

**Following Isaiah:  
An Inquiry into the Syriac  
Liturgical Origins of the Qur'an**

Sheila McCarthy, University of Notre Dame

The most recent Qur'anic scholarship by Angelika Neuwirth and Andrew Rippen assumes intertextuality between the Qur'an and Judeo-Christian sources, and therefore calls for consideration of the religious discourses of Near Eastern communities. This approach is supported by many western scholars who show that "Qur'an" is linked to the Syriac *qeryana*, lectionary, the scriptural readings in Syriac Christian liturgy. Usage of this term, *qeryana*, in pre-Islamic times among Syriac Christians has been confirmed by Sebastian Brock in liturgical manuscripts of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Because these terms share the Q-R-'/Y root, "to call," or "to recite aloud," some scholars such as Christoph Luxenberg and John Bowan have even gone so far as to identify the Qur'an as a lectionary, containing readings from the Old and New Testament, as well as liturgical prayers, psalms and hymns.

Since "Qur'an" is at least linked with the Syriac word for lectionary, Syriac lectionaries must be studied for what they might tell us about the Qur'an. In this paper I present some features of the Syriac lectionary system, drawing on F. Crawford Burkitt's work on the earliest known Syriac lectionary manuscript from 5<sup>th</sup> century Edessa, which forms the common source for the lectionary systems of all Syriac churches. One striking feature of this system is the prevalence of pericopes from the prophet Isaiah. Tracing the lexical reading of Isaiah through the liturgical year across various early lectionaries of the Syriac lectionary system, I show the resonance certain pericopes have with passages from the Qur'an. For instance, lexical pericopes of Isaiah 34:4, "All the stars of heaven will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll," and 65:17, "I will create new heavens and a new earth," find a correlation in sura 21, verse 104, "That Day that We will roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books- even as We produced the first creation, so shall We produce a new one." Although there are hundreds of correlations, here I present only a few salient examples.

Studying Isaian presence in the Syriac lectionary system and the Qur'an opens a new line of inquiry into the textual study of the Qur'an, seriously engaging the liturgical origins of the Qur'an in its Syriac context. In discovering an aspect of the Qur'an's place in the theological literature of late antiquity, the crucial task of reintegrating the Qur'an into that literature can begin.