

# Ascetic and Nonascetic Layers in the Qur'an: A Case Study

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## Abstract

Using the methods of redaction criticism, this article analyzes two Qur'anic parallel passages, Q 23:1–11 and Q 70:22–35, and the chronology of their redaction. Relying on discernable traces of editorial work, it argues that these texts of instruction, which initially exhorted their audience to live a pious and ascetic life, have known a process of rewriting, which substantially softened the ascetic injunction of continence present in the earliest versions. This analysis might shed light on the background and development of the Qur'an and early Islamic piety.

## Keywords

Qur'an – early Islam – asceticism – Syriac Christianity – redaction criticism – prayer – continence

Strictly speaking, the Qur'an is not a book but a *corpus*, namely, a gathering of texts: (1) which were not originally intended to be put together in a codex, nor composed with this goal in mind; (2) which are heterogeneous, as they belong to a variety of literary genres, and sometimes express divergent ideas, even if some ideas and concerns remain central throughout the whole text; (3) which are, in some cases, independent, and in others, are not — there are indeed numerous Qur'anic parallel passages that reuse, rewrite, or correct other passages. This is true not only for narratives, but also for other literary genres, like texts of instruction and edification, as we will see in this article.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the Qur'an as a corpus, see de Prémare 2004: 29–46; Dye forthcoming a.

This last point is particularly significant, since it entails that there is — as in the Gospels — a “synoptic problem” in the Qur’an. As a text that is both *composite* and *composed*, with various layers and parallel passages, the Qur’an is therefore particularly apt to be studied with a method fruitfully employed in biblical and New Testament studies called “redaction criticism” (*Redaktionskritik*). Relying on various significant criteria, such as tensions, contradictions, style changes, breaks of the literary genre or in the themes developed inside a text, the presence of various ways of introducing and staging the speech of various characters, etc., this method endeavors to reconstruct, at least in part, one or several previous states of a text, and studies the successive redactions/editions that gave the text its final form.<sup>2</sup>

The examination of such an editorial process is an unavoidable methodological step in any historical or scholarly use of the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, and the Qur’an. Structural and synchronic approaches might shed some light on the latest versions of the texts under scrutiny, but they are usually not able to use such texts as historical sources, since they might easily mix various historical stages of textual development in their analysis.<sup>3</sup> In fact, examining only its final form restricts in many respects the information that can be deduced — from a literary and historical viewpoint — from a text or a corpus (Müller, Pakkala, and ter Haar Romeny 2014: 11). Redaction criticism thus opens a window into the history of the community/communities centered around the Qur’an. Obviously, texts are human artifacts and manufactured products. Making a text in late antiquity (and not only then) is not gratuitous: it is done for some reason, implementing a specific program, or taking a stand in relation to particular ideas, people, or groups, within a specific context (Destro and Pesce 2016: 13). Moreover, if the process of writing a text is meaningful, then the process of rewriting or reusing texts inside a corpus is also very significant.

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2 Of course, redaction criticism does not presuppose that any kind of tension, contradiction, style change, etc., is an example of an editorial work or rewriting — only some are. It is also important to bear in mind that redaction criticism can be applied to the Qur’an. It is sometimes said that redaction criticism could be applied to the books of the Hebrew Bible, whose texts were composed and reworked for centuries, whereas it could not be applied to the Qur’an, whose genesis is much shorter. However, the genesis of the Qur’an and the genesis of the Gospels took roughly a similar amount of time, and the Gospels are very successfully studied with the tools of redaction criticism. For an excellent presentation and vindication of redaction criticism (on the Hebrew Bible, but it remains relevant in other contexts), see Müller, Pakkala, and ter Haar Romeny 2014: 1–18; and Pakkala 2013. For a vindication, and an application of the tools of redaction criticism to the Qur’an, see Dye forthcoming a, forthcoming b.

3 On the relations between synchronic and diachronic methods, see Dye 2014: 153–155.

In an insightful paper, and drawing on the work of Peter Sloterdijk, Mette Mortensen has described the Qur'an as a "training program" (Mortensen 2016). The idea is not to define every bit of the Qur'an (her article focuses on Q 18:32–46), but it aptly captures two very significant points. The first is that most of the time the Qur'an is exhortatory in character (i.e., exhortatory more than narrative). The second is that speaking of a *training program* rightly emphasizes the relations between, on the one hand, rhetoric and the use of various kinds of discourse with a specific intention (*program*) and, on the other hand, asceticism, or training (*askēsis*), which is supposed to be triggered by this rhetoric, and implies a deep change in one's life — a change that is especially motivated, in the Qur'an, by the fear of God and His imminent Judgment.

I would like to contribute to this topic with a brief case study: a comparison of two parallel passages, Q 23:1–11 and Q 70:22–35, and the chronology of their redaction.<sup>4</sup> This might shed some light on the context and genesis of the Qur'an, and the significance of ascetic concerns in the Qur'anic corpus and, more generally, early Islam.

## 1 Q 23:1–11

Let us begin with Q 23:1–11. My discussion will use and supplement a previous examination of this passage in an earlier article (Dye 2014: 159–163). The underlined words are those that differ from Q 70:22–35.<sup>5</sup>

1	<u>qad 'afḷaḥa l-mu'minūn<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Successful are the believers,</u>
2	<sup>a</sup> llaḍīna hum fī ṣalātihim ḥāṣī'ūn <sup>a</sup>	who are <u>humble in</u> their prayer,
3	<u>wa-llaḍīna hum 'ani l-laḡwi</u> <u>mu'riḍūn<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>and who turn away from frivolous talk,</u> <u>and who practice the <i>zakaṭ</i>,</u>
4	<u>wa-llaḍīna hum li-z-zakāti fā'ilūn<sup>a</sup></u>	and who guard their private parts,
5	<u>wa-llaḍīna hum li-furūḡihim</u> <u>ḥāfiḏūn<sup>a</sup></u>	except concerning their wives and what their right (hands) own [female slaves =

4 Contrary to a common opinion, I do not take the Qur'an as being simply a record of Muhammad's preaching and a reflection of the experience of the community around Muhammad in Mecca and Medina between 610 and 632 (put otherwise: some parts of the Qur'an might be so, but not necessarily all). I will therefore not presuppose the usual partition of suras between Early Meccan, Middle Meccan, Late Meccan and Medinan suras. I will also remain agnostic about issues of absolute chronology. See Dye 2014: 163–171, forthcoming a, forthcoming b.

5 Translations of the Qur'an are taken from Droge 2013, with minor modifications at times.

6	'illā 'alā 'azwāğihim 'aw mā malakat 'aymānuhum fa- 'innahum ġayru malūmīn <sup>a</sup>	concubines], surely then they are not (to be) blamed, but whoever seeks beyond those —
7	fa-mani btağā warā'a dālika fa- 'ulā'ika humu l-'ādūn <sup>a</sup>	they are the transgressors —, and those who keep their pledges and
8	wa-llađīna hum li-'amānātihim wa-'ahdihim rā'ūn <sup>a</sup>	their promises, and who guard their <u>prayers</u> ,
9	wa-llađīna hum 'alā ṣalawātihim yuḥāfiżūn <sup>a</sup>	those — <u>they are the inheritors</u> <u>who will inherit paradise. There they</u>
10	'ulā'ika <u>humu l-wāritūn<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>will remain.</u>
11	<u>'alladīna yaritūna l-firdawsa</u> <u>hum fihā ḥālidūn<sup>a</sup></u>	

Any discussion in terms of redaction criticism should take as its starting point the text in its final form, and in its literary context. Q 23:1–11 has a thematic and formal unity (the remaining parts of the sura address other topics: God's power and providence [12–22], the story of Noah [23–30], etc.). It is composed in a concentric way: the end of the text (v. 10–11, “Those — they are the inheritors who will inherit paradise. There they will remain”) is related to the beginning (v. 1, “Successful are the Believers”<sup>6</sup> — a success in the Hereafter, but maybe also here below). Of course, the Believers will be successful if and only if they adopt a specific behavior, namely the one described in vv. 2–9. This is a text of instruction, of moral edification and exhortation, which has some affinities with the genre of beatitudes (except that rewards are mentioned only at the end of the pericope), explicitly based on the model: if you *do* such and such, then you will *get* such and such. The text mentions prayer (vv. 2 and 9), which is an act of adoration of God that the Believer should not fail to perform (v. 9) and should perform humbly (v. 2). Verse 3 invites turning away from vain and futile words (*lağw*), and verse 8 recommends honesty and respect for the word given. Verse 4 describes the right relation to the possessions on this world, recalling the value of alms (v. 4).<sup>7</sup> Verse 5 clearly recommends abstinence.<sup>8</sup>

6 “*Mu'min*” as a self-designation term. It has become common to use it with capitals.

7 Arabic *zakāt*, which does not always mean *alms*: it can also mean “purity” (Q 18:81; 19:13 — that this last reference pertains to John the Baptist, a model of asceticism and world-renunciation, is of course not a coincidence).

8 And not simply modesty; see, e.g., Sinai 2017: 232 n. 47. This point is certainly closer to the idea of *askēsis* as training than generally thought. See Secord, who argues that the metaphorical figure of the athlete would have evoked for ancient readers, in addition to the idea of competitive struggle, the idea of sexual abstinence, a lifestyle choice closely associated with athletes in the Greco-Roman world: “When Christian authors called someone an athlete of

If the passage stopped there, one would easily think of a kind of Arabic version of a Syriac text of spiritual guidance, since this passage looks so much to have been influenced by Syriac piety.<sup>9</sup> There is no need to insist on the role of prayer and continence.<sup>10</sup> The importance of alms is crucial: “It is the classic religious virtue, precisely because wealth and the attachment to the goods of this world most often divert men from the path of salvation. These ideas have always been familiar to pious Christians who flee the world” (Andrae 1955: 136). Giving alms and feeding the poor is also a way to redeem oneself from one’s sins and expiate one’s faults (e.g., Anderson 2011). Moreover, this Syriac piety insists on the necessity of a quiet, humble way of life, far from futility, jokes, vain talk, and dishonesty (Andrae 1955: 143–145).

This kind of spiritual guidance in Syriac piety is of course true for the monks, but it is also relevant (but in a less demanding way, especially when continence and the amount of prayer are taken into account) for laity. Consider, for example, the *Testamentum Domini* (11-1:110–112 ed. Rahmani), a canonico-liturgical Syriac rule generally dated from the 5th century.<sup>11</sup> It enjoins the presbyter to inquire into the kind of life the catechumen is leading:

Let those who first come to hear the Word, before they enter among all the people, first come to teachers at home, and let them be examined as to all the cause [of their coming] with all accuracy, so that their teachers may know for what they have come, or with what will. And if they have come with a good will and love, let them be diligently taught.... Also let their life and conversation be asked about: if they be not contentious, if quiet, if meek, not speaking vain things or despisers or foul speakers, or buffoons or leaders astray, or ridicule mongers. Also if any of them have a wife or not; and if of his own free will he have not [a wife], let him

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God, they were drawing, at least implicitly, on the long tradition, in both philosophical and medical literature, of linking athletes with sexual abstinence and the associated debates about whether this was healthy.... Christian sexual renunciation may have been motivated more by concerns about immortality and salvation, but scholars would do well to consider it as a matter related to health and regimen in the minds of many ancient readers” (Secord 2018: 489–490).

- 9 For the relation between Syriac piety and Qur’anic piety, see Andrae 1955 and, more recently, Sinai 2017.
- 10 On prayer in Syriac Christianity, see Brock 1987 and, most recently, Bitton-Ashkelony and Krueger 2017.
- 11 More specifically, the section devoted to the canonical-liturgical rules is preceded by an apocalypse in which Jesus announces to his apostles the signs of the end of time. Linking eschatology and texts of instruction or edification is not specifically Qur’anic.

be instructed carefully and diligently and persuaded with all kindness to amend his failings.

...

Let there be no obstacle at all to him who desires to marry, so that he be not caught by the Evil One with fornication. But let him marry a Christian, a faithful [woman] of the race of the Christians, who is able to keep her husband in the faith.

...

Similarly if [a woman] be the wife of a man, let the woman be taught to please her husband in the fear of God. But if both of them desire to cultivate purity [continence] in piety, they have a reward.

*Testament of our Lord 2008: 115–116*

The *spirit* of the *Testamentum Domini* is close to the spirit of Q 23:1–11 — what is said about the “conversation” of the catechumen, for example, provides the exact background of Q 23:3.<sup>12</sup> The issue of continence is also particularly interesting: monogamous marriage is advised (since without it the risks of fornication are very high), but abstinence (in the context of a marriage) is even more praised if people can reach this level of purity.

The advice in Q 23:1–11 forms a consistent system, designed to lead the believer toward salvation: a focus on prayer, coupled with a renunciation, to some degree, to the goods, temptations, and futilities of this world, which divert the believer from the most important concern, namely God. There is also an insistence on honesty, and on keeping one’s pledges and promises. In fact, Q 23:1–11 emphasizes two complementary issues: what the Believers should do to reach salvation (prayer), and in which state of mind, or soul, they should be, to be able to focus on prayer. This last issue can itself be also divided into two parts, with some overlap: the recommendation of specific practices (alms, continence), and the fixing of basic elements in the personality of the Believer (not engaging in vain talks or concerns, keeping one’s word — and also being able to remain continent), which are a *prerequisite* for *training* (i.e. being successfully taught and exhorted) and for the change of life to be implemented.

However, this affinity between the Qur’an and the *Testamentum Domini* only works if we leave out Q 23:6–7, two verses that raise some problems. There

12 There is a slight nuance concerning the respective settings of Q 23:1–11 and the *Testamentum Domini*: Q 23:1–11 is a text of instruction, of edification, for the Believers, whereas the *Testamentum Domini* is a text of instruction in a different way, since it is designed for people who will preach texts of instruction and edification to the future baptized.

is first a formal problem: these verses break the rhythm of the psalmody and the syntactic harmony of the text, all the neighboring verses beginning with “*wa-lladīna*.” Moreover, they also raise a significant difficulty concerning their content: of course, we can acknowledge that the Qur’an does not exclude domestic happiness, and does not necessarily enjoin a complete renunciation to the pleasures of life, but advocating a continency that allows at the same time having sex with one’s several wives and concubines is, let us say, a rather open-minded conception of continency, which is clearly preposterous if we consider it against the general background of the text.

Clearly, verses 6–7 look like an interpolation, which significantly modifies — on one aspect only — the spirit of the original text. Perhaps an earlier version of the text (but not necessarily the earliest) might have included “*‘illā ‘alā ‘azwāġihim*,” meaning not that a Believer can have several spouses, but that each Believer is entitled to have sex with his spouse only: moreover, if *mu’minūn* is understood in a generic way, referring to *mu’minūn* (male Believers) and *mu’mināt* (female Believers) as well, then the text would simply mean that each Believer (male or female) should remain continent or limit his/her sexual activity to his/her legitimate partner. However, there is some reason to think that the use of the formula “*wa-lladīna hum li-furūġihim ḥāfīzūn*” (“and those who guard their private parts” [verse 5]), is even more demanding and hints at virginity or abstinence from sexual intercourse — which makes the presence of verses 6–7, therefore, even more preposterous, and confirms that they must be a later addition. Indeed, as noted by Sinai, the Arabic verb *ḥāfaza* “maps onto Syriac *nṭar* as used in appeals to ‘guard’ the treasure of virginity” (2017: 232 n.47).<sup>13</sup> One can thus safely surmise that verses 6–7 were simply absent in the original version of Q 23:1–11. From now on, I will refer to this earlier version of Q 23:1–11 (namely, Q 23:1–5, 8–11) as Q 23:1–11\*.

## 2 Q 70:22–35

Let us now turn to Q 70:22–35. Once again, it is necessary to take as a starting point the literary context of the pericope, especially the preceding verses. For this reason I have included Q 70:19–21. The text underlined corresponds to the words in verses 22–35 which differ from Q 23:1–11.

<sup>13</sup> Sinai refers to Ephrem’s Sermons. See Beck (ed.), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones I–IV* (Leuven, 8 vols., CSCO 130–131, 134–135, 138–139, 148–149, 1970–73), for example, vol. IV, no. 1, ll. 309–310, 329.

19	'inna l-'insāna ḥuḷiqa halū'an	Surely the human was created anx-
20	'idā massahu š-šarru ḡazū'a <sup>n</sup>	ious (for gain).
21	wa-'idā massahu l-ḡayru manū'a <sup>n</sup>	When misfortune touches him, (he
22	'illā l-muṣallīn <sup>a</sup> ,	is) complaining,
23	allaḡīna hum 'alā ṣalātihim	but when good touches him, he
	<u>dā'imūn<sup>a</sup></u>	refuses (to give),
24	<u>wa-llaḡīna fi 'amwālihim ḡaqqun</u>	<u>except those who pray,</u>
	<u>ma'lūm<sup>un</sup></u>	who <u>are unceasing in</u> their prayer,
25	<u>li-s-sā'ili wa-l-maḡrūmi</u>	<u>and in whose wealth (there is) an</u>
26	<u>wa-llaḡīna yuṣaddiqūna bi-</u>	<u>acknowledged portion due</u>
	<u>yawmi d-dīn<sup>i</sup></u>	<u>for the beggar and the outcast,</u>
27	<u>wa-llaḡīna hum min 'adābi rab-</u>	<u>and who affirm the Day of Judgment,</u>
	<u>bihim muṣfiqūn<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>and who are apprehensive of the</u>
28	'inna 'adāba rabbiḡim ḡayru	<u>punishment of their Lord,</u>
	<u>ma'mūn<sup>in</sup></u>	<u>Surely no one feels secure (against)</u>
29	wa-llaḡīna hum li-furūḡihim	<u>the punishment of their Lord —,</u>
	ḡāfiḡūn <sup>a</sup>	and who guard their private parts,
30	illā 'alā 'azwāḡihim 'aw mā mal-	except concerning their wives
	akat 'aymānuhum fa-'innahum	and what their right (hands) own
	ḡayru malūmīn <sup>a</sup>	[female slaves=concubines], surely
31	fa-mani btaḡā warā'a ḡālika fa-	then they are not (to be) blamed,
	'ulā'ika humu l-'ādūn <sup>a</sup>	but whoever seeks beyond those —
32	wa-llaḡīna hum li-'amānātihim	they are the transgressors —,
	wa-'ahdihim rā'ūna	and those who keep their pledges
33	<u>wa-llaḡīna hum bi-ṣḡahādātihim</u>	and their promises,
	<u>qā'imūn<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>and who stand by their testimonies,</u>
34	wa-llaḡīna hum 'alā ṣalātihim	and who guard their prayer,
	yuḡāfiḡūn <sup>a</sup>	<u>Those will be honored in Gardens.</u>
35	'ulā'ika fi ḡannātīn mukramūn <sup>a</sup>	

The whole sura 70, as it stands now, seems to be divided into three parts: 1–18, 19–35, 36–44. This is because vv. 22–35 are syntactically inserted inside the remarks of vv. 19–21 about the weakness of humankind. However, there is a break in the rhyme between vv. 19–21 (rhyme in *-ā*) and vv. 22–35 (rhyme in *-īn*, *-ūn*, *-ūm*). From a diachronic point of view, therefore, it makes much more sense to see vv. 1–21 as a unity (despite its quite anarchic rhyming scheme at times in its first half), with vv. 19–21 as its conclusion or morals. The most plausible scenario is that an independent text, with similar wording as vv. 22–35, was attached to vv. 1–21 at a certain stage of the composition of the sura, making vv. 19–21 — and more generally vv. 19–35 — appear as a new development



following vv. 1–18. Verses 36–44, on the other hand, have the same rhyme as vv. 22–35, but they are clearly an independent development (it is a completely different literary genre — an instruction specifically addressed to the Qur’anic messenger, about some unnamed protagonists).

If so, then we can take vv. 22–35 as a text that has some unity and enjoyed an independent existence *before* being joined to 70:1–21.<sup>14</sup> However, the exact wording of the beginning of v. 22, in its original form, is lost: the verse was indeed rewritten to fit its new literary context.

Q 70:22–35 can be analyzed in a similar way as Q 23:1–11. This is also a text that has a clear unity. It is composed in a concentric way: the end of the text (v. 35, “Those will be honored in gardens”) is related to the beginning (v. 22, about those who pray). The rest of the text (vv. 23–34) describes the way of life of “those who pray.” This is also a text of instruction and exhortation; the text mentions *unceasing* prayer (v. 23). Verses 24–25 describe the right relation to the possessions in this world: except the presence (required by the context) of “*wa-llaḍīna*,” they are identical, word for word, with Q 51:19. Q 51:15–19, which is about the pious (*al-muttaqīn*), clearly refers to monastic practices. Honesty and respect for the word given are highlighted in vv. 32–33. There is a focus (absent in sura 23) on the fear of God and His judgment (vv. 26–28). Verse 29 also recommends continence/abstinence, like Q 23:5. In some way (as we will see below), this text is stricter than Q 23:1–11\* in its requirements about world renunciation. Once again, it is striking to note that vv. 30–31 (identical, word for word, with Q 23:6–7) disrupt the rhythm, the syntactic parallels of the other verses in the section (beginning with “*wa-llaḍīna*”), and the general spirit of the text: clearly, the argument about Q 23:6–7 applies here, too. Q 70:30–31 are also a later addition: the text is much more consistent and forceful, in its form and content, without them. From now on, I will therefore refer to the earlier

14 In his own discussion of this passage, Sinai considers that Q 70:22–35 — with the exception of vv. 30–31 — is not a later addition and belongs to the original version of the sura (2017: 231–232 n. 46). His main argument is that “Q 70:22–35 as a whole, with the exception of v. 30, does not display a markedly higher MVL [mean verse length] than the remainder of Q 70.” It seems to me that he is pushing too far the soundness and relevance of the MVL criterion (that is, the idea that the mean verse length of the Qur’anic suras increased over time). In the same note, Sinai also acknowledges that there are some reasons to see Q 70:22–35 as a later addition to Q 70:1–21. Note, however, that speaking of Q 70:22–35 as a later addition could mean either that it is an *amplification* of Q 70:19–21 (in other words, Q 70:22–35 would have been composed/created specifically as an exceptive clause in the literary context of sura 70), or that it existed *independently* and was joined to Q 70:19–21, as I have argued here. The disruption in rhyme between vv. 19–21 and 22–35 does not support the first hypothesis. Note also that (*contra* Sinai) Q 70:36 does not connect so well to Q 70:21: there is also a disruption of rhyme.

version of this text (without the interpolation of vv. 30–31 and bearing in mind that v. 22 was originally phrased in a different way) as Q 70:22–35\*.

### 3 Relative Chronology

We should now address issues of chronology. First, the following synopsis shows that (and how) Q 23:1–11\* and Q 70:22–35\* are interdependent (text in italics is common to both versions).

Q 23:1–11*	Q 70:22–35*
1 qad 'aflaḥa l-mu'minūn <sup>a</sup> Successful are the believers	22 ('illā) l-muṣallīn <sup>a</sup> (Except for) those who pray
2 <i><sup>a</sup>llaḍīna hum fī ṣalātihim ḥāṣī'ūn<sup>a</sup></i> <i>who are humble in their prayer</i>	23 <i><sup>a</sup>llaḍīna hum 'alā ṣalātihim dā'imūn<sup>a</sup></i> <i>who are unceasing in their prayer</i>
3 wa-llaḍīna hum 'ani l-laġwi mu'riḍūn <sup>a</sup> and who turn away from frivolous talk	
4 <i>wa-llaḍīna hum li-z-zakāti fā'ilūn<sup>a</sup></i> <i>and who practice the zakāt</i>	24 <i>wa-llaḍīna fī 'amwālihim ḥaqqun ma'lūm<sup>un</sup></i> 25 <i>li-s-sā'ili wa-l-maḥrūm<sup>i</sup></i> <i>and in whose wealth (there is) an acknowledged portion due for the beggar and the outcast</i>
	26 <i>wa-llaḍīna yuṣaddiqūna bi-yawmi d-dīn<sup>i</sup></i> 27 <i>wa-llaḍīna hum min 'aḍābi rabbihim muṣfiqūn<sup>a</sup></i> 28 <i>'inna 'aḍāba rabbihim ġayru ma'mūn<sup>in</sup></i> <i>and who affirm the Day of Judgment and who are apprehensive of the punishment of their Lord — surely no one feels secure (against) the punishment of their Lord —</i>

(cont.)

Q 23:1–11*	Q 70:22–35*
5 <i>wa-llaḏīna hum li-furūḡihim ḥāfiẓūn<sup>a</sup></i>	29 <i>wa-llaḏīna hum li-furūḡihim ḥāfiẓūn<sup>a</sup></i>
<i>and who guard their private parts</i>	<i>and who guard their private parts</i>
8 <i>wa-llaḏīna hum li-'amānātihim wa-'ahdihim rā'ūn<sup>a</sup></i>	32 <i>wa-llaḏīna hum li-'amānātihim wa-'ahdihim rā'ūn<sup>a</sup></i>
<i>and those who keep their pledges and their promises,</i>	<i>and those who keep their pledges and their promises,</i>
	33 <i>wa-llaḏīna hum bi-šahādātihim qā'imūn<sup>a</sup></i>
	<i>and who stand by their testimonies</i>
9 <i>wa-llaḏīna hum 'alā ṣalawātihim yuḥāfiẓūn<sup>a</sup></i>	34 <i>wa-llaḏīna hum 'alā ṣalātihim yuḥāfiẓūn<sup>a</sup></i>
<i>and who guard their prayers.</i>	<i>and who guard their prayer.</i>
10 <i>'ulā'ika humu l-wāriṭūn<sup>a</sup></i>	35 <i>'ulā'ika fī ḡannātin mukramūn<sup>a</sup></i>
11 <i><sup>a</sup>llaḏīna yariṭūna l-firdawsa hum fihā ḥālidūn<sup>a</sup></i>	
Those — they are the inheritors who will inherit paradise. There they will remain.	Those will be honored in Gardens.

Both texts are built according to the same scheme, in a concentric way, with a series of verses beginning with *allaḏīna*; the conclusion is introduced by the same pronoun (*'ulā'ika*); the importance of prayer is highlighted at the beginning and at the end of the text; both texts follow to a good extent the same order of exhortations; some parallel verses are identical word for word (Q 23:5 and Q 70:29; Q 23:8 and Q 70:32) or almost identical (Q 23:2 and Q 70:23; Q 23:9 and Q 70:34). We also note some differences: in some cases, the same idea is expressed in a slightly different way (Q 23:4 and Q 70:24–25; Q 10–11 and Q 35:4); Q 23:3, about frivolous talk, has no counterpart in Q 70, whereas Q 70:26–28 and 33 have no counterpart in Q 23.

If the similitude of both texts shows their interdependency, the differences imply that the rewriting was not simply a copy-and-paste process but a creative work that adapted the former text to its new use and context: things could be added or removed, or reformulated, if needed.

This last observation certainly rules out a scenario in which one of those texts would have been written first, then the interpolation added, and then the other text (which therefore included, right from the beginning, what had been singled out as a later addition) composed. According to this kind of scenario, we could imagine two possibilities: either  $Q\ 23:1-11^* > Q\ 23:1-11 > Q\ 70:22-35$ , or  $Q\ 70:22-35^* > Q\ 70:22-35 > Q\ 23:1-11$ .

This scenario is indeed highly unlikely. As can be seen in the synopsis, the process of rewriting displays significant freedom (addition, removal, rewording), and if the interpolation had been added to one of these texts before the composition of the other, it is difficult to understand why the author of the second text would have kept the main text as it is, with the formal problems and the tension between an ascetic element ( $Q\ 23:5$  and  $Q\ 70:29$ ) and a decidedly nonascetic clause ( $Q\ 23:6-7$  and  $Q\ 70:30-31$ ) the goal of which is precisely to soften, or rather to move out, the ascetic injunction of the preceding verse.

Even if the verses just before and after the interpolation are strictly identical, we should also notice that the wording of the interpolation is exactly the same in both passages. It makes good sense, then, to suppose that the interpolation was added at a later stage by someone with a different agenda in mind than the author(s) of the earlier texts, once both texts had been composed. Therefore, we are left with two possible basic scenarios:  $Q\ 23:1-11^* > Q\ 70:22-35^* > Q\ 23:1-11$  and  $Q\ 70:22-35$ , or  $Q\ 70:22-35^* > Q\ 23:1-11^* > Q\ 23:1-11$  and  $Q\ 70:22-35$ . A deeper analysis of each text and of their parallels can determine which solution is the most plausible.

Let us begin by noting some general characteristics of the texts:  $Q\ 23:1-11^*$  is short and simple;  $Q\ 70:22-35^*$  is longer and its general style appears more refined. However, this observation does not yet allow any conclusion about the chronology since, contrary to common assumption, a longer text is not necessarily later than a short one.

The most significant difference, for our purposes, might be found in the first verse:  $Q\ 23:1$  mentions the Believers (*mu'minūn*) whereas  $Q\ 70:22$  mentions "those who pray" (*muṣallīn*). The term *mu'minūn/mu'minīn* is used about 200 times in the Qur'an, and the formula "*allaḍīna 'āmanū*" (those who believe) 89 times. We know it was a term (if not *the* term) of self-designation for the members of the community centered around the Qur'an.<sup>15</sup> Contrariwise,

15 Current scholarship uses this term to refer to Arab-speaking communities, more or less related to Muhammad's predication, until Marwanid times. It has to be used instead of *muslim*, which is anachronistic in this context. It has been popularized by Donner (2010), but the first scholar who used this term in this way seems to be Sharon (1988). The Qur'anic use of the term — a term of address — testifies to this. This word is also used in the Pact of Yathrib, with the formula "*amīr al-mu'minīn*" (Commander of the Believers/Faithful).

*muṣallīn* is very rare in the Qur'an (whereas the issue of prayer is very often mentioned): besides this passage, it is found only twice (Q 74:43 and Q 107:4).<sup>16</sup>

Note that *al-muṣallīn* is not used as a term of self-designation; it refers to a specific behavior, or to a specific group of people (if they are inside or outside the group of the Believers cannot be guessed from the Qur'anic text alone) whose behavior should be taken as a model. In other words, from a rhetorical point of view, Q 23 on the one hand, and Q 70 and 74 on the other hand, work in different ways: Q 23:1–11\* is similar to a text of Beatitudes, whereas Q 70:22–35\* and Q 74:43–47 single out a *specific* group of people, whose virtuosity in piety sets them apart, and enjoin their audience to imitate these people.

Here we might get a clue about relative chronology. Indeed, the most probable development is for things to go from the less common to the more common, namely that a text featuring a reference to a rare element in a corpus undergoes a process of rewriting that “normalizes” it and adapts it to the most general trend and the most widespread uses and needs of the community. Taking Q 70:22–35\* as a starting point also makes more sense from a stylistic point of view: there is an alliteration in the first two verses of Q 70:22–23 (*muṣallīn, ṣalāt*) that is lost in Q 23:1–2. The simple fact that prayer is highlighted in both texts, right from the beginning, is also consonant with the idea that Q 70:22–35\* is basic, since this passage, contrary to Q 23:1–11\*, is specifically dedicated to “those who pray.” Prayer is of course an important part of the behavior required of a Believer (*mu'min*), but it is not systematically tied to an address to the Believers: for example, among the 89 Qur'anic addresses with the formula “*yā-ʿayyuhā llaḍīna ʾāmanū*” (You who believe!), only nine are more or less directly related to prayer (2:153; 4:43; 5:6; 22:77; 24:58; 33:41–42, 56; 62:9; 63:9). As a point of comparison, mentions of testimonies and pledges — see Q 23:8 and Q 70:32–33 — are less numerous, but they are nonetheless mentioned five times (Q 2:282; 4:135; 5:8, 106; 8:27).

There is also a very significant difference between Q 23:2 and Q 70:23. The verses have the same length, the same rhythm, and the same rhyme; however, Q 23 uses *ḥāṣīʾūn* and Q 70 *dā'imūn*. There is no stylistic reason for this change, so the difference has to be found in the content: the idea that the author of the later text wanted to express was different from the idea present in the former text. In Q 70, what is implied is *unceasing prayer* (this explains the singular in

16 A brief comparison of Q 70:22–35\* and Q 74:43–47 is particularly informative (a similar analysis can be applied to sura 107). Many topics are the same (and once again, they reflect Syriac piety): praying, feeding the poor, keeping in mind the Day of Judgment (not mentioned in Q 23) — but there is nothing on continence in Q 74. The command of not bantering is not found in Q 70 but is present in Q 23:3.

Q 70:34 — there is only one prayer to guard, since it is always the same, unceasing prayer), whereas Q 23:9 refers to several prayers — probably three daily prayers. This idea of constancy in prayer is present in the Qur'an, and can be expressed with the adverb *kaṭīran*, which should not be translated as “much” or “often,” but should be understood, according to a phenomenon of loan-shifting, in relation to the Syriac homonym root *k-t-r* (which refers to quantity of time, not quantity in general; see Dye 2017: 345–346). *Kaṭīran*, in some contexts, thus, means “constantly” (Q 3:41; 20:33–34). It is significant that this command to pray constantly is addressed to God's chosen ones (Zachariah, Moses, Aaron). There are indeed remarkable affinities between the Qur'an and monastic ethics: the model of monastic ethics (Q 24:36–37)<sup>17</sup> inspires the Qur'anic presentation of the prophets/servants of God; they must practice the *ṣalāt* (Q 10:87, 14:40, 20:14) and the *zakāt* (Q 19:55, 21:73), persevere in prayer (Q 3:41, 20:33–34), and practice fasting and silence (Q 19:26).

The Pauline motto, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), was taken seriously by the Desert Fathers,<sup>18</sup> and, of course, in the Syriac piety, which lies behind much of Qur'anic piety. Anyway, if Q 70:23 on the one hand refers to monastic practices, Q 23:2, on the other hand is addressed to an audience who is not expected to reach the same degree of virtuosity in prayer: the Believers are therefore advised to pray humbly (as do monks, of course), but not necessarily all the time (praying humbly is commended elsewhere: see Q 2:45). They are also advised not to engage in vain talk (v. 3) — as I said earlier, a prerequisite for everything else — something that goes without saying for monks, whose ethics enjoin silence. Note that the insertion of v. 3 is particularly significant, since it breaks the usual pair of prayer and alms (Q 2:43, 83, 110, 177, 277; 4:77, 162; 5:12, 56; 9:5, 11, 18, 71; 19:31, 55; 21:73; 22:41, 78; 24:37, 56; 27:3; 31:4; 33:33; 58:13; 73:20; 98:5 *et passim*).

We might, therefore, surmise the following chronology: Q 70:22–35\* > Q 23:1–11\* > Q 23:1–11 and Q 70:22–35.<sup>19</sup> This chronology displays a phenomenon

17 The buildings (*buyūt*) mentioned in v. 36 are clearly monasteries. The previous verse (v. 35) — the famous “Light verse” — should be understood in a very concrete way, as referring to prayer practices of Eastern Christian oratories. See Böwering 2011: 117–118; Dye 2016.

18 One example, among many: “Flee vain glory and pray without ceasing. Sing psalms before and after sleeping and learn by heart the precepts of the Scriptures” (Athanasius 1994: 55.3). On this topic of constant prayer in late antique Christianity, see Wortley 2012, with many other references to relevant early Christian texts.

19 For some additional arguments about the anteriority of Q 70:22–35, see Sinai 2017: 231–232. A more complicated process remains possible: for example, Q 70:22–35\*, in a shorter version than the one we know at present (without v. 32, but perhaps with v. 33, which might refer to monastic vows), could have been a *Vorlage* for Q 23:1–11\* (but without v. 8).

of softening, or mitigation, of ascetic injunctions. The first text (Q 70:22–35\*) shows “those who pray” (the monks) to be an ideal of piety and purity (prayer, alms, continence); they will be saved. The second text (Q 23:1–11\*) sticks to this ideal, but expresses it in a less rigorous way; prayer does not have to be unceasing anymore. A similar attenuation of the injunctions concerning prayer is found elsewhere in the Qur’an, for example in Q 73:2–4, 20 (Sinai 2017: 230–231). Note also that Q 23:1–11\* does not mention the fear of the Day of Judgment; at first sight, this might look strange, but it can be explained by the fact this text only mentions *acts* to be performed (or not). Finally, the interpolation completely subverts the initial message about continence. In other words, in terms of asceticism, the earliest layers are more demanding than the later one. It means that the attenuation of rules and injunctions, considered by some people in the community to be too strict, belongs to the various elements that triggered the rewriting of Qur’anic pericopes during the period preceding the constitution of the Qur’anic codex. This certainly implies tensions and disagreements inside the community of the Believers about some (quite fundamental) principles and rules. At the same time, it points to an element also emphasized by Mortensen (in this issue), namely that religious texts imposing rigorous demands on the adherents will often have to soften their injunctions in order to adapt to new circumstances and, thereby, persist over time.

#### 4 Conclusion: A Hypothesis about Q 23:1–11\*

If we accept this chronology, then one question remains: why did a text like Q 70:22–35\* need to be rewritten this way? Or, in other words: why should Q 23:1–11\* have this form and content? We can only make hypotheses, of course, but the question might be worth asking. Let me highlight a few issues.

The beginning of the text (“*qad ’aflaha*”) is remarkable. Besides Q 23, this formula appears only twice in the Qur’an, introducing brief texts (Q 87:14–15; 91:9–10) which highlight the importance of prayer and purity (Q 87:14–15: “*qad ’aflaha man tazakkā / wa-ḍakara sma rabbihī fa-ṣallā*” [Prosperous is he who purifies himself / And remember the name of his Lord, and prays]; Q 91:9–10: “*qad ’aflaha man zakkāhā / wa-qad ḥāba man dassāhā*” [He has prospered who purifies it [his piety, *taqwā*, see. V. 8], / and he has failed who corrupts it]). This

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Q 23:1–11\* could then have been amplified with the addition of v. 8, which in turn would have been added (as v. 32) in sura 70. This remains, however, speculative, and redaction criticism does not claim to reconstruct every possible development of a text.

kind of formula aptly captures fundamental ideas (not specifically Islamic, incidentally) and makes them easy to remember.

Similar ideas can be found Q 23:1–11\*, but in a more developed way, since Q 23:1–11\* tells us more about the reward to be expected (vv. 10–11), includes a reference to the Believers, a specific community, and mentions more commitments, religious but also *social*; commitments each Believer should have toward his/her fellows (see v. 9) — piety and solidarity go hand in hand. Its content, therefore, seems to pick out the most basic elements that a Believer should keep in mind, and practice, if he wants to reach salvation and contribute to the success of his community. From a stylistic point of view, the text is simple, homogeneous; it rhymes and (except vv. 1, 10–11) always begins with “*allaḍīna hum*” or “*wa-llaḍīna hum.*” In other words, the text is very easy to remember (for example, in v. 2, one does not need to memorize thirteen syllables, but only seven syllables — remove five at the beginning and one at the end, with the rhyme). I wonder, though, if this is not precisely the purpose of Q 23:1–11: it is a text to be memorized by the Believers and it is therefore addressed to the largest audience among the Qur’anic community as a set of basic principles and as an encouragement to persevere in the path of God. Training, indeed, works also through the internalization of speech and ideas, but here the training has been disseminated to a much wider group of people than Q 70:22–35\*, which is indicative of the development of asceticism over time if it is to endure in a context not limited to the small group of ascetic overachievers.

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