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Exégèses de la « mécréance » et statut du non-musulman dans le commentaire coranique d'al-Qurṭubī (m. 671/1273)

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Despite his fame within the study of *tafsīr*, the Andalusian-born scholar al-Qurṭubī has received shockingly little attention in the secondary literature, with the recent entry by Delfina Serrano Ruano appearing in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an (Online)* being one of the only detailed studies in English of al-Qurṭubī's work and methodology – there are, of course, a number of studies available in Arabic, such as Mashhūr b. Ḥasan Āl Salmān's *al-Imām al-Qurṭubī, Shaykh al-a'immat al-tafsīr* (Damascus, 1413/1993), among others. Jenvrin's *Exégèses de la « mécréance »* provides a welcome and long-needed study of al-Qurṭubī, examining his life, his works, and the way in which his famous exegesis, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an* ("The comprehensive [exegesis] of the rulings of the Qur'an"), engages with two ideas: the question of unbelief and the status of non-Muslims within the community.

After a short introduction (p. 13-25) in which Jenvrin outlines the scope of the work, she begins with a significant chapter on the life and works of al-Qurṭubī ("Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī [m. 671/1273]: vie, oeuvre et *Tafsīr*", p. 27-130). This provides a comprehensive survey of his life and works that will be invaluable to any scholar working on al-Qurṭubī, or in the field of *tafsīr* more generally. Jenvrin highlights two events that had a significant impact on al-Qurṭubī's life and thought. First, the death of his father during the conquest of Cordoba by the Christian armies during the Reconquista. The loss of Arab lands in al-Andalus exerted an emotional toll on many Muslims in the region, but

al-Qurṭubī's close-hand experience and his deep personal loss can, Jenvrin argues, be seen in the way that he approached certain legal and theological issues (p. 30). For example, his discussion about whether those who were killed but who were not engaged in physical combat during war could be counted as martyrs is deeply informed by the death of his father, and it is, perhaps, no surprise that al-Qurṭubī should make the ruling that people in his father's position should be counted among the martyrs; Jenvrin gives his interpretation of Q2:245 as an example of his position (p. 30). The second event that impacted much of his work was al-Qurṭubī's experience of living in Fayyūm in central Egypt (p. 36-45). Al-Qurṭubī was, as Jenvrin shows, deeply disturbed by the ways in which Egyptians lived, particularly their lack of piety and propriety, and this comes through in a number of his works. These two experiences informed al-Qurṭubī's thought, including his *tafsīr*, although there is relatively little appreciation or acknowledgement of these in the secondary literature when examining al-Qurṭubī's contribution to debates in the *tafsīr* tradition. Jenvrin provides details of his edited, unedited, lost, and misattributed works (p. 32-36) and gives brief overview of aspects of the social context in which he wrote his *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an*. However, the main focus is an analysis of his approach to *tafsīr* (p. 45-130). It is impossible to give details of all the material that Jenvrin discusses here, but these are some points that will be of interest to those working in the field of *tafsīr*. The first is al-Qurṭubī's general approach which combines the encyclopaedic tendencies of the broader *tafsīr* tradition, the use of linguistic analysis that was associated with al-Andalus particularly closely, and the bringing together of the *tafsīr* tradition and the *ahkām al-Qur'an* genre. Jenvrin argues that al-Qurṭubī's legal focus is not simply applied to the verses of the Qur'an that have obvious legal import "mais également ceux à teneur théologique ou faisant référence à des événements historico-mythiques." (p. 49) Everything in the Qur'an had a legal significance for al-Qurṭubī, regardless of the type of material being engaged with. The second is Jenvrin's discussion of the influence of the *Ahkām al-Qur'an* of Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148), as well as other Mālikī works of *fiqh* which informed al-Qurṭubī's legal thinking and which he cites often (p. 59-62). Third is a discussion of al-Qurṭubī's general approach to the business of exegesis (p. 72-78), which Jenvrin argues is to bring together and authenticate the material transmitted by the early community, and then to develop legal reasoning from this material (p. 74).

Overall, this chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of al-Qurṭubī and his general approach to the task of exegesis.

The second chapter (“Notions de « mécréance » (*kufr*, *širk*), d’« *īmān* » et d’« *islām* »”, p. 131-298) is an extensive discussion of al-Qurṭubī’s contribution to the debates around the definition of the terms *īmān* and *kufr*. She begins by highlighting the fact that in the Qur’ān “la notion de mécréance est polysémique voire ambivalente; et elle ne comporte, ni à l’origine ni en son essence, de sens religieux, doctrinal, ou confessionnel précis” (p. 132). It is the later legal, theological, and exegetical traditions that came to define what unbelief was and how this related to the other religious communities it encountered. Jenvrin then goes on to present a focused study of the different conceptions of unbelief and how al-Qurṭubī responds to, and engages with, them. She begins with unbelief as a sign of injustice and treachery (p. 132-157), and the way in which the idea of unbelief is often framed as a political, rather than theological, concept. In the Qur’ān the unbelievers are associated with specific acts of injustice, but Jenvrin notes a trend in al-Qurṭubī’s interpretation of the Qur’ān which sees him decontextualise these acts and turn them into more general denunciations of injustice, giving his interpretation of Q42:39-44 as an example (p. 134). This passage refers to the injustice (*ẓulm*) committed by the unbelievers, but al-Qurṭubī’s interpretation sees the act of injustice, rather than the perpetrator of the injustice, as the basis from which to develop a legal opinion, which appears to go against the plain-reading of the Qur’anic text. This shift from the specific to the general is a common trend in al-Qurṭubī’s *tafsīr*: even in verses which have very specific contexts, such as the association of Q3:186 with the satirical poems of the Jewish poet Ka’b al-Ashraf, al-Qurṭubī creates a more general position: this verse, he argues, commanded the Prophet to engage with those, like Ka’b al-Ashraf, who mocked him. Even though later verses commanded Muḥammad and the Muslim community to fight against the unbelievers, al-Qurṭubī argues that this command to engage and debate with the unbelievers remained in force, which, Jenvrin argues, is viewed as an act of piety (p. 156-157). This position, of course, has important ramifications in a multi-confessional religious context. The second section in this chapter deals with unbelief as a dimension of doctrine (p. 157-172). Jenvrin notes that unbelief is not a question of not having any belief but having a “bad” belief, i.e. a belief that contradicts Islamic law (p. 159). Al-Qurṭubī also links the notion of belief and unbelief to the act of prostration and the invocation of the *shahāda*

(p. 167), which, for him, are the outward signs of faith. By defining unbelief not as a state of having *no belief* but as having *false belief*, there is a greater emphasis placed on law (p. 168-172). This is seen in al-Qurṭubī’s interpretation of Q2:190, where he widens the category of people who are fighting the Prophet to include heretics, Kharijites and the “people of deviation” (p. 169-170). Again, we see al-Qurṭubī taking a specific reference in the Qur’ān and applying it more generally. The conception of unbelief being defined as a form of “faulty belief” presented some problems for the People of the Book, who both received a scripture but who also, in Muslim eyes, clearly had erroneous beliefs. Al-Qurṭubī views and classes Jews and Christians as a specific category of “unbelievers,” which is the focus of the third section of this chapter (p. 172-222). Jenvrin first examines the ways in which Jews and Christians split away from the original community, before exploring links between Islam and the “religions of the Book”. Although they are disbelievers, their history as part of the single, Abrahamic community, gives them a special status, so much so that al-Qurṭubī, in his interpretation of Q2:62, argues that those among People of the Book that believe in God on the Last Day will receive their reward (p. 192). This section also discusses aspects of Islamic law, the status of the Zoroastrians, and the identity of the Sabeans. There is then a lengthy discussion of the ways in which individuals move from a state of unbelief to a state of belief and submission (p. 222-231). For al-Qurṭubī conversion is not simply a matter of declaring faith in God but requires time lived within the faith. By this, Jenvrin argues, al-Qurṭubī “met le musulman en garde contre la profusion de l’hypocrisie, des fausses conversions et des hérétiques cachés dont il condamne la profusion à son époque.” (p. 222). Belief, for al-Qurṭubī, is not a question of self-identity or self-proclamation, but involves living by and abiding by Islamic law. This leads into the following section (p. 232-239) which discusses al-Qurṭubī’s views on what it means to be a Muslim, which, as already seen, is rooted in the *sharī’a*. This is followed by a long section on political and social alliances (p. 236-267). This includes an important discussion of mixed marriage, which was an important question in both al-Andalus and Egypt where Muslims lived alongside people of other faiths (p. 256-264), and it is also discussed as part of the following section on alliances with Jews and Christians and the payment of the *jizya* (p. 267-298).

This chapter is an important contribution to the idea of belief and unbelief in the Qur’ān and the interpretative tradition. Given the work’s legal focus, it is no surprise that al-Qurṭubī should view

belief and unbelief as an engagement with the Law. Such a position sees the development of the Qur'ānic view of unbelief as a political and social construct, rather than necessarily being rooted in theology. Jenvrin's study also highlights more specifically in this chapter the way in which al-Qurṭubī's views on unbelief are rooted in his own context. This chapter is an interesting read, with much close analysis and examples taken from the source material, and it gave much food for thought. In the discussion of the Qur'ān's views on belief and unbelief, it could, perhaps, have been helpful to have seen more engagement with the work of Toshihiko Izutsu, as he, like Jenvrin, challenges some of the assumptions about what belief and unbelief mean in the Qur'ān. The question of faith requiring action and not just a profession of faith is a central theme in the discussions of the "conversion" of Pharaoh in *Sūrat Yūnus*, and this may have provided Jenvrin with an interesting debate to explore al-Qurṭubī's views on faith and action.

Chapter 3 ("Guerre et paix avec les « mécréants »", p. 299-386) is the shortest of the chapters in the monograph and is divided into two main parts: the first is a discussion of *jihād* (p. 300-368) and the second is focused on Jewish and Christian communities and the payment of the *jizya* (p. 368-386). Jenvrin engages with numerous aspects of *jihād* in the Qur'ān and later Islamic law, with, naturally, particular interest in al-Qurṭubī's thought. Jenvrin argues that al-Qurṭubī "conçoit le *ḡihād* comme une prescription divine ancienne, nécessaire à la survie du monothéisme, qui fut dictée aux Prophètes." (p. 321) In this way, al-Qurṭubī regards *jihād* as more than a political and societal act, but one that is entwined with the concept of belief and unbelief: *jihād* is the means by which the community can fulfil its religious obligations (i.e. the *farā'id*, p. 322-327) and the command to defend monotheism through *jihād* is a command that has been given to all the prophets, and to the monotheist communities that came before Islam (p. 321-322). Al-Qurṭubī also insists that fighting in *jihād* must be strategic and effective (p. 327-328), which was a view that was held by a number of other Andalusian scholars. *Jihād*, for al-Qurṭubī, does not end with victory but continues through preaching and the conversion of the unbelievers. Jenvrin goes into a number of specific legal issues that cannot be discussed in detail here, but as a whole, this discussion of *jihād* in the Qur'ān and al-Qurṭubī's thought helps to nuance our understanding of what *jihād* is. Although Jenvrin does engage with the secondary literature, this section could have benefited from a little deeper reflection on the literature on *jihād* and how al-Qurṭubī's ideas

can add new light to some of the debates that were being had about *jihād* in the 7th/13th century. Jenvrin's discussion of the *jizya* reaches similar conclusions, with al-Qurṭubī's ideas about the *jizya* providing more nuance to contemporary scholarly discussions. Jenvrin opens her argument by stating that al-Qurṭubī's exegesis rejects the idea that the community is commanded to eradicate unbelief, because it is also commanded to make peace, with the *jizya* providing a good example of the tolerance of "unbelief" in Muslim societies (p. 372).

The final chapter, ("Les relations interconfessionnelles sous et hors les lois de l'islam (*aḥkām al-islām*), p. 387-522) is another substantial chapter that is divided into three main sections: the first is on Islamic law and interreligious relations (p. 387-445), the second is on the ways in which *dhimmī-s* are subject to the Islamic law (p. 445-477), and the last is on the protections accorded to *dhimmī-s* (p. 477-522). The first section on Islamic law and interfaith relations begins by exploring the notions of *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb*. Al-Qurṭubī describes the move from Mecca to Medina during the *hijra* as a move from the *dār al-ḥarb* to the *dār al-islām*; however, in his discussion of Q4:100, al-Qurṭubī, following other exegetes, expands the interpretation of the *hijra* to cover more abstract ideas, such as a move from the 'lands of innovation' (*arḍ al-bid'a*), a general obligation to move away from lands that do not apply Muslim law, fleeing from places where harm may be inflicted on Muslims, and so on (p. 388-391). This follows al-Qurṭubī's general approach of developing more general legal and theological principles from specific events and statements given in the Qur'ān. The second section on the laws pertaining to the *dhimmī-s* and the way in which al-Qurṭubī approaches these laws. There is a particular concern with the ways in which People of the Book are judged when they commit crimes, which was often debated in the legal literature. Jenvrin also discusses specific issues such as what should happen if someone converts to Islam during Ramadan or during the *hajj* (p. 469-471), as well as social issues, such as intermarriage (p. 471-477). The final section looks at legal protections accorded to *dhimmī-s*. Al-Qurṭubī's approach to this issue is framed by the overriding principle that Muslims cannot live in an environment which is ruled by unbelievers (p. 477-483). The law also prohibits *dhimmī-s* from offering witness statements, principally because, by virtue of being non-Muslims, they do not understand the law about which they would be testifying (p. 484-492). Although being non-Muslim generated a number of restrictions on the People of the Book, Islamic law also provided a number of protections, as long

as the People of the Book maintained their side of the pact, with the actions that could constitute a breach of contract, including: attacking the Qur'ān, blasphemy against the Prophet, condemning Islam, marrying a Muslim woman, as well as engaging in magical practices (p. 510-514). Although this chapter is highly legal in focus, it casts light on the experiences of Muslim communities living alongside members of other religions, and also speaks to the concerns that many scholars had when they looked at the world around them. As Jenvrin shows in her introduction, this was an area of concern for al-Qurṭubī and in these discussions about the legal status of the People of the Book, it is also possible to see what issues bothered al-Qurṭubī and what ills in society he thought needed addressing.

In her conclusion, Jenvrin notes an interesting, and perhaps uneasy, tension between al-Qurṭubī's theological approach to the People of the Book and his discussions of the status of the *dhimmī*s (p. 531). As discussed above, al-Qurṭubī has a theology of belief and unbelief that includes People of the Book as acceptable unbelievers, united, to some extent, with the Muslims through a shared heritage. However, this openness is not found in his discussions of the legal status of People of the Book, where al-Qurṭubī creates quite strict separations between Muslims and *dhimmī*s. Jenvrin concludes that in his *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, al-Qurṭubī's views on non-Muslims do not reflect a theology of unbelief, but are rooted in the practicalities of government, and the imposition of Islamic law within Muslim lands (p. 531). This tension between theology, Islamic law, and the realities of Muslim communities living

beside and ruling over non-Muslims is an interesting one that opens up many avenues for future research.

Jenvrin's *Exégèses de la « mécréance »* provides an invaluable study of al-Qurṭubī's *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. The monograph goes beyond merely providing an account of his life, his views, and his approach to exegesis, but illustrates the ways in which his interpretations of the Qur'ān are influenced by his context and his own life experiences. The discussions of *jihād* and the *jizya* also provide some nuance to the way in which both concepts are viewed in the modern scholarly literature. There are a few places where Jenvrin could have engaged with the secondary literature a little more, but this book is, on the whole, well-researched and well-presented. The frequent citations from al-Qurṭubī's *tafsīr* are to be commended as this allows the reader to see what al-Qurṭubī is doing with his interpretation first hand. Above all, in this book Jenvrin has been able to shed light on an aspect of the dynamism found in the *tafsīr* tradition that can often be forgotten or passed over: scholars, such as al-Qurṭubī, did not write their *tafsīr*s in a vacuum, but wrote them to address the issues and concerns of the day – this is something that can be seen very clearly in this study. The field of Islamic law can often be dry and abstract, thinking about theoretical issues in abstract terms, but Jenvrin's *Exégèses de la « mécréance »* shows how this material was influenced by aspects of al-Qurṭubī's personal life, as well as the questions, concerns and debates of his day.

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