, Romae, 1896–1899.
While explaining the reason for establishing the practice of circumcision, the author further develops the idea that there was a need to differentiate the chosen people from all the others and that circumcision served as a differentiating mark. “The custom of circumcision was established..., such that [every] newborn should be circumcised on the eighth [day] to have a sign by which they would be known among the peoples... In the same way, a chosen thing is marked, when it is mixed with other things...” The necessity of circumcision is, therefore, dynamic; when living among the Gentiles, it becomes obligatory, but once there are no others around or the other nations enter into the same faith as the chosen people thus constituting a single community with them, then circumcision loses its raison d’être: “When the object of preference is moved away alone, there is no longer need for differentiation because it is separated, as they did while dwelling in the desert, when they gave up circumcision of children. Also, when something is chosen as a whole, there is no longer need for a sign [of differentiation], as when faith in Christ became universal and safety embraced the peoples.”

It is emphasized that God “did not differentiate between uncircumcised and circumcised people in priority...” during their sojourn in the desert, and that He maintained His support as He did earlier. However, when the chosen people passed across the Jordan and got into contact with other nations, God commanded them to practice circumcision again, but this commandment had a temporary character: “thus the practice of circumcision, or the law of circumcision, was introduced for a limited [time].”

There was no other reason for practicing circumcision than keeping the chosen people segregated from the others in order to prevent their moral and spiritual corruption. “The strongest indication that circumcision [was re-introduced] for the [sole] purpose of [keeping the people] segregated, not for the sake of kinship or [ritual] purity, is the fact that it is prescribed for males, but not for females, and that Abraham was circumcised, but not Sarah: if [the purpose of circumcision] were happiness and grace, pure women would not be deprived of it...” What really matters is faith and following the divine guidance. Our author assembles quotations from Jeremiah, Malachi, and Paul to demonstrate that “neither circumcision is anything to rely on, nor uncircumcision, but faith in God and confession of love. If the circumcised broke the law, his circumcision is made uncircumcision, and if the uncircumcised kept the commandments his
uncircumcision turned out to be circumcision.” Thus, what is preferred by God is the spiritual circumcision along with “rightness of faith, goodness of reliable knowledge, and integrity of the heart.”

The spread of Christianity “to all the ends of the earth” resulted in many nations entering the faith “and thus all of them became chosen, and could dispense with the mark of differentiation, and the difference between circumcision and uncircumcision ceased.” The author, however, insistently points out that the apostles “did not forbid the people of circumcision [i.e. the Jews] from practicing it, nor did they make it mandatory for the uncircumcised once they had accepted the [right] faith.” If abandoning the practice of circumcision were mandatory this would have been difficult for Christianized Jews, and if circumcision were mandatory this would have been an obstacle for Gentiles attracted to Christianity, so God allowed both ways to be valid. We see, however, once again, that though declaring that “there is neither harm, nor sin, neither benefit, nor honor” in being circumcised, our author still remarks that “the whole creature is more worthy of [being considered as] truthful.”

The concluding part of the chapter under discussion is devoted to the practice of circumcision among “the sons of Ishmael.” The author shows that Ishmaelite circumcision practices were very inconsistent. Circumcision began before the rise of Islam and was then applied to girls — a custom not in accordance with any of the divine commandments concerning circumcision. Then he mentions the Turks, “the children of Abraham from Qantura,” who “rejected circumcision [and] as a result, the law of Islam got modified,” and, according to him, circumcision is hardly ever practiced among them.

Summing up what has been said above, we can discern several apologetic strategies in the Kitāb al-Maḡdal’s discussion of the subject, but also generally in the entire treatise. The Middle Eastern Christians’ main opponents who criticized them for ignoring circumcision were Muslims, rather than Jews. The Kitāb al-Maḡdal has certain similarities to anti-Islamic polemical works by Middle Eastern Christian authors and in that sense may be considered one of them, though taken as a whole it is an encyclopedic treatise rather than a piece of

polemic. The author’s approach is quite delicate. First, he deploys the traditional anti-Jewish arguments and brings into play a vast array of biblical material elegantly arranged for the purpose of his discussion even though by the time he was writing Jewish-Christian polemic of this kind had largely lost its bitterness. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the Christian attitude towards circumcision is one that allows the practice, and that the main reason for the abolition of circumcision in Christianity is the focus on the spiritual value and meaning of circumcision already highlighted by the Old Testament prophets. Therefore, despite the fact that there are many Christian reasons to prefer uncircumcision, there is no principal argument against circumcision, and it therefore remains legitimate if those who practice it do not wish to go beyond the outer aspect of the practice and move on to the inner, and from the bodily dimension on to the spiritual. While moderate and irenic in tone, the author develops this implicitly polemical conception and appeals to the well known idea, characteristic of Arabic literature, of going beyond the zāhir on to the bāfin, i.e. beyond the outer aspect on to the inner. Finally, he highlights the pre-Islamic origins of circumcision among the Arabs and points out that the ways of practicing it during the spread of Islam were inconsistent. Last, but not least, the very elegant literary form of the Kitāb al-Mağdal, written in a refined rhymed style, was evidently intended to serve as an additional witness to the cultural attractiveness of Christianity.

The following edition is based on two manuscripts: P — MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ar. 190 (13th century),9 fol. AR163v/512v/p.1019—AR171v/519v/p.1033 and C — MS Cambridge University Library, Add. 3163 (=3293) (14th century)10, fol. SYR203r/201r—SYR210r/208r. The scribe of P often omitted the diacritical points and signs of vocalization. While setting the type, I added the diacritical points. I also indicated the ends of lines in P as well as the pagination of both P and C. The English translation was prepared in consultation with Dmitry A. Morozov to whom I express my deepest gratitude. I am

---


also grateful to Alexander Treiger (Dalhousie University), Grigory Kessel (Marburg University), and Sergey Minov (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) for reading an earlier draft of this publication and suggesting some improvements.
باليسحق\(^{14}\) الزيك من سرا\(^{15}\) واخراج الملوك من صلبه واراة النار [20] في القيسوم\(^{16}\) أنه زيدته ثقة بزيكه* ووكد معه الوعد والوعد ان يملأ الأرض من نسله وان يثبت اسم يسحق المطوع الله برضي فله* (18) (17)


\(^{14}\)يسحق cf. Syr.
\(^{15}\)سارة
\(^{16}\)Sic in both P and C. Probably, a corruption of أور قدسيم
\(^{17}\)الله
\(^{18}\)Editorial correction of the misplaced
\(^{19}\)Editorial correction of the cambio
\(^{20}\)Editorial correction of the منهما
\(^{21}\) وبينكم

(22) سريانية وعربية سريانية رقم ضربة Jw وعربية وقائع بتلك الحاجة إلى العلامة كما عم اليمان بالسبيح وشملت | الشعوب السلامة وصارت ختانة الشعب عامة تومن مخلال | الغربا وعاشوا بها محصورون لا يجدون لسترها منبأ ولو ساوا | المصررين عند المجاورة في الغرلة افدلوا باتخاذ النسا وامتزجا باشتباك [10] الوصلة ولم يكن للبشر من أولادهم إذا الفوا بيوت الأمهات وعرفوا | الريف والانزاع وتعودوا الرحب والنزهات * يصبرون على سوم | التعيد والضنك والفضضاء والعسف ولا يخرجون من منزل الوطن | الى القفر والشفا والخوف * وكان تميزهم مع الكثرة يعسر لا محاولة على | الرسول والرب احكام تديرها بالامر إلى ما يقول وله خلق الله لام ولم يفعله بالحكمة كل شي من ساير الشيا لم يامره بالختانة ولا يعلمها لها | معمي وحظي عند الله كثير من ولده باظهار الطاعة وصحة الأقرار | وحسن اليقين واخلاص المشابهة مثل هابيل المقبول قربانه | وشيت الموهوب معني القدس وانوش المشهور بالاحماد | وحناخ المنقول الى القدوس وهو غير مختون وولاد شيث المدعوون ابنان الله في بعض الكتاب ما عريضت لهم ببال ولا فكروا [20]

(23) Something seems wrong with the text between †...†. The sense required here seems to be “lest” or “because otherwise.” The correct text can only be established by consulting additional mss.

(24) C واشتكروا
(25) C لقوا
(26) C سوم
(27) Cf. classical Arabic فظاظة
(28) C مواطن
(29) C abs.
في فعل ولا اجتتاب وشهادة الكتب أن الله خلق أدم بشرًا سويًّا 
[30]

المحولون عندهم بصورة الله وعلى مثاله فالنصان 31 منه عرار وانتم والفخر في الباق على حالما وما امر الله موسى النبي أن ينشى مذبحا للرب رسم

له اختيار | حجارة سليمة من القطع والعبيد وكذلك أمر ايشوع بن نون [5]

إن يكتب ناموس العقيدة على حجارة لم يقربها حديماً على قدم الخليفة

ولم يعنى بذلك الحجارة التي لا عمل لها ولا شرع وانما فضل السليم |

الصحيح | على ما شابهه القبط ولهما مجد الله العالم وامر آل نوح بعمارة

الأرض | لم يأمرهم الرب بالختانة والاعرف الناس ردود واشتهر ملكون ذو |

الحيرة بالإنجليزية [33] ووالصلحة وتلاد كثير من الطابعين عبد الله [10] واتبعوا مراده ونشأ في أقطار الأرض ملوك

جبرارة وحكما علملا | ابتدعوا العلوم واخترعوا الصناعات وتكلموا على

نجوم السما | ما | عرفوا الختانة ولا خطرت لهم يذكر حتى امر الله بها

ابرهيم على ما تقدم | من الذكر بعد ثلاثة الف وثلثيمنتين سنة انفرضت من

سنابل العالم على | سياقة كتب الشريعة والتاريخ الثابت المعتمد ولما اراد

الله إخراج 15 بنى اسرائيل من مصر لم تنفعهم الختانة التي كانت السبب

فى الحضور وجعل | نجاتهم من الموت بالدم المنصرم على إيانهم ليعملوا

بأ ما حفظهم من | فساد انسابهم صارت علامة في إبانهم تمنع عن

فصاحة العروبا | لا يتخذ الإسرائيلى غريبة ولا يجد من شعبه مهربا

* ولما اعطى | الله موسى الألوان وعرفه العمل الذي يرضيه لم يثبت |

الختانة في [20] الآيات ولا حكم بها فيما قضاه فارتفعت الختانة ابام موسى

في | التيه عن سائر الشعب وتساوي في العرفة والختانة الاحبار في |

[31] خدمة الرب استعانوا بالبعد من الأمر عن علامة تمنع

من | الاغتفاء وظلموا مدة الانفراد بالعزلة على أتم احوال الإغتفاء | لا

يتاخر الحفر بالعزلة ولا يتمد الثير بالختانة مما سبب في حد | الظهارة

(30) Syriac and Arabic quire numbers and خداء are written in the bottom margin.

(31) النص

(32) P

(33) Cf. Syr.

(34) Editorial correction of تثبت in C; P has no diacritics on the prefix.


(41) P in the margin; C in the text.
(42) غيره
(43) P adds and deletes خطاتية
(44) C abs.
(45) C الغنا (with a sign underneath the غ, indicating that it is to be read as an غ and not as a غ).
بالإيمان عنهما | من الاختيارات الفامدة والمغزى في تكليف الديانة
ارضًا للرب [15] والقرية اليه باخلاص الضمير في طاعته واملا الجد في
الزلفة [46] | لديه والختانة الروحانيّة النافعة التي يختارها [46] الرّب
صحة الإيمان | وحسن اليقين وسلامة القلب كما يقتضي العقل ويوجب
الدين | ويوجد في الكتاب والمقبول من شواهد الحق يغنى عن اطالة
الإسهام | قال موسى النبي في التوراة للشعب اختنوا فلؤكم وذللو
[20] صعوبة رقابكم من أجل الرب الهึก هو الله الآلهة ورب الأرباب |
وقال امرؤا النبي في الأصحاح الثالث من كتبه اسرجو لكم مصباحًا
والاختناء | [46] ولا تزرو على الحسك واختنوا للرب فلؤمكم
قال معبرًا للشعب | كل الأمم فلكلهم وينى إسرائيل فلكلهم
وقال الرّب على لسان | ما لم في الأصحاح الرابع والعشرين من كتابه
احببت يعقوب | وابغضت عيسى كلاهما بالسومية في الأبوة والأموات
والسن والنسب [5] والختانة وما ذاك والله أعلم وأحكم الا حسن | الطريقة
وفضل الديانة | وقال السليم العبود فلؤس وكان من اعيان اليهود وخدام
القدس لا الختانة | شئ يعتمد ولا الغرلة الإيامان بوضع المحبة
والاختناء | [46] ولا تجوز الناسوس صارت ختانه غرلة والغرلة اذا حفظ
الأمر | الناسوس عادت غرله ختانه والله الواحد الذي يزکی الختانة [10]
بالإيامان هو يزکي الغرلة بالإيامان وبطل فضل الختانة واما الختانة |
xthanة القلب بالروح وحقق تساوي الختانة والغرلة في الإيامان | والتقوى
والزكاة * حظوة الفريقيين عند الله ومساواته في الآخر | من ارضاء ونقوه
امتحن الفردوس لما تاب حيا بغرله وليا | النبي إلى السما مشهودًا
بختانه وقبوله قرابين هابيل وحنون وملكيذى [15] وغيره بالغرلة
ورقابين هرون وداود واليا وايوب بالختانة المستعملة | وقسمته البحر
لموسى وهرون والخارجيين من مصر بالختانة والاردن | لنشر اليه
بغرلة على اهتهار خبرهم في الصيانة والكثير الموجود | من التعب عند

(46) Both manuscripts have the المغرى. Adding a diacritical dot seems to provide a better reading.
(47) الزلفى
(48) P first writes السابع, then corrects in the margin.
(49) Sic
(50) Editorial correction of لحسن in both P and C.
Scrinium X (2014). Syrians and the Others

اَتِقِيَّا اِهِلَ الْغَرْلَةُ وَالخِتَانَةُ اِذَا اَطَّاعُوا [مصْدِق (206r/517r/1028)] اَلْلَّهَ وَارْضُوهُ | وَتَفْرُوْا

على شُروط الديانة ولم تَوجَدَ الخِتَانَةُ عَذَّبَ على الشَّعبِ بَعْفُ [20] مشهود

بِل لَحَقَّهُم بها رَزَايا شَرِّحَهُم في الكِتابِ مُوجُودُ الخِتَانَةُ الْأَوَّلَ | العَلَامةُ في

اسْتَبِعَادَهُ بمصرِ وَالدَّاعِيَةُ لِإِلَى الْصَّبَرِ عَلَى الْكَدِ والْعَسْفِ

[206r/517r/1028] | والضِرْرُ المُسْتَمِرُ والمُنْتَغِيَةُ مِن مَخَالِطَةِ الْقَبَائِلِ والجَازَة

عن التَّحَلُّصِ | بِالْهرِبِ وَلَبِئْوَا لَأِلْجَاءِ مُضْطَهِدُونَا لَا يَتَضِطُهُنَّ كَتَمَان

النسبُ | وَمَوْارِدَتُ لِمُنْتَظَهِدِهَا عَلَى الْتَّلِفِ | الْمُوَتِّ وَالْحَربِ وَالْفَتَا | لَا

اقْسَمُ الْرِبَّ الَّذِي يَدْخُلُ الْأَرْضَ سُوَى اِسْبَعْوَ اَبِنِ نَوْنٍ وَكَالَابِ اَبِنُ يَوْفَانَا | [5]

الخِتَانَةُ الثَّانِيَةُ فِي عَبْرِ الْأَرْدَن زَالَتْ مُعَارِى الْاَخْتِبَارِ وَاَرْتَفَعَ | المعْهُود

من النَّورِ وَالشَّهِيَدُ مِن غَمَامِ الْنَّهَارِ عَلَى الْصَّبَرِ وَالْمَغْمُود

والثناءٌ وَساَوَا الْأَمَمَ | فِي الْتَلِفِ وَمَعَانَةِ الْشَّقَا | وَالْيَدُ الْعَلَيْنِ | الْعَلَاةُ

ارضُ المِيعادُ بَلْ حِيْزَةُ مِن كُذَّ | اَبْنَاهُم وَعَدَّلَتْهُم وَأَعْلَاهُم مِن كَدْحِم

وعَزْلَ نَسُوَاهُم | [10] وَصَارُوا بِالخِتَانَةِ مُحَصُورِينَ فِي الْقَسْمَةِ | والمِعْهُود

يَمْلُوْكُون مُخْلَصًا مِن | ضَرْرٍ لَا يَقُدُّونَ عَلَى الْابْعَادِ وَالْاِسْتِدْعَةِ دَعُوعُ اِسْبَعُوُّ

الْمُسْلِمِ | ذِكْرَهُ الْتَسْبِيحُ فِي سَانِرِ اَكْتَفَى الْأَرْضُ وَدَخَلَ الْشَّعْوُ | فِي

الْمِسْلِمِ وَقَبَلَ عِنْدَهُ | مَرْسَمٌ | السُّنَّنِ وَالْفُرُضٍ | حَصَلَ جَمِيعُهُمْ فِي | الْاَخْتِبَار

واَسْتَغْنَى عَلَى عَلَامَةِ الاَخْتِصَاصِ وَزَالْ فَرْقُ الْخِتَانَةِ | [15] الْغَرْلَةُ وَكَانَت

الْهُدَىَةُ وَطَرِيقُ الْخَلاصُ وَصَارُتْ الْفُرُضُ مَعْرِفَةُ اَللَّهِ | وَأَتَابَعَ كُنَبَهُ وَرَسَلَهُ

وَالْفَتَا | الْعَلَاةِ وَالْحَقَّ، فِي كَلَّى الْحَالِيَنَّ | [54] الْعَمَلُ الْجَالِبُ عَوْاءً | فَضَلَّهُ وَرَسَّدَّهُ لَا أَشَار

بِتَرْكِ الدِّيَنَاءِ مِن اَحْكَامِ الْنَّامُوسِ | وَإِسْتِعْمَالُ مَا يَنِتَجُ السَّلَامَةَ فِي

الْمِسْلِمِ وَالْحَالِ وَالنَّفْوِسِ وَنَهَى عَنِ اللَّهَ | وَمَقَامَةِ الْأَعْدَاءِ بِالْشَّرِّ

وَالْفِصَاصِ | [55] بِالْقَصَاصِ وَالْقُطُولِ | وَانْتِخَابُ الْأَرْوَاجِ | بِكِتَابِ الْبِرَاءِ وَتَقْرِيبِ النَّبَابِ عَلَى

الْذَّنَوبِ وَالْمَتَاعِ فِي السَّبِتِ | [مصْدِق (206v/517v/1029)] عَن عَمَلِ الْخَبِيرِ وَأَمَرَ بِالْأَلْيَامِ | [58v/v/517v/1029]

الْقُصَاصِ وَالْقُصَاصِ وَالْقُصَاصِ وَالْقُصَاصِ وَالْقُصَاصِ، وَمَا بَدَلَ عَلَيْهِ | اَلْعَدْجِيَّ من

(51) P لَا اِمْنُ | (52) C abs. | (53) C وَالْفِصَاصِ | (54) C الْحَالَيَنَّ | (55) Repeated twice in C. | (56) C initially had وَالْقَصَاصِ، but then corrected to وَالْقَصَاصِ.
لا يمكنني قراءة النص العربي بشكل طبيعي. يرجى تحويل النص إلى نص إنجليزي يمكن قراءته. الشخص المختص بالترجمة يمكنه قراءة النص العربي بشكل طبيعي.

(61) This seems to be the reading in C. The reading in P has a similar rasm, but is uncertain.
(62) Editorial correction of افتتان in both P and C.
(63) P الشرف
(64) P النسل
الرب عليكم اسبغها التى بالنعمة مورثين 

المسيح بختانة والاحتجاج والطفولية زمن فى فُعلت لانھا استعمالھا التابعين على يوجب لاحقیه، والحواريين لا ظهرت الحديثة خبرًا واقوى | الحжение


سفره فانه اختن ليسارى منقذى الشعب على الموصوف | من خبره واطلاق المفضل شمعون الصفرا من نظر من اليهود استعمالها | وختانة المنقادين أولادهم على اعتقادهم القديم فضلها واقامة بعض | التلاميذ على وجوب فعلا بالذكر امر الله ابرهم بھا ومعادته [20] عليها إلى الدهر فان ختن المولود يوم ثامن من غير اعتقاد وجب | الختانة والى حين لبس العماد [68] والدخول تحت قوانين الديانة فلا إضرار ولا [1032/519r/071]

احم ولا انتفاع ولا شرف والخلقة السوية اولي بالحق والزيادة على | الاكتفا سرف ولف يزال الموالد بغترنته كما براھ الله بديًا * التقى | بظهارة الاعماد [69]

وعاش خلقا سويًا والعمدة في الجمع معرفة الله | بالسيم وخلاص

الإيمان والمحية واعتقاد يقيق [مصرا/ر208r] صحيح والاقرار [5] بالرسول والكتب والعمل لوراثة الملكوت والاعتراف بالبشر | والبشر والجزا عند القيامة من الموت * وقد وُجد من توالد بارض | تهامة من بني اسمعیل لما استقبله امرھ بالكثره واستطاعوا بالنسب | الجليل ختیروا الولدات من أولادهم

بلا امر ولا اتباع شريعة * ولا | ليتهمزوا من مجاورھم ولا يتزوجوا

ذوى الاسبوب الوضيعة * فلما [10] ظهر دين الإسلام فيهم ثبتت ختانة الولدات مع البنين من عهد | الولدات الي الاحترام فرضة عليهم في قواعد الدين وصارت الختانة | الثانية للولدات على امر الله لابرهم زائدة أو لسابع خاصئا او | بتمام نقصانه عابدة وبطل المحدود من ایامها وتجددت

(65) So in C. P has فضلها, but corrects to فضلها in the margin.

(66) P تدعوا

(67) P الموئد

(68) Here and below C spells عماذ.

(69) C العماذ

(70) Editorial correction of تزوجوا in both P (without diacritical dots on the prefix) and C.
THE SEVENTH GATE
Gardens, [IN] Four sections

First section

[On] Abandoning [the practice of] circumcision and dispensing with it in virtue of rightness of the faith in accordance with what is written

[P 1020] God brought Abraham out of Harran when he was seventy-five years old.76 Abraham obeyed God with devotion and worshiped Him in excellent ways, remaining uncircumcised for twenty-four years, while the Lord was giving him [other] commands and prohibitions. His name was exalted and his memory became widespread, and God favored him and looked after him, while his rank in right-

(71) C والثت
(72) C جماعةته
(73) C واختلفت
(74) C واقترن
(75) P وادراك
(76) Gen 12:4.
eousness was exalted, and his affair became famous in virtue of the rightness of [his] faith. On account of his compassion and benefaction his fame became widespread among the Gentiles, and his appreciation among the kings was great because of the [divine] benevolence manifestly bestowed upon him. God’s care would always surround him, guarding him from the vicissitudes of self-will. God chose him, spoke to him, made him a father, named him a prophet, blessed him and his possessions, gave him a good fate, changed his name from Abram to Abraham, and elevated him to the chosen rank. [God] also changed the name of his pure wife from what was at first Sarai to Sarah, delivered her from the hand of Abimelech,77 even to the degree of taking her away from him by force, and, on another occasion, [delivered her] from the Pharaoh.78 [God then] filled his dwelling place with fertility, and the Angel of God called upon Hagar and returned her to the saddle of her master,79 commanded her to serve her mistress and brought her the good news of the offspring that was to be born of her. [God] promised prosperity, complete success, and [abundant] growth to Ishmael, [Abraham’s] firstborn, gave him the desirable things of the earth, and guaranteed him the blessings of heaven. God made [Abraham] victorious over the five kings, even though he only had a small group of servants and slaves, three hundred and eighteen men in number. He brought back the captives of Sodom and Lot, and scattered the enemies far away.80 The Lord appeared to him in three persons, and talked to him in understandable speech, and he learned the evil meaning of Sodom and what punishment would befall it. Then [the Lord] brought him the good tidings that the pure Isaac [would be born] of Sarai and that he would beget kings from his loins.81 He showed him fire in Qaysum [Ur Qasdim],82 which would strengthen his trust in his Lord. He confirmed His promise and vow to him that He would fill the earth with his proge-

(77) Gen 20.
(80) Gen 14.
(81) Gen 18.
ny, and that the name of Isaac who was obedient to God would be strengthened by his God-pleasing deeds. [P 1021] He gave him the covenant that He would make his descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea, and that his memory would remain in the world forever. He also promised that He would let him inherit the kingdoms of the Gentiles, that He would bring back the fourth generation after him to rule over their enemies’ land, and that He would give [his descendants] all that is upon it. All this happened, as it is described, in the years when he was uncircumcised, and both the prophet [Moses] and the Torah bear witness to the fact that everything explained here concerning his story is correct.

Then God willed to grant Abraham the blessed child Isaac from his infertile and pure [wife] Sarai in accordance with the foregoing promise and vow. He also willed to multiply his progeny in the world and to bring forth from this couple kings, prophets, the chosen people selected for prophecy and priesthood, high priests and [other] chosen men. God willed to make his [descendants] His chosen tribe, set apart from [all other] nations. Yet He also foreknew that they were to live alongside transgressors. He also foreknew that [his descendants] would greatly multiply in Egypt after they had came to be enslaved there, and that He would lead them as a separate group out of Egypt with miraculous signs. It was only then that God — may His name be exalted! — commanded the forefather Abraham to practice circumcision as a sign for his male descendants, not in such a way that it would be a sign of the faith on their bodies which could not be hidden in times of oppression, [but as a sign which] would prevent them from mixing with strangers and taking wives from the Gentiles. Abraham circumcised himself when he was ninety-nine years old, and fulfilled [God’s] command in obedience. He then circumcised Ishmael when he was thirteen years old as well as those men who were in his camp, and he circumcised his slaves, both old and young, whatever their age, whether little or great. In his time, circumcision became a sign of the people of faith in God. When later Abraham was blessed with Isaac, he circumcised him on the eighth day, as the Lord commanded him to circumcise slaves, children, and residents. God’s word came to Abraham, saying: “Circumcise every

---

(83) Gen 22:17.

(84) The term خبر in this text seems to refer to (high) priests. It is used below to describe Melchizedek.
male after eight days, him who was born in your house and whom you bought with your money. There will be a covenant between Me and you in your generations forever that you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and every male who is uncircumcised his soul shall perish from his people."\(^{85}\) The custom of circumcision was established among the males of the family of Jacob, such that [every] newborn should be circumcised on [P 1022] the eighth [day] to have a sign by which they would be known among the peoples, both in places of settlement and on a journey, whether they be alive or dead. In the same way, a chosen thing is marked, when it is mixed with other things, as long as it is present among them; since otherwise\(^{86}\) these other things] would [seem] equally worthy of choice, the [chosen thing’s] distinguishing sign would be lost, and everything would be [equally] shown preference. However, when the object of preference is moved away alone, there is no longer need for differentiation because it is separated, as they did while dwelling in the desert, when they gave up circumcision of children. Also, when something is chosen as a whole, there is no longer need for a sign [of differentiation], as when faith in Christ became universal and safety embraced the peoples.

So, circumcision became a sign for the people to prevent their mingling with foreigners. Their way of life was defined by it, as they could not hide it in contacts [?]. If, however, they had been equal to the Egyptians in being uncircumcised while living side-by-side with them, they would have got corrupted by taking [foreign] women, and their [stock] would have become mixed through [blood] ties. Having become used to their mothers’ homes, familiar with the countryside and the desires [?], and accustomed to bathing and recreation, no one among their children would be able to withstand the burden of slavery, hardship, harshness, and oppression, and even less so to leave their homes and to depart to the desert with its desolation and fear. Moreover, [without circumcision] differentiating them [from the Egyptians] would have definitely been very difficult for the prophet [Moses], given their great number, but the Lord is most skillful in arranging the affairs so as to lead them to [His goal].

By contrast, when God created Adam and taught him the wisdom of all things, He did not command him [to practice] circumcision, nor

\(^{85}\) Gen 17:11–14.

\(^{86}\) The translation is conjectural.
did He explain its meaning to him. Instead, many of his descendants enjoyed God’s favor through showing obedience, having the right faith, assurance of reliable knowledge, and devotion in following [God]. This is the case with Abel, whose sacrifice was accepted, Seth, the gifted singer of the holy, Enos, famous for his praises [to God], Enoch, who was transferred to Paradise while being uncircumcised, and the children of Seth, who were called “sons of God” in a certain book. [As for circumcision,] nothing [of the sort] ever occurred to them, nor did they think of doing anything [of the sort] or avoiding it. The Scriptures testify that God created Adam as a perfectly-shaped man. [P 1023] This rules out the possibility of excess or lack [in his bodily constitution] and hence means “no” to what has been mentioned earlier [i.e. circumcision]. Moreover, since, according to the [Jews?], [Adam] was created in the image of God and according to His likeness, taking anything away from him is shameful and sinful, and one should rather take pride in letting him be in his [original] state. [Similarly], when God commanded Moses to build an altar for the Lord, He commanded him to choose whole stones, unhewn and having no defects. He also commanded Joshua son of Nun to inscribe the Law of the Old [Testament] on stones untouched by iron. This was a symbol pointing back to the primordial creature. He did not mean by this stones completely unworked on, on which labor has not even begun [?], but simply expressed preference for what is whole and intact over what has been affected by cutting. When God renewed the world and commanded the family of Noah to populate


(88) The expression “perfectly-shaped man” (bašran sawiyan) is Qur’ānic (19:17), where it refers to the angel Gabriel as he appeared to Mary at Annunciation.

(89) Ex 20:25.

(90) Josh 8:31–32.

(91) Or: to the beginning of creation.
the earth, the Lord did not command them [to practice] circumcision, and they knew nothing of it, either as a [praiseworthy] custom or as a mandatory duty. [Similarly,] Melchisedek the high priest was famous on account of his piety, excellence, and asceticism, and many people of obedience came after him worshiping God and following His will. Then there arose in different regions of the earth giant kings and knowledgeable sages who invented the sciences and devised the crafts, teaching about the stars of heaven. They knew nothing of circumcision and never mentioned it. As discussed earlier, it was only when God commanded Abraham [to practice] it, three thousand and three hundred years after the [creation of the] world, according to the books of the Law and the known reliable history, [that circumcision first appeared]. Also, when God willed to bring the children of Israel forth out of Egypt, circumcision, which had been necessary in sedentary life, was no longer useful, but [nevertheless] He delivered them from death through blood let out [and smeared] upon their doors. This was done so that they might know that it was through [the letting out of blood in circumcision] that God kept them from corrupting their lineage. [Thus, circumcision] became a sign on their bodies preventing them from intermarrying with foreigners, so that no Israeliite might take a foreign woman or find a way to leave his people.

When God gave Moses the tablets [of the covenant] and taught him the way of action pleasing to Him, He did not establish circumcision by way of miracles, nor did He deliver a ruling concerning it in His decree. As a result, circumcision disappeared from the entire people in the days of Moses [during the journey] in the desert. Both circumcised and uncircumcised high priests [P 1024] worshiped God equally. Being far away from the Gentiles, they had no need for a sign which would prevent intermingling [with them]. During this period of isolation and despite being uncircumcised, they remained in a state of complete blessedness: the uncircumcised were not left


(93) The Chronicle of Michael the Great witnesses to the tradition which narrates that the “sons of God,” after their descent and abandoning the “Angelic way of life,” appointed a king named Semiazos, while the Sethites imitated them by appointing another king (Book 1, ch. 3–4). Chronique de Michel le Syrien Patriarche Jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199), ed. J. B. CHABOT, 4 vols., Paris, 1899–1910, vol. 4, p. 2 (Syr. text); vol. 1, p. 5 (FT).

(94) Ex 12:7.
behind in misery, and the circumcised were not given preferential treatment, but both were treated equally as far as purity was concerned and if some were more excellent than others this was only in terms of piety, reverence, and faith.

When God commanded the prophet Moses to build the Tabernacle, to make the Ark of the Covenant, as explained [in the Scriptures], and to establish [the hierarchy of] high priests and priests, those who sacrifice, celebrate, and worship, there was no difference between the uncircumcised and the circumcised in priority. All of them were equals of one another in terms of priority, and were distinguished only by their deeds: in both groups, whoever acts [as prescribed], obtains [God’s] favor, and whoever neglects [to act], forfeits [it].

When God commanded the prophet [Moses] to wash Aaron and the high priests among his sons and after that to anoint them for the service of the holy, the people had not yet traveled deep into the desert, and both the circumcised and the uncircumcised had the same rank in the service of the Lord; uncircumcision presented no disadvantage, and circumcision no advantage. Likewise, the rest of the people were treated equally during their sojourn in the desert, with no one considered more excellent than another, except when one was considered excellent on account of his knowledge and given priority over his peers in virtue of his intellect. This was true for both those who were circumcised and those who were uncircumcised: they were treated without distinction.

Eventually, those who were circumcised all died and perished in the desert to the last of them. Their uncircumcised sons grew up and inherited all their dignified offices. Thus, when God made those who had left Egypt with Moses and Aaron to die, for He had promised them in wrath to leave their dead bodies in the desert, He appointed their sons who grew up uncircumcised as high priests and priests. The wise [God] neither diminished them in rank nor took away their dignity. Instead, light was illuminating [their way] at night, a cloud overshadowed them during the day, through revelation [divine] command and prohibition came down, and manna was given them as food in abundance. Their situation in regard to clothing [P 1025]

(95) Ex 25 ff.
(97) Ex 16:15–18.
and belongings was the same as that of their ancestors, and when they offered sacrifices they were accepted, similarly to [sacrifices of] their circumcised descendants. [Divine] support was offered them as it had been before: there was no loss of the [divine] care, nor did they lose the means towards [eternal] happiness. Instead, they were protected from death, accidents, injuries, and killing. They were allowed to grow and multiply, and blessings were bestowed upon them, for God willed them to have many descendants. As a result, while in the desert, they became as numerous as those leaving Egypt and even exceeded them in number by many thousands, according to the figures given in the Scriptures. These people received the gifts of the Lord in the desert, the commandments of the prophet were addressed to them, and the virtues of the people were firmly established among them. They witnessed the commandments and the curses, and learned [the difference between] choice and obligation. They became heirs of the promise and of the covenant, and habitations of the earth were distributed among them. Among them there were high priests, the sons of Aaron, who resumed the service of the Lord and were given the new and firm covenant as well as [P marg.: everlasting] priesthood in their progeny.

The God-pleasing Joshua [son of Nun] appeared among them and ruled over them with might, prudence, and vigor. He took them across the Jordan by an astonishing miracle and brought them to the land of fertility and abundance. The crossing of the Jordan and the fact that priests stood on the river bottom and took stones from its soil was evidence that their crossing it was a miracle, and they were proud of it. The fact that the Jordan stood still so that they could cross it through the great grace [of God] and that the [priests] went on standing on the river bottom until people could run safely across it with their belongings with no fear affecting them became [the sign of] the uncircumcised people’s dignity.

It was only after they had crossed the Jordan and were in need of living in the neighborhood of the Gentiles that God commanded them to practice circumcision. And so they were all circumcised in compliance with the explicit command, and the practice of the law of

(98) Deut 28.
(99) Josh 4:7.
(100) The Arabic text seems somewhat garbled here, in both manuscripts.
circumcision was introduced at that time for a limited [number of] days. Adult men, youths, and boys were circumcised, according to the well known story. [God] the Father made the sign [of circumcision] to re-appear before their contact with the Gentiles [P 1026]. The explanation provided in the Scriptures makes it unnecessary for us to retell what is written.

The strongest indication that circumcision [was re-introduced] for the [sole] purpose of [keeping the people] segregated, not for the sake of kinship or [ritual] purity, is the fact that it is prescribed for males, but not for females, and that Abraham was circumcised, but not Sarah: if [the purpose of circumcision] were happiness and grace, pure women would not be deprived of it, because there were many good and pure women among them, those who prophesied and were mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives of prophets, kings, and high priests. There were noble women, famous for their asceticism, who practiced virtue and were thus equal to righteous men. Since the goal of circumcision was to keep the males and preserve their stock, practicing it was not necessary for women, even as [both males and females] were equally praised for [their other] endeavors.

The obvious meaning of both the [Scriptural] text and [the nature of] the action itself indicates that circumcision is merely a sign which neither provides an advantage to the person who keeps it nor imputes blame to the person who neglects it. If one is an infidel, there is no use for [circumcision], and if one has the [right] faith, there is no harm in abandoning it. Moreover, there is surely neither loss nor shame in leaving the creature of God in its original state. When the circumcised has no belief in God, he loses the dignity of his circumcision, and when the uncircumcised has belief in God, he enjoys the fitting [fruits] in virtue of his faith. [The former] has experienced suffering and took on a [bodily] defect with neither reward, nor recompense, while he who is so rich in faith as to dispense with these two [aspects of circumcision, i.e. suffering and bodily defect] is protected from corrupt choices.101

The whole meaning of following a religious [life] is to please the Lord and to draw near Him through purity of conscience in obedience to Him, and to strive zealously for His goodwill. The spiritual and beneficial circumcision, which is preferred by the Lord, is having

---

101 The sentence is very difficult in Arabic. This is the best interpretation of it that can be offered.
the rightfaith, assurance of reliable knowledge, and integrity of the heart, as reason demands, religion deems necessary, and Scripture confirms. Universally accepted witnesses of Truth [to be cited presently] allow us to speak no more [ourselves].

The prophet Moses addressed the people in the Torah [as follows]: “Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts, and be no more stiffnecked for the Lord your God, who is God of gods, and Lord of lords.” The prophet Jeremiah said in the third section of his book: “Light a lamp for yourself, [P 1027] and sow not among thorns. Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts for the Lord.” And he said, rebuking the people: “All the nations are uncircumcised in their flesh, but the sons of Israel are uncircumcised in their hearts.” And the Lord said by the mouth of Malachi in the twenty-fourth section of his book: “I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau. They are both equal in their fatherhood and motherhood, in age, generation, and circumcision.” The [circumcision meant here] is nothing but the upright way of life and the virtue of religion, though God knows best [the meaning of Scripture] and is all-wise. Paul, the divinely inspired apostle, who had been one of the dignitaries of the Jews and servants of the holy, said: “Neither circumcision is anything to rely on, nor uncircumcision, but faith in God and confession of love. When the circumcised breaks the law, his circumcision is rendered uncircumcision, and when the uncircumcised keeps the commandments of the law his uncircumcision becomes circumcision. The One God who makes circumcision valid by faith, He makes uncircumcision valid by faith.”

[The following considerations] prove the superiority of [bodily] circumcision to be null and void (for [true] circumcision is the circumcision of the heart by the Spirit) and establishes the equality between circumcision and uncircumcision in faith, piety, and purity. Both groups enjoy an equal favor with God, and He bestows an equal

(103) Peshitta: ين. The translator obviously read the Hebrew י in Jer 4:3 as “a lamp,” not as “a fallow ground.” The Arabic مصباح translates the Peshitta reading.
(104) Jer 4:3–4. The author is following a different division of the book into chapters than the one presently accepted.
(106) Mal 1:2–3.
(107) Rom 2:25–26, 3:30; cf. 1 Cor 7:19.
reward upon those of them who please Him. He translated Enoch alive into Paradise when he repented, even as he was uncircumcised, and He took up the prophet Elijah into heaven, as observed [by all], and he was circumcised. He accepted the sacrifices of Abel, Enoch, Melchizedek, and others, though they were uncircumcised, and the sacrifices of Aaron, David, Elijah, and Job, who practiced circumcision. He divided the sea for Moses, Aaron, and those who left Egypt, who were circumcised, and He [divided] the Jordan for those who grew up in the desert, who were uncircumcised. The story of how they were protected [in the desert] is well known. Abundant blessings are bestowed upon pious people, whether they be uncircumcised or circumcised, if they obey God, [do what] pleases Him, and fulfil the conditions of religion.

Circumcision did not only bring manifest benefits for the people, but they also experienced troubles on account of it, as explained in the Scriptures. The first circumcision was a sign of enslavement in Egypt, and it urged them to be patient in the face of hardship, oppression, [P 1028] and continuous harm. It prevented [those who were circumcised] from mingling with [other] tribes. It also prevented them from escaping, and so they remained oppressed on account of it, as they could not hide their origins. In the desert [circumcision] became a sign of perdition from death, war, and destruction, for the Lord had made a vow that no one should enter the [promised] land, except Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh.108 The third circumcision took place after crossing the Jordan. It indicated that they were no longer privileged as a chosen [people]. [This is why] the celebrated light and the visible cloud109 which had appeared during the day were taken away, the giving of manna ceased, their footwear and clothing got worn out, and they became like the Gentiles in searching for goods, suffering from hardship, and earning their living. In the promised land, they had to eat [what they earned] with shameful bodily labor. They had to cover themselves and their children with materials they produced and their women wove together. With that circumcision, they became confined to their lot and the [land] promised to them. They could find no deliverer110 [to save them] from harm, nor could they repel it themselves.

(108) Deut 1:35–38.
(109) I. e. the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud.
(110) Or: deliverance.
The preaching of Jesus Christ (may His memory be glorified!) spread to all the ends of the earth, and many peoples embraced the faith and accepted the prescribed customs and obligations. Thus all of them became chosen, and could dispense with the mark of differentiation. The difference between circumcision and uncircumcision ceased. Guidance and the way of salvation were established, and the requisite obligation became [obtaining] knowledge of God and following His Scriptures and His messengers. In both cases [whether one was circumcised or uncircumcised], it is one’s works that draw down His gracious rewards and His guidance towards us.

[Christ] commanded to leave behind the worldly [aspects] of the commandments of the Law and to practice what is conducive to integrity of the faith, of the inner state, and of the souls. He forbade swearing by God’s [name], repaying enemies with evil, taking vengeance, killing, marrying several women, divorcing a wife by a letter of dismissal, offering sacrifices for the [forgiveness of] sins, and abstaining from doing good on Sabbaths. He commanded to have faith [P 1029] and to repent, to be pious and truthful, to forgive, to be merciful and humble, and to follow the Gospel in forgoing revenge and doing good [to one’s enemies] instead. Yet as regards circumcision, He neither forbade the practice nor commanded it as being part of the stipulations of faith. Also, when He sent His disciples to establish the preaching of the right way, made them to see the fruits of piety, and warned them against the causes of perdition, He did not mention circumcision as part of His commandments, either as being mandatory or as being forbidden. This indicates that [circumcision] is neither particularly useful nor particularly harmful to whoever practices it or refrains from it.

Further, when the disciples summoned the nations [to Christianity], they did not forbid the people of circumcision from practicing it, nor did they make it mandatory for the uncircumcised once they had accepted the [right] faith. As the cornerstone of the right way, they put purity from pernicious [spiritual] defects. As a means of purifying oneself from previously committed sins, they advocated putting on the garment of baptism. They compared getting out of the [baptismal] water to Christ’s rising from the grave [and raising up] their souls, which are now renewed and pure, and again capable of [acting in] pious ways pleasing [to God]. The [disciples] said that circumcision did not help draw a disobedient person nearer [to God], nor did it alienate [from God] an obedient person who fully observed [what
is prescribed]. Likewise, uncircumcision did not draw an unfaithful person nearer to God, nor did it alienate [from God] someone who is pious and beneficent.

When after the descent of the [Holy] Spirit the seventy [disciples] chosen from among the most prominent believers gathered together in order to determine religious obligations, they neither forbade the practice of the circumcision nor declared it mandatory for those who were guided. They did not give preference to those who practiced it, nor did they hold those who refrained from it in contempt. And so it happened that followers [of Christianity] from among the People [of Israel] continued to practice it, according to the custom of Abraham, while the adherents [of Christianity] from among the [other] nation[s]\footnote{111} refrained from it, preferring instead to keep the created [form of man] intact. All the while, [both groups] were all members of one faith, and there was no difference between them in religion. Both the circumcised and the uncircumcised were equals of one another, once they became part of those who were rightly guided [by God].

The prominent apostle Peter, called “the Rock,” did not forbid circumcision for the faithful coming from the Jews because it was difficult for them to abandon it as they considered abandoning a prescription of the covenant to be a grievous act, were deeply attached to the custom, and were reluctant to act against the law. Thus they accomplished the fullness of the Old Testament by means of circumcision, and [became worthy of] the coming of Christ by observing the conditions of holiness.

Then the divinely inspired \footnote{[P 1030]} apostle Paul called the nations to the law of Christ, and great kings, philosophers, and scholars all embraced the true religion. It sometimes happened that a king, with all his subjects and inhabitants of his city, or a prominent chieftain with all those loyal to him, including old people, adults, youths, children, and infants, along with their mothers, sisters, spouses, and unmarried and married daughters, all came into the faith in one day. By heavenly command, the apostle spoke in favor of abandoning the practice of circumcision and offered a proof that it was no longer necessary. He explained the [Old Testament] testimonies to the [Christian] faith and said: “The same [God] who established circumcision in times of old, has now commanded to abandon it, and the

\footnote{111}{Following the emendation suggested in n. 59 above.}
same [God] who sent the Rock [i.e. Peter] to preach circumcision, has sent me [i.e. Paul] to preach uncircumcision."\(^{112}\)

Some of those who responded to the call from among the Gentiles were apprehensive about circumcision on account of the Jews. They were afraid that if they became equal to [the Jews] in being [circumcised], they would be bound by [the obligations of] the covenant. They also knew that Christ appeared among [the Jews] and that those who preached Him were [Jews] as well. They also witnessed John’s baptism given to the [Jews], and so they were afraid that [if they were to accept baptism] they would also enter Judaism. It was only when the divinely inspired preacher [i.e. Paul] permitted the nations guided [to faith] to abandon circumcision that they realized that Jesus came with a new dispensation. It was only then that they felt safe from the consequences of circumcision, and so they were put at ease and responded to His preaching. They accepted the faith with trust, embraced the good lot of following the right way, and worked for [the salvation of] their souls with assurance.

Had [Paul] made circumcision mandatory for the Gentiles, they would have hardly found it attractive, since people of the East dislike change and find it hard to embrace it. Moreover, most people must attend to procuring their bread and clothing and taking care of various necessities and expenses associated with children and women-folk.\(^{113}\) Thus, the [new] dispensation came from on high and the new regulation for all came from heaven. [Whether circumcised or not,] the faithful were equals of one another, all following the right way and accepting the religion of Christ in a spiritual manner.

The divinely inspired apostle Paul said in his epistle to the Ephesians: “You, the community of Gentiles, were in the past [P 1031] fleshly who were called people of uncircumcision. You were far from Jesus Christ and from God’s promise to Abraham and from the law of the Torah, having no hope after this world. But now, by the blood of Jesus Christ, you became nigh and received the hope of good things, for He abolished the enmity between the People [of Israel] and the Gentiles, and between angels and humans, and both the circumcised and the uncircumcised became one community. He abolished the


\(^{113}\) The author’s idea seems to be that if Gentiles had been forced to get circumcised as adults the painful operation would have prevented them (temporarily) from earning their living and supporting their families.
doubts separating them, and instead of the fleshly commandments, gave new, spiritual ones. He made all one and renewed all things through baptism. He established peace between God and [His] servants, and satisfied the Lord for them by His one body. He abolished the enmity between them by His cross; then He came and preached the good news both to the peoples who were far away and to the people of the Jews who were near. The nearness to God the Father has embraced us all by the one Spirit, and you have now become sons and heirs through the grace which the Lord has bestowed upon you."\(^{114}\)

The argument that Christ and the apostles were circumcised does not make it necessary for His followers to practice circumcision, because the former were [circumcised] as children without considering [circumcision] to be a virtue. They did not have the power of reason and were unable to object. Moreover, they did not [at the time] know any other preaching, as the dispensation of the Old Testament had not yet been fulfilled, and the good news of the New [Testament] had not yet been revealed.

The strongest argument of those [Christians] who practiced circumcision, unnecessary though this was, is the fact that the divinely inspired apostle Paul had Titus\(^{115}\) circumcised when he wanted him to accompany him and assist him while traveling. And so he got circumcised to be equal to the faithful from among the People [of Israel], as described [in the Book of Acts]. Likewise, the distinguished [apostle] Simon [Peter], called the Rock, gave permission to those among the Jews who became Christians to practice circumcision. The faithful circumcised their children in accordance with their old belief regarding its value. Some of the disciples, too, insisted that circumcision was necessary and invoked God’s command to Abraham and the everlasting covenant with him regarding the matter.

So if a newborn is circumcised on the eight day, prior to donning the garment of baptism and accepting the obligations of the faith, and without holding the belief that circumcision is mandatory, then there is neither harm and \(^{115}\) sin nor benefit and honor. However, [keeping] the creature in its integral [form] is truly preferable, while adding to what is already sufficient is a waste. So [it is best for] the newborn to remain uncircumcised as God created him from the very

\(^{(114)}\) Eph 2:11–19.

\(^{(115)}\) Titus is obviously confused with Timotheus here, see: Acts 16:3.
beginning. Then he will receive the purity of baptism and will live as an integral creature.

The cornerstone of all is to have knowledge of God in Christ, sincere faith and love, and strong and correct belief, to accept the apostles and the Scriptures, to act [righteously] so as to inherit the Kingdom, and to confess resurrection [of the dead], the gathering [of all humanity for the Last Judgment], and the [final] recompense at the time of resurrection.

Then there were those of the sons of Ishmael who were born in the land of Tihama.\(^{116}\) When they swelled tremendously in number, and their genealogies grew long, they began circumcising their daughters with no [divine] command and without following a [divinely given] law. Nor did they do so in order to set themselves apart from their neighbors or to prevent intermarriage with people of base lineage. When the religion of Islam emerged among them, the custom of circumcising daughters along with sons, during the time between their birth and puberty became established as a mandatory commandment and one of the foundations of their religion. This second circumcision, that of daughters, was something added to God’s command to Abraham, or [better put] something contradicting the earlier covenant and going back to its complete deficiency, for the time appointed [for the practice] had already passed. Many years went by, until eventually all the [adherents] of this religion, from all the nations, near and far, became [circumcised]. Then the children of Abraham from Qantura [i.e. the Turks]\(^{117}\) appeared in the land of the East, multiplied and grew strong. They strayed away from the true path and rejected circumcision. As a result, the law of Islam got modified, and they no longer circumcise males or females and no longer subject themselves to a defect in [bodily] perfection. Those among them who only now convert to Islam are circumcised, but others remain in their uncircumcised state as they were created. Thus [the Muslims] became identical to their neighbors among the nations, and family ties were established among


\(^{(117)}\) Gen 25:1–4; 1 Chr 1:32–33. An explanation common in Arabic writers is that Qantūrā was a female servant of Abraham from whom the Turks were descended.
them. There was no longer a need to have a sign by which one would be differentiated from the others, and the lineage [of the Arab Muslims] became intertwined and mixed with that of [other nations]. Superiority [among them] is now achieved through obedience [to God] [rather than having a superior lineage].

The Jewish pride in being circumcised, distinguished, and having a superior lineage has dwindled. They have been [P 1033] humiliated, and [divine] anger with them has become evident. Their circumcision did not help them when they refused to believe in Christ, and their pride was given to others. The slave became equal to someone who is completely free, and the earlier prophecies concerning the union of nations and peoples came true. The matter came back full circle to the point of justice, and it is only the person who repents that attains purity.

SUMMARY

The present article provides an interesting example of how Christian discussions of the abolition of circumcision — originally developed as part of the process of Christian emancipation from the Old Testament law — became revitalized in Christian-Muslim polemic in the medieval Middle East. The chapter on the abolition of circumcision from the comprehensive ‘Nestorian’ encyclopedic work of the mid-10th – early 11th century entitled Kitāb al-Mağdal (‘The Tower’) is edited and translated in full. The edition of the Arabic text is based on two manuscripts: Paris, BnF Ar. 190 and Cambridge University Library Add. 3163 (= 3293).

(118) The reference is primarily to the destruction of the Temple and their expulsion from the Promised Land.
Saint Petersburg State University of Aerospace Instrumentation
Centre of Research and Education
in Philosophy, Religion, and Culture

SCRINIUM

Journal of Patrology, Critical Hagiography
and Ecclesiastical History

Volume 10

Syrians and the Others:
Cultures of the Christian Orient
in the Middle Ages

Edited by
Basil Lourié and Nikolai N. Seleznyov

Gorgias Press
2014

SCRINIUM

Journal of Patrology, Critical Hagiography and Ecclesiastical History

Editor in Chief
Basil Lourié

Advisory Board
Sebastian Brock, Oxford (President);
Pauline Allen, Brisbane—Pretoria; Alessandro Bausi, Naples;
Gilbert Dagron, Paris; Kazuhiko Demura, Tokyo;
Gianfranco Fiaccadori, Mailand; Stephan Gerô, Tübingen;
Robert Godding, Bruxelles (Société des Bollandistes);
Alexander Golitzin, Milwaukee; Getatchew Haile, Avon;
Cornelia B. Horn, Berlin; Hubert Kaufhold, Munich (Oriens Christianus);
Robert Kraft, Philadelphia; Vladimir A. Livshits, St Petersburg;
Igor P. Medvedev, St Petersburg; Bernard Meunier,
Lyon (Institut des Sources Chrétienues); Bernard Outtier, Paris;
Madeleine Petit, Paris; John C. Reeves, Charlotte;
Gerrit J. Reinink, Groningen; Antonio Rigo, Venice;
James Russel, Harvard; Samir Kh. Samir, Beirut;
Michael Stone, Jerusalem; Satoshi Toda, Sapporo;
James VanderKam, Notre Dame

Secretariat
Tatiana Senina, St. Petersburg;
Elena Bormotova, Montreal

© Authors, 2014
© B. Lourié and N. N. Seleznyov, 2014
© Gorgias Press, 2014
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

List of Abbreviations .................................................................................................................. x

**Critical Editions**

Yulia Furman
The Origins of the Temporal World:
the First *mēʾmrā* of the *Kṭābā d-rēš mellē* of John Bar Penkāyē .......................... 3

Yulia Furman
Zeus, Artemis, Apollo:
John bar Penkāyē on Ancient Myths and Cults ......................................................... 47

Nikolai N. Selezniov
The Laments of the Philosophers over Alexander the Great according to *The Blessed Compendium* of al-Makīn ibn al-ʿAmīd ........... 97

Nikolai N. Selezniov
“These stones shall be for a memorial”: A discussion of the abolition of circumcision in the *Kitāb al-Maḡdal* ....................... 115

Anton Pritula
The *Wardā* Hymnological Collection and Šlēmōn of Ahlāṭ (13th century) ......................................................................................... 149

Youhanna Nessim Youssef
Litanies or Prayers for Travellers ....................................................................................... 208

**Hagiography**

Andrey Moroz
Folkloric Hagiography and the Popular Cult of Saints:
Formation of Beliefs and Plots .......................................................................................... 219

Alexander V. Pigin
Hagiographic Writings in the Old Believer Controversies over ‘the Suicidal Death’ at the End of the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries (Peter Prokop’ev’s Message to Daniil Vikulin) ............................. 230
Tatiana A. Senina (nun Kassia)
Concerning the Dates of St. Makarios of Pelekete’s Life
and the Dating of his Vita ................................................................. 245

Tatiana A. Senina (nun Kassia)
Did St. John, the Abbot of the ton Katharon Monastery,
Join the Iconoclasts under Leo V the Armenian? ......................... 251

Yulia M. Shevarenkova
Verbal Hagiography of Seraphim of Sarov ..................................... 255

Patrology

Dmitry Biriukov
Hierarchies of Beings in the Patristic Thought:
Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, and the Palamites ...... 281

Irina Kolbutova
The Book of the Body of Christ:
Jewish-Christian Mysticism of Letters and the Name of God
as an Origin for the Christian Spiritual Exegesis ......................... 305

Dirk Krausmüller
A Chalcedonian Conundrum:
the Singularity of the Hypostasis of Christ ................................. 361

Alexey Ostrovsky and Maia Raphava
Notes on Georgian Translations of the Works of Nicetas Stethatos .. 383

Olena Syrtsova
L’anthropologie apocryphe et le traité Περὶ Ἀρχῶν d’Origène ...... 402

Review Articles

Dmitry Biriukov
Providence and fate in the ancient philosophical tradition
and in Greek patristics ................................................................. 415

Basil Lourié
Notes on Mar Pinhas: A “Nestorian” Foundation Legend;
the Liturgy Implied; Polemics against Jewish Mysticism; an Early
Christian Apology Used; Syrian Monasticism from Athens ............ 422
Olga Mitrenina
The Corpora of Old and Middle Russian Texts
as an Advanced Tool for Exploring an Extinguished Language ..... 455

Aleksandr V. Pigin
A new book on Old Russian demonology ........................................ 462

Tatiana A. Senina (moniale Kassia)
Deux livres sur Cassia de Constantinople ........................................ 468

Christos A. Zafiropoulos
Ahiqar, his Tale and the Vita Aesopi ............................................... 479

Reviews
What Was the Question? The Inter-Byzantine Discussions
about the Filioque, Nicephorus Blemmydes,
and Gregory of Cyprus (B. Lourié) .................................................... 499

Warren T. Woodfin, The Embodied Icon. Liturgical Vestments
and Sacramental Power in Byzantium (T. Sénina) ................................. 508

Two Books on Fr Antonii (Anthony) Bulatovich (1870–1919)
and the Imiaslavie (Onomatodoxy, Name-Glorifying) (B. Lourié) .. 510

The Monks and Their Reading (O. Mitrenina) ..................................... 514

A Lonely Church as a Symbol of Faith and Power (B. Lourié) .......... 516

Syriaca et Varia Orientalia (B. Lourié) .................................................. 523

Das russisch-deutsche Seminar „Simon Lüdwigowitsch Frank:
der deutsche Kontext der russischen Philosophie” (A. Malinov) .. 528